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ARTICLE I.—*A Discourse commemorative of the History of the Church of Christ in Yale College, during the first Century of its Existence.* Preached in the College Chapel, November 22, 1857. With Notes and an Appendix. By GEORGE P. FISHER, Livingston Professor of Divinity. New Haven: Thomas H. Pease. 1858.

ANY historical review of the course of any department in Yale College for the past century, cannot fail to bring to light facts of great interest and importance. This is peculiarly true of the history of the Christian church and religion in such an institution during a period so extended, so critical, and so formative for all public institutions in our country. Foremost among these is the church, in close relation to which are Christian colleges, which, deriving their sap from the church, seem beyond any other public institutions to partake of its life, vigour, and perpetuity. The history of the church in these seats of learning and culture, serves to illustrate the mutual relation and reciprocal influence of high education and vital Christianity. On these general grounds, therefore, the friends of religion and education will acknowledge their obligations to Professor Fisher for his careful and dispassionate survey of the formation, growth, and vicissitudes of the church of Christ in Yale College, and for the many curious and instructive facts which he has rescued from oblivion in executing the task.

ART. V.—*Adoption of the Confession of Faith.*

CIRCUMSTANCES have recently awakened public attention to this important subject. It is one on which a marked diversity of opinion exists, between the two portions into which our church has been divided: and as in May last a direct proposition was made on the part of one branch of the New-school body, to our General Assembly, for a union between them and the Old-school, this original point of difference was brought into view. Not only on the floor of the Assembly was this matter referred to, but it has since been the subject of discussion in the public papers, especially at the South. A passing remark made in the last number of this journal, which we supposed expressed a truth which no man could misunderstand or deny, has given rise to strictures which very clearly prove that great obscurity, in many minds, still overhangs the subject. We either differ very much among ourselves, or we have not yet learned to express our meaning in the same terms. It is high time, therefore, that the question should be renewedly discussed. We have nothing new to say on the subject. As long ago as October, 1831, we expressed the views which we still hold, and which in a passing sentence were indicated in our number for July last. Those views have passed unanswered and unheeded, so far as we know, for thirty-six years. How is it that the renewed assertion of them has now called forth almost universal condemnation from the Old-school press? They have been censured by men who adopt them, and who in private do not hesitate to admit their correctness. This does not imply any unfairness, or any other form of moral obliquity. It is easily accounted for. The proposition, that the adoption of the Confession of Faith does not imply the adoption of every proposition contained in that Confession, might mean much or little. It might be adopted by the most conservative, and is all that the most radical need claim. Still the proposition is undeniably correct. The fault of the writer, as the *Presbyterian of the West* sensibly remarked, is not in what is said, but

in what was left unsaid. This fault would have been a very grave one, had the subject of subscription to the Confession been under discussion, and had the above proposition been put forth as the whole rule in regard to it. The remark, however, was merely incidental and illustrative. To show the impossibility of our agreeing on a commentary on the whole Bible, we referred to the fact, that there are propositions in the Confession of Faith in which we are not agreed. Does any man deny this? If not, where is the harm of saying it? Are we living in a false show? Are we pretending to adopt a principle of subscription, which in fact we neither act on for ourselves, nor dream of enforcing on others? Or are we so little certain of our own ground, that we are afraid that our enemies will take advantage of us, and proclaim aloud that we have come over to them? If we really understand ourselves, and are satisfied of the soundness of our principles, the more out-spoken we are the better; better for our own self-respect, and for the respect and confidence of others towards us. If the Christian public, and especially those who have gone out from us, hear us asserting a principle or rule of subscription which they know we do not adopt, it will be hard for them to believe both in our intelligence and sincerity.

The question put to every candidate for ordination in our church, is in these words: "Do you sincerely receive and adopt the Confession of Faith of this church, as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures?" It is plain that a very serious responsibility before God and man is assumed by those who return an affirmative answer to that question. It is something more than ordinary falsehood, if our inward convictions do not correspond with a profession made in presence of the church, and as the condition of our receiving authority to preach the gospel. In such a case we lie not only unto man, but unto God; because such professions are of the nature of a vow, that is, a promise or profession made to God.

It is no less plain that the candidate has no right to put his own sense upon the words propounded to him. He has no right to select from all possible meanings which the words may bear, that particular sense which suits his purpose, or which, he thinks, will save his conscience. It is well known that this

course has been openly advocated, not only by the Jesuits, but by men of this generation, in this country and in Europe. The "chemistry of thought," it is said, can make all creeds alike. Men have boasted that they could sign any creed. To a man in a balloon the earth appears a plain, all inequalities on its surface being lost in the distance. And here is a philosophic elevation from which all forms of human belief look alike. They are sublimed into general formulas, which include them all and distinguish none. Professor Newman, just before his open apostasy, published a tract in which he defended his right to be in the English church while holding the doctrines of the church of Rome. He claimed for himself and others the privilege of signing the Thirty-nine articles in a "non-natural sense;" that is, in the sense which he chose to put upon the words. This shocks the common sense and the common honesty of men. There is no need to argue the matter. The turpitude of such a principle is much more clearly seen intuitively than discursively. The two principles which, by the common consent of all honest men, determine the interpretation of oaths and professions of faith, are, first, the plain, historical meaning of the words; and secondly, the *animus imponentis*, that is, the intention of the party imposing the oath or requiring the profession. The words, therefore, "system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures," are to be taken in their plain, historical sense. A man is not at liberty to understand the words "Holy Scriptures," to mean all books written by holy men, because although that interpretation might consist with the signification of the words, it is inconsistent with the historical meaning of the phrase. Nor can he understand them, as they would be understood by Romanists, as including the Apocrypha, because the words being used by a Protestant church, must be taken in a Protestant sense. Neither can the candidate say, that he means by "system of doctrine" Christianity as opposed to Mohammedanism, or Protestantism, as opposed to Romanism, or evangelical Christianity, as distinguished from the theology of the Reformed (i. e. Calvinistic) churches, because the words being used by a Reformed church, must be understood in the sense which that church is known to attach to them. If a

