

PUBLISHERS' NOTE.

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CONTENTS.

	PAGE
I.—LETTER OF DR. DE WITT (New York <i>Evangelist</i> , June 6, 1889),	7
II.—RESPONSE OF DR. VAN DYKE (New York <i>Evangelist</i> , June 27, 1889),	9
III.—DR. DE WITT'S RESPONSE TO DR. VAN DYKE (New York <i>Evangelist</i> , July 11, 1889),	14
IV.—DR. VAN DYKE'S REJOINDER TO DR. DE WITT (New York <i>Evangelist</i> , July 18, 1889),	19
V.—DR. DE WITT ON DR. VAN DYKE'S REJOINDER (New York <i>Evangelist</i> , July 25, 1889),	25
VI.—REPLICATION OF DR. VAN DYKE TO DR. DE WITT (New York <i>Evangelist</i> , August 1, 1889),	33
VII.—PROF. WARFIELD'S PAPER PRESENTED TO THE NEW BRUNSWICK PRESBYTERY, June 25, 1889,	39
VIII.—DR. VAN DYKE ON THE ACTION OF THE NEW BRUNSWICK PRESBYTERY (<i>Herald and Presbyter</i> , July 31, 1889),	42
IX.—PROF. WARFIELD IN REPLY TO DR. VAN DYKE (<i>Her- ald and Presbyter</i> , August 21, 28, September 4, 1889),	47
X.—DR. VAN DYKE'S REPLY TO PROF. WARFIELD (<i>Her- ald and Presbyter</i> , September 11, 18, 25, 1889),	63
XI.—LETTER OF PROF. W. G. T. SHEDD (New York <i>Evangelist</i> , September 5, 1889),	81

	PAGE
XII.—DR. VAN DYKE ON PROF. SHEDD'S LETTER (New York <i>Evangelist</i> , September 26, 1889), . . .	92
XIII.—FURTHER REMARKS BY PROF. SHEDD (New York <i>Evangelist</i> , October 10, 1889), . . .	100
XIV.—DR. VAN DYKE IN REPLY TO PROF. SHEDD (New York <i>Evangelist</i> , October 17, 1889), . . .	107
XV.—A NOTE FROM DR. SHEDD (New York <i>Evangelist</i> , October 24, 1889), . . .	115
XVI.—GOD'S INFINITE LOVE TO MEN. DR. VAN DYKE. (<i>The Presbyterian</i> , October 5, 1889), . . .	116
XVII.—GOD'S INFINITE LOVE TO MEN AND THE WESTMINSTER CONFESSION. PROF. WARFIELD. (<i>The Presbyterian</i> , November 2, 1889), . . .	120
XVIII.—THE CONFESSION AND GOD'S INFINITE LOVE TO MEN. DR. VAN DYKE. (<i>The Presbyterian</i> , November 16, 1889), . . .	126

CONFESSIONAL REVISION.

I.

LETTER OF DR. DE WITT.

THE subject of the Revision of the Confession will now come before the Presbyteries in a form which will enable our ministers seriously to consider it. One does not need to express the hope that they will bring to its study an adequate appreciation of the importance of rightly answering the Assembly's questions, or of the magnitude of the task they will impose on the Church if they shall decide in favor of Revision. This may safely be taken for granted.

There is, however, a suggestion which any minister may properly take on himself to make at the outset. This is, that if a Presbytery shall express a desire that the statements of the Confession on a particular subject be amended, this desire should be given not only a general and negative form, but a positive and constructive form also. Let us know exactly the words which a Presbytery may wish to substitute for the present words of the Confession.

It is easy enough to criticise the language of the Westminster Divines; but it is not so easy to write formulas on the same subjects, which will command as general an assent throughout the Church. This is a fair suggestion. I do

not know whether a committee was appointed by the General Assembly lately in session, to receive the Presbyterial replies; but it is clear to me that such a committee might quite properly eliminate as valueless, and leave unreported, any reply which does not give a confessional or symbolical form to a Presbytery's proposed amendment. Let us have samples of the new or revised statements. If any one wants revision on any subject, let him try his hand at a formula correlated to the formulas which he does not want revised. Why not? If the present confessional declarations are made to stand up for critical inspection in the fierce light of the open day, why should the proposed future confessional declarations be suffered to half conceal themselves in a sort of dim moonshine? It is possible that some of our ministers have, or suppose they have, formulas in their heads better than those in the Confession. Let us see the formulas. Let them be subjected to the criticism that can be offered only after they shall have been printed. Let no one be permitted to suppose that he is doing anything for Revision by simply saying, "The sections on Predestination should be amended," but compel him *to write out a section which he is prepared to defend as better.*

Respectfully yours,

JOHN DE WITT.

McCORMICK THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY, June 7, 1889.