man professes to receive the doctrine of the Trinity, the word must be taken in its Christian sense, the candidate cannot substitute for that sense the Sabellian idea of a modal Trinity, nor the philosophical trichotomy of Pantheism. And so of all other expressions which have a fixed historical meaning. Again, by the *animus imponentis* in the case contemplated, is to be understood not the mind or intention of the ordaining bishop in the Episcopal church, or of the ordaining presbytery in the Presbyterian church. It is the mind or intention of the church, of which the bishop or the presbytery is the organ or agent. Should a romanizing bishop in the church of England give "a non-natural" sense to the Thirty-nine articles, that would not acquit the priest, who should sign them in that sense, of the crime of moral perjury; or should a presbytery give an entirely erroneous interpretation to the Westminster Confession, that would not justify a candidate for ordination in adopting it in that sense. The Confession must be adopted in the sense of the church, into the service of which the minister, in virtue of that adoption, is received. These are simple principles of honesty, and we presume they are universally admitted, at least so far as our church is concerned.

The question however is, What is the true sense of the phrase, "system of doctrine," in our ordination service? or, What does the church understand the candidate to profess, when he says that he "receives and adopts the Confession of Faith of this church as entertaining the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures"? There are three different answers given to that question. First, it is said by some, that in adopting "the system of doctrine," the candidate is understood to adopt it, not in the form or manner in which it is presented in the Confession, but only for "substance of doctrine." The obvious objections to this view of the subject are:

1. That such is not the meaning of the words employed. The two expressions or declarations, "I adopt the system of doctrine contained in the Confession of Faith," and, "I adopt that system for substance of doctrine," are not identical. The one therefore cannot be substituted for the other. If there were no other difference between them, it is enough that the one is definite and univocal, the other is both vague and

equivocal. The latter expression may have two very different meanings. By substance of doctrine may be meant the substantial doctrines of the Confession; that is, those doctrines which give character to it as a distinctive confession of faith, and which therefore constitute the system of belief therein contained. Or it may mean the substance of the several doctrines taught in the Confession, as distinguished from the form in which they are therein presented. It will be at once perceived that these are very different things. The substance or essence of a system of doctrines is the system itself. In this case, the essence of a thing is the whole thing. The essential doctrines of Pelagianism are Pelagianism, and the essential doctrines of Calvinism are Calvinism. But the substance of a doctrine is not the doctrine, any more than the substance of a man is the man. A man is a given substance in a specific form; and a doctrine is a given truth in a particular form. The substantial truth, included in the doctrine of original sin, is that human nature is deteriorated by the apostasy of Adam. The different forms in which this general truth is presented, make all the difference, as to this point, between Pelagianism, Augustinianism, Romanism, and Arminianism. It is impossible, therefore, in matters of doctrine, to separate the substance from the form. The form is essential to the doctrine, as much as the form of a statue is essential to the statue. In adopting a system of doctrines, therefore, the candidate adopts a series of doctrines in the specific form in which they are presented in that system. To say that he adopts the substance of those doctrines, leaves it entirely uncertain what he adopts. The first objection then to this view of the meaning of the phrase, "system of doctrine," is, that it is contrary to the simple historical sense of the terms. What a man professes to adopt is, "the system of doctrine," not the substance of the doctrines embraced in that system.

2. Another objection is, that it is contrary to the mind of the church. The church, in demanding the adoption of the Confession of Faith as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures, demands something more than the adoption of what the candidate may choose to consider the substance of those doctrines. This is plain from the words used, which, as we have seen, in their plain import, mean something more, and

something more specific and intelligible than the phrase "substance of doctrine." The mind of the church on this point is rendered clear beyond dispute by her repeated official declarations on the subject. The famous adopting act of the original Synod, passed in 1729, is in these words: "Although the Synod do not claim or pretend to any authority of imposing our faith on other men's consciences, but do profess our just dissatisfaction with, and abhorrence of such impositions, and do utterly disclaim all legislative power and authority in the church, being willing to receive one another as Christ has received us to the glory of God, and admit to fellowship in sacred ordinances, all such as we have grounds to believe Christ will at last admit to the kingdom of heaven, yet we are undoubtedly obliged to take care that the faith once delivered to the saints be kept pure and uncorrupt among us, and so handed down to our posterity; and do therefore agree that all ministers of this Synod, or that shall hereafter be admitted into this Synod, shall declare their agreement in, and approbation of the Confession of Faith, with the Larger and Shorter Catechisms of the Assembly of Divines at Westminster, as being in all the essential and necessary articles, good forms of sound words and systems of Christian doctrine, and do also adopt the said Confession and Catechisms as the confession of our faith. And we do also agree, that all Presbyteries within our bounds shall always take care not to admit any candidate of the ministry into the exercise of the sacred functions, but what declares his agreement in opinion with all the essential and necessary articles of said Confession, either by subscribing the said Confession and Catechisms, or by a verbal declaration of their assent thereto, as such minister or candidate shall think best. And in case any minister of this Synod, or any candidate for the ministry, shall have any scruple with respect to any article or articles of said Confession or Catechisms, he shall at the time of making said declaration, declare his sentiments to the Presbytery or Synod, who shall, notwithstanding, admit him to the exercise of the ministry within our bounds, and to ministerial communion, if the Synod or Presbytery shall judge his scruple or mistake to be only about articles not essential and necessary in doctrine, worship, or government. But if the Synod or Presbytery shall judge