II.

RESPONSE OF DR. VAN DYKE.

THE revision of our Confession of Faith does not appear to me such a formidable task as Dr. De Witt apprehends. This is due doubtless to our different understanding of the thing proposed. He says, "It is easy enough to criticise the language of the Westminster Divines; but it is not so easy to *write formulas on the same subjects* which will command as general an assent throughout the Church." For one I do not believe that either the science of theology and Scripture exegesis, or the art of expressing divine truth in acceptable words, has so far declined in the Presbyterian Church that it would be impossible to rewrite the whole or any part of the Westminster Confession. If it were so, it would be a sad result of these two hundred years of Biblical study and theological training. But it is not necessary to discuss this question. So far as I know, nobody proposes to make a new Confession, nor to rewrite the old one, nor even to make an entire new statement of any doctrine belonging to the system which it contains. It is not a reconstruction, but a revision, which is proposed. To revise, according to Worcester, is "to look over with a view to correct or amend." After studying the Confession for nearly half a century, and adhering to it to-day with as much loyalty as any man ought to feel toward any uninspired statement of divine truth, I am in favor of the proposed revision. Without admitting the canon that no one ought to criticise a human production unless he is able to make a better one, or that no Presbyterian minister

should express his desire to have the Confession revised unless he is able to revise it himself. I am ready at the first call of the trumpet to answer Dr. De Witt's challenge to give to every one in favor of the revision "samples of the new or revised statements," and to "try his hand at a formula correlated to the formulas he does not want revised."

Let us begin with Chapter III., *Of God's eternal decree*. The first and second sections contain all that is essential to the doctrine, admirably sums up the teaching of Scripture on the subject, and guards it against the abominable inference that God is the author of sin, or that any violence is offered to the will of the creature. But the *third* section has a *supralapsarian* bias. It may be construed to mean that men are foreordained, whether to life or death, simply as men, and not as *fallen* men; in other words, that God makes one on purpose to save him, and another on purpose to damn him. I would like to see that section amended, and brought into "correlation" with the teaching of the most orthodox theologians of our time, by inserting the words *for their sins*, so that it would read, "By the decree of God, for the manifestation of His glory, some men and angels are predestinated unto everlasting life, and others foreordained *for their sins* to everlasting death." The *fourth* section I would like to see stricken out. Because it states a mere theological inference not in any way necessary to the exposition of the doctrine, and especially because it goes beyond the statements of the Scripture on the subject. There is no appropriate proof-text for it. The two that are quoted are wide of the mark. The declaration of Paul, "The Lord knoweth them that are His" (2 Tim. ii. 19), and the saying of Christ, "I know whom I have chosen," were not intended to show that the number of those predestinated, whether to life or to death, "cannot be either increased or diminished," neither do they prove it;

nor is it necessary to prove it. The *seventh* section of the same chapter contains another theological inference, which, however logical, is not necessary to a positive and complete statement of the Scripture truth. The word *preterition*, or *reprobation*, is not used in our Confession, but the doctrine covered by these terms is taught in this section. Some of our ablest and most orthodox ministers openly reject it, and it is a stumbling-block to many. If any one says their rejection of this section, while they accept the rest of the chapter, proves that they are *not* strictly orthodox, and that the statement ought to be retained as a test between the Calvinistic and the Calvinist: I have only to say that as a Calvinist I have no sympathy with such intolerance and want of tenderness for others.

But the striking out of this section would not satisfy me. I would like to see its place supplied with something which would amend what many of our best divines regard as a serious defect in our Confession taken as a whole, namely: that it contains no explicit declaration of the infinite love of God, revealed in the fullness of the Gospel salvation as sufficient for, adapted to, and freely offered to all men. And here I am willing to "try my hand at a formula correlated to the formulas which I do not want revised," and to submit it to the criticism of all the orthodox. Let the seventh section read thus: "God's eternal decree hindereth no one from accepting Christ as He is freely offered to us in the Gospel; nor ought it to be so construed as to contradict the declarations of Scripture, that Christ is the propitiation for the sins of the whole world, and that God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." Will any Presbyterian minister dare to say that such a formula as this would not *correlate* with the rest of our Confession, or that it would introduce a discordant element into the chapter on the divine decrees?

That is precisely the position of Arminians and all other opponents of the Calvinistic system; and one who objects to such an amendment plays into their hands. I contend that this amendment, or one expressing the same thoughts in better language, would be in perfect harmony with the whole Confession, and that it would add logical force as well as divine beauty to the concluding section of the chapter about handling the doctrine of this high mystery of predestination with special prudence and care, so that it may afford matter of praise to God and abundant consolation to all who obey the Gospel.

The tenth chapter of the Confession contains the well-known phrase, "elect infants dying in infancy." I will not enter upon the discussion as to the *historic* meaning of that much-jaculated phrase, nor review the explanations by which we answer the interpretations of our enemies, nor answer for the thousandth time the old slander that Calvin taught that hell is paved with infants' skulls. We have fenced and fought and played football with the phrase long enough. If the Westminster Assembly adopted it as a compromise, let us no longer perpetuate their ambiguity. If it means that all dying infants are elect, let us say so in the Confession itself, in words that will leave no room for controversy. If it means that the whole subject is in doubt, and that for aught we know some dying infants may be lost, let us reject a doctrine which no Presbyterian minister holds, or would dare to preach if he did. I believe with Dr. Hodge, that all infants dying in infancy, baptized and unbaptized, born in Christian or in heathen lands, are elect and saved. (See Hodge's "Theology," vol. i., p. 29.) And therefore I am in favor of amending the Confession at this point by striking out the word *elect*, and substituting the word *all*, so that the section would read thus: "All infants dying in infancy are regenerated and saved by

Christ through the Spirit, who worketh when and where and how He pleaseth. So also are all other elect persons who are incapable of being outwardly called by the ministry of the Word.”

These are not all the amendments which I would like to have made, but they may serve for the required *samples*. They are offered without consultation with any one. They are my personal convictions after many years of study. They do not indicate any defection from our Standards, but a profound love and loyalty which would vindicate them from reproach, and lift them higher in the estimation of men. In this respect I claim to be in the first rank of the orthodox. But the Confession is not the Bible. Its authors were not inspired, nor is their work immaculate. As to the sentiment—for it can hardly be called an *opinion* without disrespect—that this human and fallible exposition of the Scriptures, after two hundred years of improved Christian scholarship, cannot be amended for the better, nothing but personal regard for those who entertain it restrains our laughter.

HENRY J. VAN DYKE.

BROOKLYN, June 22, 1889.

III.

DR. DE WITT'S RESPONSE TO DR. VAN DYKE.

I SAW only yesterday Dr. Van Dyke's response to my letter on Confessional Revision. I was delighted to find not only that my letter had attracted the attention of so eminent a minister, but also that the suggestion it contained had received from him the most emphatic endorsement he could give to it, namely, the endorsement involved in its adoption. Some of your readers may remember that I called attention to the ease with which the Confession can be criticised, and contrasted this ease with the difficulty of formulating confessional statements which will command an assent as general as that now commanded by the Confession of Faith. I suggested that those who desire amendments, present their amendments in *positive* form, correlating them to the statements of the Confession which they do not wish amended.

This Dr. Van Dyke has done. He has formulated two amendments. He has brought to their preparation exceptionally vigorous and well-trained mental powers, wide and accurate theological knowledge, and, above all, the accumulated results of "a study of the Confession for half a century by one who loyally adheres to it." The proposals of such a man must be read with deep interest by a large number of clergymen; and the fact that they are put forward by him, is itself likely to secure for them a favorable consideration. I am happy in the thought that I called him out, and I am especially interested in the proposals he

has made, because they finely illustrate the difficulty I mentioned in my letter—the difficulty, I mean, of preparing satisfactory confessional formulas. That I may be clearly understood, I undertake to show that one, at least, if not both, of Dr. Van Dyke's proposed amendments, will, if adopted, make our Confession of Faith a narrower or less liberal symbol than it is at present.

The third section of the tenth chapter commences with the often-repeated sentence, "Elect infants dying in infancy are regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit, who worketh when and where and how He pleaseth." This, Dr. Van Dyke proposes to amend by striking out the word "Elect" and by inserting in its place the word "All." He says that he "will not enter upon the discussion of the historic meaning of the statement," and for that reason I refrain from doing so, although a discussion of its history, so far as that can be ascertained, would, in my judgment, bring into clear light the wisdom and the catholicity of the Assembly of Divines. Especially would it show how important in their view is the distinction between a dogma of the faith, on the one hand, and a private opinion on the other,—a distinction which ought never to be lost sight of by any who undertake to frame a statement intended to bind the conscience of a Church.

But without going into the history of the sentence, it is clear that it permits, as it was intended to permit, a presbyter to hold and to teach any one of the four following opinions: First, all infants dying in infancy are saved; second, some infants dying in infancy are not saved; third, though it is impossible to be certain, yet there is a well-grounded hope that all who die in infancy are saved; fourth, though certainty is impossible, there are considerations that awaken the fear that God has not chosen to regenerate all infants dying in infancy. Thus the Westminster divines left the

whole subject to individual opinion, and made places under the Confession—as our fathers, by adopting their work, made places in the Church—for men of widely differing views.