such ministers or candidates erroneous in essential and necessary articles of faith, the Synod or Presbytery shall declare them incapable of communion with them. And the Synod do solemnly agree that none of them will traduce or use any opprobrious terms of those who differ from us in extra-essential and not necessary points of doctrine, but treat them with the same friendship, kindness, and brotherly love, as if they did not differ in such sentiment.”

On the afternoon of the day on which the above act was adopted, the following minute was recorded, viz. “All the ministers of this Synod now present, except one,\* that declared himself not prepared, namely, Masters Jedediah Andrews, Thomas Craighead, John Thompson, James Anderson, John Pierson, Samuel Gelston, Joseph Houston, Gilbert Tenant, Adam Boyd, John Bradner, Alexander Hutchinson, Thomas Evans, Hugh Stevenson, William Tenant, Hugh Conn, George Gillespie, and John Wilson, after proposing all the scruples that any of them had to make against any articles and expressions in the Confession of Faith, and Larger and Shorter Catechisms of the Assembly of Divines at Westminster, have unanimously agreed in the solution of those scruples, and in declaring the said Confession and Catechisms to be the confession of their faith, excepting only some clauses in the twentieth and twenty-third chapters, concerning which clauses the Synod do unanimously declare, that they do not receive those articles in such sense, as to suppose that the civil magistrate hath a controlling power over Synods, with respect to the exercise of their ministerial authority, or power to persecute any for their religion, or in any sense contrary to the Protestant succession to the throne of Great Britain.

“The Synod observing that unanimity, peace, and unity, which appeared in all their consultations relating to the affair of the Confession, did unanimously agree in giving thanks to God in solemn prayer and praises.”

This fundamental act, passed in 1729, has never been either repealed or altered. It has on several occasions been inter-

\* The Rev. Mr. Elmer, who gave in his adhesion at the following meeting of the Synod.



preted and reaffirmed, but it has never been abrogated, except so far as it was merged in the readoption of the Confession and Catechisms at the formation of our present Constitution, in the year 1788. This important document teaches, first: That in our church the terms of Christian communion are competent knowledge, and a creditable profession of faith and repentance. The Synod, say they, "admit to fellowship in sacred ordinances, all such as we have grounds to believe Christ will at last admit to the kingdom of heaven." Second: That the condition of ministerial communion is the adoption of the system of doctrine contained in the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms. This is expressed by saying, "We adopt the said Confession and Catechisms as the confession of our faith." For this is substituted as an equivalent form of expression, "agreement in opinion with all the essential and necessary articles of said Confession." That is, "all the essential and necessary articles" of the system of doctrine contained in the Confession. Third: That the only exceptions allowed to be taken were such as related to matters outside that system of doctrine, and the rejection of which left the system in its integrity. That this is the true meaning and intent of the act is plain, first, because the Synod in 1730 expressly declared, "that they understand those clauses that respect the admission of entrants or candidates, in such sense as to oblige them to receive and adopt the Confession and Catechisms at their admission, in the same manner, and as fully as the members of the Synod did, that were then present. Those members adopted the whole system in its integrity, excepting only to certain clauses relating to the power of the civil magistrate in matters of religion. Again, in 1736, they say, "The Synod have adopted, and still do adhere to the Westminster Confession, Catechisms, and Directory, without the least variation or alteration . . . and they further declare, that this was our meaning and true intent in our first adopting of said Confession." In the same minute they say, "We hope and desire that this our Synodical declaration and explication may satisfy all our people, as to our firm attachment to our good old received doctrines contained in said Confession, without the least variation or alteration." This

minute was adopted *nemine contradicente*.\* Second: Not only this official and authoritative exposition of the "adopting act," given by its authors, but the subsequent declarations of the several Presbyteries composing the Synod, and of the Synod itself, prove that "the system of doctrines" was adopted, and not merely the substance of those doctrines. The common form of adoption may be learned from such records as the following, from the Presbytery of Philadelphia. Mr. Samuel Blair was licensed after "having given his assent to the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms as the confession of his faith." David Cowell was ordained "after he had adopted the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms as the confession of his faith." In 1741, the great schism occurred by the exclusion of the New Brunswick Presbytery, which being subsequently joined by the Presbyteries of New York and New Castle constituted the Synod of New York. This body, composed of the friends of the Whitefieldian revival, say: "We do declare and testify our constitution, order, and discipline, to be in harmony with the established church of Scotland. The Westminster Confession, Catechisms, and Directory, adopted by them, are in like manner adopted by us." The first article of the terms of union, by which the two Synods were united, in 1758, and which was unanimously adopted, is as follows: "Both Synods having always approved and received the Westminster Confession of Faith, Larger and Shorter Catechisms, as an orthodox and excellent system of doctrine, founded on the word of God; we do still receive the same as the confession of our faith, and also adhere to the plan of worship, government, and discipline, contained in the Westminster Directory: strictly enjoining it on all our ministers and probationers for the ministry, that they preach and teach according to the form of sound words in the said Confession and Catechisms, and avoid and oppose all errors contrary thereto." When the General Assembly was constituted, the Westminster Confession and Catechisms were declared to be parts of the Constitution of the church, and every candidate for