Dr. Van Dyke now proposes to define as a doctrine what has hitherto been left to private opinion. He will permit no opinion except the opinion, “All infants dying in infancy are saved.” Henceforth, should his proposal be adopted, doubt or hesitancy in respect to the future salvation of all infants dying in infancy will have no more legal right in the breast of a Presbyterian minister than doubt in respect either to the existence of a personal God or to the reality of the Atonement of Christ. Should a minister make so cautious and conservative a statement as that made by the late Prof. Henry B. Smith, “As to those who die in infancy, there is a well-grounded hope that they are of the elect” (“Christian Theology,” p. 322), it would be competent for a Presbytery to deal with him just as it would deal with a minister who should say, “As to a personal God, there is a well-grounded hope that He will be found to exist.” I say, therefore, that Dr. Van Dyke’s proposal on this subject is a proposal to narrow the Church—to make it less liberal than it is to-day, by lifting out of the realm of opinion, and into the realm of officially defined dogma, a subject concerning which we are now at liberty to reach individual conclusions.

Moreover, if Dr. Van Dyke should get his amendment passed, he would be in no better position as a religious teacher, so far as this subject is concerned, than he is now. He could not announce in the pulpit any more positively than he is now permitted to do, that “all who die in infancy are saved.” The sum total of his gain would be the imposition on the whole Church, as a defined dogma, of what is now a private belief. The only result would be to

make the theological platform of the Church less liberal than it now is.

I have no right to ask for space in order to criticise at length Dr. Van Dyke's proposed amendments of the chapter on the decree of God. Indeed, writing at a distance from my books, I hesitate to say anything. I will say, however, that one of them is open to the same objection that I offer to his proposal concerning the "infants dying in infancy." He objects to the present form of the third section, because it has "a supralapsarian bias." He will not say that a sublapsarian Calvinist cannot accept it. That the sublapsarian can do. But the difficulty is that a supralapsarian Calvinist can accept it also. The effect of his amendment would not be to make it easier for sublapsarian Calvinists to subscribe the declaration, for that is perfectly easy now. It would only be, if it had any effect of the kind, to make it more difficult for supralapsarians to subscribe it. At any rate, Dr. Van Dyke's avowed object is to get rid of supralapsarianism. Now I think it one of the glories of this Confession, that its authors were unwilling to drive out of the synagogue those who held either historical form of Calvinism. And though I am no more a supralapsarian than Dr. Van Dyke is, Beza, Gomarus, Van Maastricht, and Twisse, the Prolocutor of the Westminster Assembly, were, unless my memory is at fault. And when I read the Institutes of Calvin, I am unable to find anything that shows clearly that he was not. Certainly, I shall not vote for an amendment intended or calculated to make the platform of the Church too narrow for these men to stand on.

I have, I think, maintained the proposition with which I began, namely, that Dr. Van Dyke's amendments, if adopted, will make the Confession of our Church less liberal than it is. This, I undertake to say, will be the effect of most of the amendments that shall be proposed, unless great care is

taken. The Westminster divines were an exceptionally wise body of men. The wisdom of the Assembly was far greater than the wisdom of its wisest member. I have not studied the Confession for half a century, as Dr. Van Dyke has done. Still I have studied it, and I profoundly admire the learning and the wisdom its authors displayed, not only in what they defined, but also, and I may say especially, in what they might have been expected to define, and yet refrained from defining. The result of their labors is, that the Confession, when subscribed as we subscribe it in our Church, gives to a ministry the largest liberty possible within the limits of the Calvinistic or Reformed theology. My own impression is, that we would better let it stand as it is. I say this, remembering that it is not impossible that an amendment may be proposed which will really improve it. I hazard nothing, however, in asserting that attempts to improve it, while keeping it Calvinistic, are usually attempts to narrow it by imposing passing individual opinions on the conscience of the whole Church.

Of course the Presbyterian Church may some day desire to relegate all that is distinctively Calvinistic in its creed to the realm of private opinion; and in the interest of Church unity, to stand on some such doctrinal platform as that of the American Tract Society or the Evangelical Alliance. The Congregationalists of some parts of the country have done this substantially, but the result up to this time does not encourage the hope that such a change of doctrinal platform will promote belief in the distinctive doctrines of Christianity.

But this is a large subject, and the excision of Calvinism from the Confession is not the subject now before the Church.

JOHN DE WITT.

THE HILL · DANVILLE, PA., July 3, 1889.

IV.

DR. VAN DYKE'S REJOINDER TO DR. DE WITT.

DR. DE WITT's article in the *Evangelist* of July 11th, is so full of respectful kindness that it seems like ingratitude to make any response beyond my thanks for his courtesy. But the subject under discussion is so far above personal considerations, that I am sure my generous friend will not be offended by my observing that he is too hasty in claiming the victory. Let not him that putteth on his armor, boast as he that putteth it off. He has not proved the sweeping assertion "that attempts to improve the Confession, while keeping it Calvinistic, are usually attempts to narrow it by imposing passing individual opinions on the conscience of the whole Church"; nor has he shown that all or any of the amendments I proposed are "private opinions," which, if adopted, "would make our Confession less liberal than it is." It is not clear to my mind with what precise meaning Dr. De Witt uses the phrase "*private* opinion." In his article it seems—unintentionally, of course—to "palter in a double sense." When he says, "Of course the Presbyterian Church may desire some day to *relegate* all that is distinctively Calvinistic in its creed, to the realm of private opinion," the word *private* appears to be synonymous with *unauthorized*—not recognized in the Standards. But this cannot be his meaning, when he applies the same epithet to my proposed amendments: for they are confessedly unauthorized, and because they are not in the Confession already, we desire to put them into it.

By "private opinion" he must mean an opinion held by very few, not generally adopted, or as he himself explains it, "a *passing individual* opinion." In response to his summons, I proposed *five* distinct amendments. Has he proved that any one of them is a passing individual opinion? I think not. Three of them he does not notice at all, viz.: the proposals to strike out the fourth and seventh sections of the third chapter, and especially the new section which I offered as a substitute for the seventh, in these words: "God's eternal decree hindereth no one from accepting Christ as He is freely offered to us in the Gospel; nor ought it to be so construed as to contradict the declarations of Scripture that Christ is the propitiation for the sins of the whole world, and that God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." This is the only instance in which I undertook, in answer to Dr. De Witt's challenge, to formulate a statement "correlated to the formulas which he does not want revised." But the challenger takes no notice of it whatever. Does he brand this simple statement of the fullness and freeness of the Gospel as a passing individual opinion which ought not to be "imposed upon the conscience of the Church"? Or are we permitted to conclude that his silence gives consent?

Of the two remaining amendments, the first has for its avowed object, as Dr. De Witt correctly says, to get rid of the *supralapsarian bias* from Section 3, Chapter III., by making it read that God foreordains men to everlasting death, not merely for His own glory, but also *for their sins*. Dr. De Witt does not deny that as it now stands, it *has* a supralapsarian bias; but he defends and desires to retain the present form of the statement. He says that it is perfectly easy for the sublapsarian to subscribe to it, and intimates that I will not say to the contrary. But that is just what I *do* say. It is a stumbling-block and an offence.

If it was designed to embrace both the supralapsarian and the sublapsarian form of Calvinism, it failed in its object; for it leans distinctly toward the theory that God foreordains men to eternal death simply as creatures, antecedent to and irrespective of their sins. For one, I do not believe this; neither do I subscribe to it. I receive and adopt the Confession as a whole, *in spite* of this statement. Ninety-nine hundredths of our Presbyterian ministers do the same.

But Dr. De Witt is troubled about the effect of the proposed amendment upon the standing of the dead. He tells us that Gomarus, Van Maestricht, and Twisse, and even Calvin, were supralapsarians, and he will not "vote for an amendment which would make the platform of the Church too narrow for these men to stand on." Admitting, for the sake of the argument (though I deny it in fact, so far as regards Calvin), that these men all held the supralapsarian theory, what then? None of them but Twisse ever adopted our Confession; and now they are all in heaven, where they are not required to do so. Our fellowship with the saints in glory does not rest upon our Confession of Faith. We propose to amend our Standard with a view to its adaptation to the living, not to the dead. How many among the recognized teachers of theology in the American Presbyterian Church have held the supralapsarian theory? *Not one.* Woods, Richards, Henry B. Smith, the Hodges, Thornwell, Shedd—all repudiate it. How many of our living ministry believe or preach it? Does Dr. De Witt know of any whose conscience would be imposed upon by the adoption of my sublapsarian amendment? If there were space for such discussion, I could easily show that the doctrine of this amendment, so far from being "a passing individual opinion," belongs to the very substance and consensus of the Reformed theology; that the contrary opinion

belongs not to the sixteenth, but to the seventeenth century; that its seed was sown, not by such as Beza and Calvin, but by men like Twisse; and that its fruit is seen in that hideous Emmonsism from which the New Theology of New England is largely the natural and necessary revolt. Dr. A. A. Hodge, in his "Consensus of the Reformed Confessions," says: "It is no part of the Reformed faith that God created men in order to damn them; nor that His treatment of the lost is to be referred to His sovereign will. He condemns men only as a Judge for their sins, to the praise of His glorious justice" (*Presbyterian Review*, vol. v., p. 295). Even if there were many men in our Church to-day to agree with Twisse, the practical question would be whether they should tolerate us, or we tolerate them. I think the exercise of toleration is the privilege of an overwhelming majority.