\* These documents may be seen in full in Baird's Collection, and in Hodge's Constitutional History, Vol. i., chap. 3.

the ministry was required, previous to his ordination, to receive that Confession, as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures. From the beginning, therefore, the mind of our church has been that that "system of doctrine" in its integrity, not the substance of those doctrines, was the term of ministerial communion. For a fuller discussion of this subject we would refer our readers to *Hodge's Constitutional History of the Presbyterian Church*, Vol. i., chap. 3. It is there shown that no exception to the Confession of Faith, touching any of the doctrines constituting that system, was ever allowed.

3. Not only are the plain meaning of the words, and the *animus imponentis* opposed to the interpretation of the ordination service now under consideration, but that interpretation is liable to the further objection, that the phrase "substance of doctrine" has no definite assignable meaning. What the substance of any given doctrine is, cannot be historically ascertained or authenticated. No one knows what a man professes, who professes to receive only the substance of a doctrine, and, therefore, this mode of subscription vitiates the whole intent and value of a confession. Who can tell what is the substance of the doctrine of sin? Does the substance include all the forms under which the doctrine has been, or can be held, so that whoever holds any one of those forms, holds the substance of the doctrine? If one man says, that nothing is sin but the voluntary transgression of known law; another, that men are responsible only for their purposes to the exclusion of their feelings; another, that an act to be voluntary, and therefore sinful, must be deliberate and not impulsive; another, that sin is merely limitation or imperfect development; another, that sin exists only for us and in our consciousness, and not in the sight of God; another, that sin is any want of conformity in state, feeling, or act, to the law of God; do all these hold the substance of the doctrine? What is the substance of the doctrine of redemption? The generic idea of redemption, in the Christian sense of the word, may be said to be the deliverance of men from sin and its consequences by Jesus Christ. Does every man who admits that idea, hold the substance of the doctrine as presented in our Confession? If

so, then it matters not whether we believe that that deliverance is effected by the example of Christ, or by his doctrine, or by his power, or by the moral impression of his death on the race, or the universe, or by his satisfying the justice of God, or by his incarnation exalting our nature to a higher power. The same remark may be made in reference to all the other distinctive doctrines of the Confession. The general idea of "grace" is that of a remedial divine influence; but is that influence exercised only by ordering our external circumstances; or is it simply the moral influence of the truth which God has revealed; or that influence exalted by some special operation; is it *praeveniens* as well as assisting; is it common without being sufficient, or sufficient as well as common; is it irresistible, or efficacious only through its congruity or the coöperation of the sinner. Does the man who holds any one of these forms, hold the substance of the doctrine of grace? It is perfectly obvious that there is no authoritative standard by which to determine what the substance of a doctrine is; that the very idea of a doctrine is a truth in a specific form, and, therefore, those who do not hold the doctrines of the Confession in the form in which they are therein presented, do not hold the doctrines. It is equally obvious, that no definite, intelligible, trustworthy profession of faith is made by the man who simply professes to hold the substance of certain doctrines. Such a mode of adopting the Confession of Faith is morally wrong, because inconsistent with the plain meaning of the words, and with the mind of the church, and because it renders the adoption nugatory.

4. This system has been tried, and found to produce the greatest disorder and contention. Men acting on the principle of receiving the Confession for substance of doctrine, have entered the ministry in our church, who denied the doctrine of imputation, whether of Adam's sin or of Christ's righteousness; the doctrine of the derivation of a sinful depravity of nature from our first parents; of inability; of efficacious grace; of a definite atonement; that is, of an atonement having any such special reference to the elect, as to render their salvation certain. In short, while professing to receive "the system of doctrine" contained in the Westminster Confession and Cate-

chisms, they have rejected almost every doctrine which gives that system its distinctive character. It was this principle more than any other cause, and probably more than all other causes combined, that led to the division of our church in 1838, and it must produce like disasters should it again be brought into practical application among us.

The second interpretation given to the question, "Do you receive and adopt the Confession of Faith of this church as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures?" is, that the person who answers that question in the affirmative does thereby profess to receive and adopt every proposition contained in that Confession as a part of his own faith. The objections to this view are substantially the same as those urged against the view already considered.

1. It is contrary to the plain, historical meaning of the words. To adopt a book as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures, and to adopt every proposition contained in that book, are two very different things. The book, although a confession of faith, may contain many propositions by way of argument or inference, or which lie entirely outside the system, and which may be omitted, and yet leave the system in its integrity. The words "system of doctrine," have a definite meaning, and serve to define and limit the extent to which the Confession is adopted.