The same course of argument applies equally well to the proposed amendment in regard to the salvation of infants. The phrase "elect infants," if it was intended to embrace all opinions on the subject prevalent in the Westminster Assembly at the time of its adoption, has practically failed in our day to accomplish its object. It is quoted and understood by thousands within and without the Presbyterian Church, not only as tolerating, but as teaching by implication that some dying infants are lost, in fulfilment of a supralapsarian decree. But where is the man or woman in our Church who believes this? Dr. Hodge says, "It is the general belief of Protestants, contrary to the doctrine of Romanists and Romanizers, that all who die in infancy are saved" (see "Theology," vol. i., p. 27). He also declares that he never saw a Calvinistic theologian who doubted it. Dr. Thomas Smyth, whose ministry covered the greater part of the first half of this century, in his book on the "Salvation of Infants," published in 1848, says:

“ At this time it is, I suppose, universally believed by Presbyterians and those who hold the doctrine of election, that all dying infants are included among the elect. I at least am not acquainted with any who hold an opposite opinion.” There is a great cloud of witnesses whose testimony is to the same effect.

But in face of all their testimony, Dr. De Witt says the belief that all infants dying in infancy are saved, is a mere *private* opinion—a *passing individual* opinion—and that its adoption into the Confession would be an imposition upon the conscience of the whole Church. Nay, he thinks the adoption of such an amendment would not only narrow our Confession, but might stir up the fires of bigotry and persecution. Surely our good brother is tilting at a shadow when he says, “ Dr. Van Dyke will permit no opinion, except the opinion that ‘all infants dying in infancy are saved.’ Henceforth, should his proposal be adopted, doubt or hesitancy in respect to the salvation of all dying infants will have no more legal right in the breast of a Presbyterian minister, than doubt as to the existence of a personal God, or the reality of the atonement of Christ. Should a minister make such a cautious and conservative statement as that made by the late Prof. H. B. Smith—‘As to those who die in infancy, there is a well-grounded hope that they are of the elect’—it would be competent for a Presbytery to deal with him, just as it would deal with a minister who should say, ‘As to a personal God, there is a well-grounded hope that He will be found to exist.’” This is a *reductio ad absurdum*, but it is not on my side. No one proposes to make the salvation of infants as important a doctrine as the existence of God. I am not so sure as Dr. De Witt seems to be, that a *well-grounded hope* in regard to either, is not quite as good as an assured belief. I do not think any Presbytery would convict a man of heresy for making either

statement. There is, however, this difference between the two subjects: the existence of God is a matter of consciousness as well as of testimony, whereas the salvation of infants rests only on the testimony of God's Word. If a man believes that his hope of their salvation is *well grounded* in that testimony, I think his faith is about as strong relatively to its subject, as when he says, I believe and know there is a personal God.

If both these amendments were adopted, the supralapsarian and the doubter in regard to infant salvation, if such there are, would have no more difficulty in adopting the Confession, than the great mass of our ministers have now. No one would be put out of the synagogue, while many would be encouraged to come in. And above all, the whole Church would have the immense public advantage of conforming her Confession to her faith. A dead law on the statute-book impairs the authority of all law. A doctrinal statement in our Confession, which the mass of our ministers and people do not believe, opens the door for unbounded *license* in subscribing to our Standards. For this very reason some are opposed to revision. But Dr. De Witt is not one of *them*; and I am not without hopes that he, with his inherited zeal for the Presbyterian Church, and his broad scholarly attainments, will yet be found among the advocates of a conservative revision.

HENRY J. VAN DYKE.

V.

DR. DE WITT ON DR. VAN DYKE'S REJOINDER.

DR. VAN DYKE'S rejoinder contains so much that deserves observation, that if I did it justice, I should occupy more space than the *Evangelist* can lend me. Besides, I desire briefly to notice the amazing diversity in the proposals for revision already made in your hospitable columns. For these reasons I omit much I should like to say, and before noticing this diversity, confine myself to answering two questions which Dr. Van Dyke puts to me.

1. Dr. Van Dyke says that I did not remark on the new section, which he proposes as a substitute for one of the sections on the decree of God, and very properly asks whether my silence is to be understood as agreement with him in respect to that proposal. In reply I have to say first, that any criticism of this particular proposal, seemed in the circumstances unnecessary. I wished to illustrate the difficulty which even a trained, able, and learned theologian must find, in the endeavor to formulate confessional statements as widely acceptable as those of the Confession. I found abundant material for my purpose in his other proposed amendments. Having shown clearly, as I think I did, that these, if adopted, would make our Confession of Faith a narrower and less liberal symbol than it now is, I did all that I thought needed. It did not seem necessary to make evident, as I am now obliged to do, the infelicity of still another of his amendments. Secondly,

writing at a distance from my books, I hesitated to criticise at length this carefully drawn substitute for a section of the Chapter on the Decree. But thirdly, since Dr. Van Dyke has emphasized, by reprinting, this particular example of revision, and puts the question, "Does your silence mean consent?" I have great pleasure in stating as shortly as possible my objections to his proposed new section, regarded as a "Confessional formula." His proposed new section is as follows:

"God's eternal decree hindereth no one from accepting Christ as He is freely offered in the Gospel; nor ought it to be so construed as to contradict the declarations of Scripture that Christ is the propitiation for the sins of the whole world, and that God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."