No man has the right to put upon them his own sense. He must take them in their historical sense, i. e. in the sense which by historical proof it may be shown they were intended to bear, just as the phrase "Holy Scriptures" must be taken in its historical sense. By the words "system of doctrine," as used in our ordination service, as remarked on a preceding page, are not to be understood the general doctrines of Christianity, nor the whole system of a man's convictions on politics, economics, morals, and religion, but the theological system therein contained. That is the established meaning of the phrase. The Westminster divines did not intend to frame a new system of doctrines, nor have they done it. They have simply reproduced and presented, with matchless perspicuity and precision, the system of doctrines common to the Reformed churches. That is the system which the candidate professes to adopt, and

no one can rightfully demand of him either more or less. It is one thing to adopt the system of doctrine and order of worship contained in the Book of Common Prayer, and quite another thing to "assent and consent" to everything contained in that book, as the clergy of England are required to do. So it is one thing to adopt the system of doctrine contained in the Westminster Confession, and quite another to adopt every proposition contained in that Confession. Many a man could do the one, who could not do the other.

2. A second objection to this interpretation of the adoption of the Confession is, that it is contrary to the *animus impo- nentis*, or mind of the church. The mind of the church on this subject is indicated and established, first, by the words employed; secondly, by the official explanations of the sense in which those words are to be taken; thirdly, by the contemporaneous testimony of the men who framed the constitution, or acted under it; and, fourthly, by the uniform action of the church. First, as to the words employed. If the church intended that the candidate should adopt every proposition contained in the Confession of Faith, why did she not say so? It was very easy to express that idea. The words actually used do not, in their plain, established meaning, express it. The simple fact that no such demand is made, is evidence enough that none such was intended. The church makes a clear distinction between the terms of Christian communion, of ministerial communion, and the condition on which any one is to be admitted to the office of professor in any of her theological seminaries. For Christian communion, she requires competent knowledge, and a credible profession of faith and repentance; for ministerial communion, the adoption of the system of doctrine contained in the Westminster Confession; for admission to the office of a professor, she exacts the promise, "not to teach anything which directly or indirectly contradicts anything taught in the Confession of Faith, Catechisms, or Form of Government in this church." Does all this mean nothing? Do these differently worded demands all amount to the same thing? This is impossible. The words have not only a different meaning, but there is an obvious reason for the different demand in these several cases. More

is in Scripture required for admission to the office of a minister, than is required for admission to church privileges; and more may reasonably be demanded of a professor than of a minister. Whatever a professor's private convictions may be as to anything not included in the system of doctrines, he is bound to avoid going counter to the standards of the church whose servant he is. He may think that ministers and ruling elders do not differ in office, but he cannot properly officially inculcate that idea. The mind of the church, therefore, as to the meaning of the ordination service, is already indicated by the words employed.

Secondly, This is placed, as it seems to us, beyond dispute, by the official explanations given of the words in question. The original Synod of Philadelphia officially declared that there were certain clauses in the Westminster Confession relating to the power of the civil magistrate in matters of religion, which they did not adopt. This was no less true of the two Synods of Philadelphia and New York after the schism, and of the Synod of New York and Philadelphia after the union. Yet all these bodies uniformly declared for themselves, and required all candidates to declare, that they received that "Confession as the confession of their faith," or that they "received and adhered to the system of doctrines" therein contained. Every minister received, and every candidate ordained, was required to make that declaration. It cannot be denied, therefore, that the church understood the adoption of the Westminster Confession as not involving the adoption of every proposition contained in that book. Let it be remembered that the formula of adoption was not, "Do you receive the Westminster Confession, with the exception of certain clauses in the twentieth and twenty-third chapters, as the confession of your faith?" but simply, "Do you receive that Confession," or "the system of doctrine in that Confession?" It was not considered necessary to make that exception, because the language was not intended to extend to every proposition, but only to "the system of doctrine." This is the church's own official explanation of the sense of the words in question.

Thirdly, The mind of the church as to this point is determined by contemporaneous testimony. There were three forms of

opinion on the subject of confessions in our original Synod. First: There was a very small class, represented by President Dickinson, who were opposed to all creeds of human composition. They entered a protest, signed by four ministers,\* against the overture for the adoption of a confession as a test of orthodoxy. On this subject President Dickinson said: "The joint acknowledgment of our Lord Jesus Christ for our common head, of the Sacred Scriptures as our common standard both of faith and practice, with a joint agreement in the same essential and necessary articles of Christianity, and the same methods of worship and discipline, are a sufficient bond of union for the being and well-being of any church under heaven."† This small class, therefore, made no distinction between Christian and ministerial communion, requiring for the latter as well as for the former, simply agreement in the "necessary and essential articles of Christianity." Another class, represented by Mr. Creaghead, who afterward left our church mainly on account of the imperfect adoption of the Confession of Faith,‡ desired unqualified adherence to the Confession, and to all that it contained. The third class, including the great body of the Synod, insisted on the adoption of "the system of doctrine" contained in the Confession, admitting that there were propositions in the book, not essential to the system or even connected with it, which they did not receive. With this class the whole body of ministers subsequently concurred, and established this as the permanent condition of ministerial communion. Mr. Thompson, the leader of the Synod, and author of the overture for the adoption of the Confession, says, that the object of the measure was to protect our infant church from the inroads of error; "of Arminianism, Socinianism, Deism, and Free-thinking," especially, he says, from Ireland, whence the larger supply of ministers was expected. Although the Synod unanimously declared that they adopted everything in the Confession, except certain clauses in the twentieth and twenty-third chapters, yet as there was this exception, they were forced to limit

\* Those ministers were Malachi Jones, Joseph Morgan, Jonathan Dickinson, and David Evans. Of these, Messrs. Jones and Evans were Welsh, and Mr. Morgan probably either Welsh or English.