My objections are two:

First. The proposed section quotes, without the slightest attempt to interpret them, two verses of Scripture, the meaning of one of which has for a long time been, and still is, debated among the ministers of our Church, who yet receive and adopt the Confession as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures. Dr. Van Dyke knows very well that a Creed, or Confession of Faith, properly constructed, is not a response in Scriptural language to the language of Scripture. Indeed, it is a statement in dogmatic propositions, constituted of language other than that of Scripture, of the Church's interpretation of Scripture. The creeds, whether Ecumenical, Greek, Latin, Lutheran, or Reformed, are conspicuously *not* in Scriptural language, for the very good reason that they are intended to be official expositions of Scriptural language. Dr. Van Dyke's proposed amendment, being clothed in the language of Scripture, violates the fundamental, constitutive, and historical idea of a creed statement.

Second. One of the two verses employed by him was

one of the most often quoted and debated verses during that long and unhappy ecclesiastical controversy which began before the Separation of 1838, and ended at the Reunion of 1869. The question of the meaning of the phrase, "for the sins of the whole world," was answered in one way by Old School, in another by New School, Presbyteries. Finally, the Reunion came, and although the meaning of the verse is still most properly discussed by theological professors in their lecture-rooms, and by all who choose to do so, the entire subject has been taken out of the realm of our ecclesiastical disputes. But Dr. Van Dyke selects this very verse, and notwithstanding this history, puts it in the Confession. He does nothing to help us toward its interpretation, but (with the most irenic of motives, I am sure) does the one thing of all best calculated to reopen the ecclesiastical debate which the Reunion has closed. He places it in the Confession at the point most likely to make Presbyteries, as Presbyteries, discuss the question, What does it mean? In view of all this history, I do most earnestly appeal to Dr. Van Dyke, if he feels bound to propose an amendment on this subject, to formulate another. Of course, if he thinks that this verse in any way modifies the statement of the Catechism, "God having elected *some* to everlasting life, did enter into a covenant to bring *them* into a state of salvation by a Redeemer," all will agree that since the Reunion he is entitled to hold that opinion. Or if he thinks the two statements perfectly concordant, he is entitled to say so. But he is proposing what in my judgment is dangerous, when he moves to insert, without interpretation, in the Confession an expression, which for many years was among us just what the Psalter of Finnian was among the Irish, a war-cry of two opposing clans.

2. Dr. Van Dyke is not sure that he understands what I

mean by the phrase "private opinion," and the alternative phrase "a passing individual opinion." He is afraid that unintentionally I make the phrase "palter in a double sense." I have no right to complain of this criticism, for the use of the word "passing" was unfortunate. It may mean evanescent. Probably this is the idea that it would convey to most readers. But this I did not intend to convey. By "passing individual opinion," I meant "current individual opinion," and this, whether evanescent or permanent, whether exceptional or prevalent.

With this explanation, let me say that I used the phrase "private" or "individual" opinion in its recognized and technical sense, the sense, I mean, in which it is contrasted with another technical phrase, *dogma de fide*. Both phrases have long been used. Sometimes, most often perhaps, the adjective "pious" is employed by Roman Catholic writers instead of the adjective "private" or "individual." But the meaning is obvious, and is always the same. There is, as there must be, a large and various body of opinion on theological subjects, formed by the devout or "pious," and "private" or "individual" study of learned men. These opinions are allowed by the Church. Never having been erected into "dogmas of the faith," never having been "defined" as doctrines and given a place in the creed, they are still only "private" or "pious" opinions. Some of them are held by only a few theologians. Others are prevalent. Some are likely to prove evanescent; others to be permanent. Usually they are derived, not from explicit statements of Scripture, but from what those holding them believe to be implicated in the teachings of the Word of God.

In this sense of the phrase, the belief that "all who die in infancy are saved" is, with us, a "private" or "pious" opinion. Nor would it be other than a private opinion, if

it could be shown that every individual in the Church believed it. For each individual throughout the Church is at liberty as an individual to hold or reject it. But put it in the Confession of Faith, and it will be a private opinion no longer; it will be a *dogma de fide*. Our liberty of opinion on this subject will then be gone. Hope, expectation, supposition, and all other states of mind in respect to dead infants, except assent to their salvation, will be utterly out of place. If I have made my meaning clear, it is evident that whenever a "private opinion" is made "a dogma of the faith," by being "defined" and placed in the creed, the creed in which it is placed is, so far forth, narrower or less liberal than it was before.