† See Constitutional History, page 170.

‡ Ibid. Page 197.



the adoption to "the necessary and essential articles," or, as it is elsewhere expressed to "the system of doctrine." As, however, the words of the preamble to the adopting act, declaring that the Synod received the Confession "in all the essential and necessary articles," were interpreted by some to mean the essential doctrines of the gospel, these words became a bone of contention, and called for frequent explanations. Mr. Creaghead made them the ground of his secession, saying that the Synod had never adopted the Confession in all its articles or chapters. To him Mr. Samuel Blair replied, that the Synod did expressly adopt the Confession in all its articles or chapters, excepting only to certain clauses. On the other hand, the Rev. Samuel Harker, having been suspended from the ministry for certain Arminian doctrines, complained that his suspension was a violation of the adopting act, which required only agreement in the essential doctrines of Christianity. In his published reply to this complaint, Mr. John Blair says, that Mr. Harker takes the words cited "in a sense in which it is plain the Synod never intended they should be taken." "The Synod," he adds, "say essential in doctrine, worship, or government, i. e. essential to the system of doctrine contained in the Westminster Confession of Faith, considered as a system, and to the mode of worship, and to the plan of government contained in our Directory. Now what unprejudiced man of sense is there, who will not readily acknowledge that a point may be essential to a system of doctrine as such, to our mode of worship, and to Presbyterian government, which is not essential to a state of grace?" "That, therefore, is an essential error in the Synod's sense, which is of such malignity as to subvert or greatly injure the system of doctrine, and mode of worship and government, contained in the Westminster Confession of Faith and Directory."\* Such is the explanation of the adoption of the Confession of Faith, given by the original framers of the act, and by their contemporaries. They did not merely receive it for "substance of doctrine," nor did they

\* See, "The Synod of New York and Philadelphia vindicated. In reply to Mr. Samuel Harker's Appeal to the Christian World. By a member of the Synod."

adopt all the propositions which it contains, but they received "the system of doctrine" therein taught in its integrity.

Fourthly, The mind of the church on this subject is clearly evinced by the uniform action of our church courts, from the highest to the lowest. So far as we have been able to learn from the records, no man has ever been refused admission to the ministry in our church, who honestly received "the system of doctrine" contained in the Westminster confession, simply because there are propositions in the book to which he could not assent. And no Presbyterian minister has ever been suspended or deposed on any such ground. It is a perfectly notorious fact, that there are hundreds of ministers in our church, and that there always have been such ministers, who do not receive all the propositions contained in the Confession of Faith and Catechisms. To start now, at this late day, a new rule of subscription, which would either brand these men with infamy, or exclude them from the church, is simply absurd and intolérable.

This introduces our third objection. The principle that the adoption of the Confession of Faith implies the adoption of all the propositions therein contained, is not only contrary to the plain, historical meaning of the words which the candidate is required to use, and to the mind of the church in imposing a profession of faith, but the principle is impracticable. It cannot be carried out without working the certain and immediate ruin of the church. Our Confession is a large book; beside the system of doctrine common to all the Reformed churches, it contains deliverances on many other topics relating to the church, the state, and to our social relations. No doubt the original framers of the Westminster Confession, or the majority of them, thought these deliverances both important and scriptural. No doubt also the majority of our own church have concurred in so regarding them. But this is a very different thing from making the adoption of these judgments, all and several, a condition of ministerial communion. One man may dissent from one of them, and another from another, while some may adopt them all; and to many of them they may attach very great importance, without recognizing them as terms of communion. Thus our standards distinctly teach,

that the church is bound to admit all true Christians "to fellowship in sacred ordinances." Yet there have always been, and there still are, some among us who deny this. They press so far the idea of the church as a witnessing body, that they will not commune with any Christians whose creed they cannot adopt; neither will they receive to the communion of the Presbyterian church any who do not adopt its doctrinal standards. This rejecting from our communion those whom Christ receives into fellowship with himself, is revolting to the great body of our ministers and members. Yet who would think of making departure from our standards on this point, the ground either of reproach or of judicial process. Again, our book recognizes the right of a woman to divorce her husband, as well as that of a man to divorce his wife. Some of our most distinguished men, however, hold that the Scriptures give the right of divorce solely to the husband. Our book also teaches that wilful desertion is a legitimate ground of divorce, *a vinculo matrimonii*, but many of our brethren in the ministry do not believe this. Other Presbyterians again, knowing that our Lord says, "Whosoever putteth away his wife, and marrieth another, committeth adultery," cannot bring themselves to believe that there can be any such divorce as renders a second marriage lawful. Our standards deny the lawfulness of the marriage of a man with the sister of his deceased wife, yet it is notorious that a large portion, probably a large majority, of our ministers openly reject that doctrine. Now what is to be thought of a rule, which, if applied, would cast out of the ministry all these classes—a rule which would have strangled the church in its infancy, and which would kill it now in a week—a rule which would have deposed from the ministry the venerable Dr. Ashbel Green, and scores of men among our fathers of like standing? If the rule that no man should be allowed to exercise the ministry in our church, who did not adopt every proposition contained in the Confession of Faith, should be carried out, we verily believe we should be left almost alone. We are not sure that we personally know a dozen ministers besides ourselves, who could stand the test. We should have to mourn the exodus of our valued friends, the editors of the *Presbyterian*, and should doubtless be called to

bid a tearful adieu to the venerable "G.," of Richmond, Virginia. As we have no desire to sit thus solitary on the ruins of our noble church, we enter a solemn protest against a principle which would work such desolation.

4. There is another view of this subject. We all admit that the preservation of the truth is one of the most important duties of the church, and that she is bound to guard against the admission of unsound men into the ministry. We all admit that the Holy Ghost calls men to preach the gospel, and that soundness in the faith is one of the marks by which that call is authenticated to the church. We admit further, that the church has no right to call men to the sacred office; that the authority to preach does not come from her; that the prerogative of the church is simply to judge of the evidence of a divine call. Her office is purely ministerial, and should be exercised cautiously and humbly. She has no more right unduly to lower, or to raise unduly the evidence which she demands of a vocation to the ministry, than she has to alter the evidence of a call to grace and salvation. If she does not, and dares not, require perfect holiness of heart and life, as proof of a call to fellowship with the Son of God, neither can she demand perfect knowledge, or perfect freedom from error, as evidence of a call to the ministry. Now, who is prepared, standing in the presence of Christ, and acting in his name, to say, that so far as the Presbyterian church can prevent it, no man shall be ordained to the ministry, no man shall be a pastor, no man shall be a missionary, no man shall preach the gospel anywhere, to the poor and the perishing, who does not believe that wilful desertion is a legitimate ground of divorce? Who is ready to shut up every church, silence every pulpit, abandon every missionary station, where that principle is not maintained? There doubtless have been, and there still may be, men who would do all this, and in the mingled spirit of the Pharisee and Dominican, rejoice in the desolation they had wrought, and shout, "The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are we." God forbid that such a spirit should ever gain the ascendancy in our church. Let us keep our hands off of God's ark, and not assume to be more zealous for his truth, or more solicitous for the purity of his church, than he is him-

self. We may well bear with infirmities and errors which he pities and pardons in his servants.

There is another great evil connected with these inordinate demands. Whenever a man is induced either to do what he does not approve, or to profess what he does not believe, his conscience is defiled. Those who lead their brethren thus to act, the Apostle says, cause them to offend, and destroy those for whom Christ died. To adopt every proposition contained in the Westminster Confession and Catechisms, is more than the vast majority of our ministers either do, or can do. To make them profess to do it, is a great sin. It hurts their conscience. It fosters a spirit of evasion and subterfuge. It teaches them to take creeds in a "non-natural sense." It at once vitiates and degrades. There are few greater evils connected with establishments, than the overwhelming temptations which they offer to make men profess what they do not believe. Under such strict requirements, men make light of professions, and are ready to adopt any creed which opens the door to wealth or office. The over strict, the world over, are the least faithful.

The third interpretation of the formula prescribed for the adoption of the Confession of Faith, is the true *via media*. It is equally removed from "the substance of doctrine"-theory, which has no definite meaning, leaving it entirely undetermined what the candidate professes; and from the impracticable theory which supposes the candidate to profess to receive every proposition contained in the Confession. What every minister of our church is bound to do, is to declare that he "receives and adopts the Confession of Faith of this church, as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures." The words "system of doctrine" have a fixed, historical meaning. The objection that it is an open question, what doctrines belong to the system and what do not, and therefore if the obligation be limited to the adoption of the system, it cannot be known what doctrines are received and what are rejected, is entirely unfounded. If the question, "What is the system of doctrine taught by the Reformed churches?" be submitted to a hundred Romanists, to a hundred Lutherans, to a hundred members of the Church of England, or to a hundred sceptics, if

intelligent and candid, they would all give precisely the same answer. There is not the slightest doubt or dispute among disinterested scholars, as to what doctrines do, and what do not belong to the faith of the Reformed. The Westminster Confession contains three distinct classes of doctrines. First, those common to all Christians, which are summed up in the ancient creeds, the Apostles', the Nicene, and the Athanasian, which are adopted by all churches. Secondly, those which are common to all Protestants, and by which they are distinguished from Romanists. Thirdly, those which are peculiar to the Reformed churches, by which they are distinguished, on the one hand, from the Lutherans, and on the other, from the Remonstrants or Arminians, and other sects of later historical origin. From the Lutherans the Reformed were distinguished principally by their doctrine on the sacraments, and from the Arminians, by the five characteristic points of Augustinianism, rejected by the Remonstrants, and affirmed at the Synod of Dort by all the Reformed churches, viz. those of Switzerland, Germany, France, England, and Scotland, as well as of Holland. What those points are everybody knows. First: The doctrine of the imputation of Adam's sin, i. e. that the sin of Adam is the judicial ground of the condemnation of his race, so that their being born in sin is the penal consequence of his transgression. Second: The doctrine of the sinful, innate, depravity of nature, whereby we are indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good. Therefore there can be no self-conversion, no coöperation with the grace of God in regeneration, as the Arminians taught; and no election not to resist as the Lutherans affirmed. With this doctrine of absolute inability consequently is connected that of efficacious, as opposed to merely preventing and assisting grace. Thirdly: The doctrine that as Christ came in the execution of the covenant of redemption, in which his people were promised to him as his reward, his work had a special reference to them, and rendered their salvation certain. Fourth: The doctrine of gratuitous, personal election to eternal life; and, Fifth: The doctrine of the perseverance of the saints. It is a matter of history that these doctrines constitute the distinguishing doctrines of the Reformed churches. And, therefore, any man

who receives these several classes of doctrine, (viz. those common to all Christians, those common to all Protestants, and those peculiar to the Reformed churches,) holds in its integrity the system of doctrine contained in the Westminster Confession. This is all that he professes to do, when he adopts that Confession in the form prescribed in our Constitution. A man is no more at liberty to construct a system of theology for himself, and call it the system contained in the Confession of Faith, than he is authorized to spin a system of philosophy out of his head, and call it Platonism. The first argument, therefore, in favour of this interpretation of our ordination service, is that it is in accordance with the literal, established meaning of the words, and attaches to them a definite meaning, so that every one knows precisely what the candidate professes.

2. A second argument is, that such was and is the intention of the church in requiring the adoption of the Confession. This has already been proved from the meaning of the language employed, from the official explanations given of that language, from the declarations of the framers of our Constitution, and from the uniform practice of the church. No case can be produced from our annals of any man being censured or rejected, who received the system of doctrines contained in the Confession of Faith, in the sense above stated. The church, in point of fact, never has required more, and no man has now the right to exalt or extend her requirements. What is here said does not imply that the deliverances contained in the Confession relating to civil magistrates, the power of the state, conditions of church membership, marriage, divorce, and other matters lying outside of "the system of doctrine" in its theological sense, are unimportant or without authority. They are the judgments of the church solemnly expressed on very important subjects; but they are judgments which she most wisely has not seen fit to make conditions of ministerial communion. As she does not require the adoption of her whole system of doctrine as the condition of church fellowship; so she does not require the adoption of these collateral and subordinate judgments as the condition of ministerial communion. And as her receiving gladly to her bosom thousands who are not able intel-

ligerly to adopt her whole system of faith, does not imply that she does not value that system, or that she does not strive to bring all her members, even the weakest, to adopt it in its integrity; so her not making her judgments of points lying outside of that system a condition of ministerial communion, does not imply that she undervalues those judgments, or that she would not rejoice to see them universally embraced. There are many things both true and good which cannot be made the condition of either Christian or ministerial fellowship.

3. A third argument in favour of this view of the meaning of the formula used in the ordination service, is, that it is the only one consistent with a good conscience, and with the peace and union of the church. To make every minister affirm that he adopts as a part of his faith every proposition contained in the Confession of Faith, would make the vast majority of them profess an untruth, and what those demanding the profession know to be untrue. This is a dreadful evil. And it is a very great evil for any portion of our brethren to represent the great majority of their fellow ministers as guilty of a false profession. This is done by every man who asserts, that to adopt the system of doctrine contained in the Confession means to adopt every proposition in the book. He thereby asserts that every minister who does not believe that desertion is a scriptural ground of divorce, or that every true Christian should be received to sealing ordinances, or that a man may not marry his deceased wife's sister, is guilty of a breach of his ordination vows.

Does not the doctrine concerning subscription here advocated answer all desirable or practicable purposes? We can agree, and to a wonderful extent, to an extent greater than in any other age, in so large a communion, we do agree as to "the system of doctrine." Our ministers hold the faith of the Reformed churches in its integrity. This they are bound to do, and this they do with exceptions so few that it would be difficult to point them out. If we are not satisfied with this, we shall soon split into insignificant sects, each contending for some minor point, and all allowing "the system of doctrine" to go to destruction. If there is any dependence to be placed on the teachings of history, the men who begin with making the



tithing of anise and cummin of equal importance with justice and mercy, are sure in the end to cling to the anise, and let the mercy go.

As so many of our brethren have taken exception to the remarks in our last number, we deem this extended exposition of our views on the matter of subscription, due to them no less than to ourselves. We are confident there is no real disagreement between us on this subject. It is a misunderstanding, as we hope and believe, due to the absence of all explanation or limitation of a passing remark, which, although true in itself, and true in the sense intended, was capable of an application wide of the truth.

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ART. VI.—*The Revised Book of Discipline.*

THE General Assembly of 1857 appointed Drs. Thornwell, James Hoge, R. J. Breckinridge, E. P. Swift, A. T. McGill, and Charles Hodge, with Judges Sharswood, Allen, and Leavitt, a Committee to revise the Book of Discipline. That Committee met at the call of the chairman in Philadelphia, on the first Thursday of August last. All the members were present, except Messrs. Leavitt and Allen, who, to the great regret of their associates, were unable to attend. The Committee in a good degree represented the different phases of thought and theory which prevail in our church. Their cordial agreement in any doubtful point may, therefore, afford ground to anticipate a like agreement in the church. The plan of conducting the revision, proposed by the chairman and adopted by the Committee, was to read over the present Book, chapter by chapter, and section by section, and discuss each point until an agreement was arrived at. In the great majority of cases the decisions were unanimous. In some the form adopted was a compromise; and in a few the majority had to decide. This was necessarily a slow process. It took a good while for the Committee to understand each other; still more to produce