I am glad that Dr. Van Dyke has given me the opportunity to explain my meaning in detail. As the Church is bound to discuss this question of revision, there is no distinction more important to be remembered just now than the distinction between a "private opinion" and "a dogma of the faith." The very strongest reasons should be announced and sifted and abide the sifting before the opinion is permitted to be defined as a dogma. The change ought not to be made without the clearest and most explicit warrant of Scripture. We Presbyterian ministers and elders are doubly fortunate, first, in possessing a creed composed by men who understood thoroughly this distinction; and secondly, in a form of subscription which places us in "genial relations" to the creed itself.

Rome understands and has carefully observed this distinction. If there is a church, which, on its theory and by its constitution, is in a position to multiply dogmas, it is the Roman Catholic Church. It possesses an inspired "Vicar of Christ," and it possesses also a vast body of "tradition," on which it could draw for this very purpose. One might well have prophesied that its activity in their multiplication

would be greater than that of the whole of Christendom except itself. But the Roman Catholic Church, of which Lord Macaulay long ago said, "There is not, and there never was, on this earth a work of human policy so well deserving of examination," has been most sagaciously careful in its exercise of this tremendous power. Since the Council of Trent was dissolved three centuries ago, only two "pious opinions" have been defined as "dogmas of the faith." The debates between Franciscan and Dominican, between Scotist and Thomist, often in the thirteenth century raged around the question of the "Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary." From that date until 1854—a period of five centuries of active discussion—when it was "defined" as a dogma of the Catholic faith, the question was left to be answered by private and pious opinion. So was the infallibility of the Pope, until 1870.

But Rome has not furnished the model for our active and ardent revisers. There is another religious body, however, to which the Roman Catholic Church in this particular presents a striking and instructive contrast. This religious body has a head like the head of the Church of Rome. But, lacking a vast body of tradition, it has been accustomed to supply that deficiency by an almost annual addition to its "dogmas of the faith." I am vividly reminded, by the lightness and gaiety with which so many of my brethren are entering on the work of Confessional revision, of the abounding activity in the same direction of the Apostles and Chief Revelator of the Church of the Latter-Day Saints, commonly called Mormons.

3. Having made clear, I trust, why I object to Dr. Van Dyke's amendment, and what I mean by "private opinion," I wish, before concluding this letter, to call attention to the remarkable diversities of attitude among writers

favorable to revision as they appear on the pages of the *Evangelist* this very week.

Here, first, is the Rev. Mr. Dulles, who wishes the Confession revised in such a way as to make it "a living one"; but who has no confidence in "patching" the present Confession—indeed, in nothing short of a new Confession, which shall express "what we now believe." Here, secondly, is a letter which endorses the article of Elder Henry Day, who tells us that if he must find a reason for the decree of God, he will find it in the foresight of faith. Here, thirdly, is my valued friend Dr. Van Dyke, who is against all such Arminianism, but who would also remove "the supralapsarian bias" from the Confession, and who would insert the statement, "All infants dying in infancy are saved." And here, finally, is my dear and honored Professor, Dr. Duffield, of Princeton College, who will not allow Dr. Van Dyke his dogma concerning all who die in infancy, but who is ready to knock out "the supralapsarian bias" from our most logical Confession, though he quotes without disapproval Dr. A. A. Hodge's remark that "supralapsarianism is the most logical scheme."

Here is a diversity of tongues, indeed. Shall I say that it recalls the story of what once occurred on the plain of Shinar? In the midst of it I take my stand on the platform so finely formulated by Prof. Warfield, of Princeton, and I beg to close my letter by quoting a portion of his most admirable paper:

"Our free, but safe, formula of the Confession of Faith, by which we 'receive and adopt it,' as 'containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures,' relieves us of all necessity for seeking each man to conform the Confession, in all its propositions, to his individual preferences, and enables us to treat the Confession as a public document, designed, not to bring each of our idiosyncrasies to expression, but to express the general and common faith of the whole body, which it adequately and admirably does.

“ Enjoying this free, yet hearty relation to the Confession, we consider that our situation toward our Standards is incapable of improvement. However much or little the Confession were altered, we could not, as a body, accept the altered Confession in a closer sense than for system of doctrine ; and the alteration could not better it as a public confession, however much it might be made a closer expression of the faith of some individuals among us. In any case it could not be made, in all its propositions and forms of statement, the exact expression of the personal faith of each one of our thousands of standard-bearers.”

JOHN DE WITT.

THE HILL : DANVILLE, PA., July 20, 1889.

VI.

REPLICATION OF DR. VAN DYKE TO DR. DE WITT.

It is wonderful how much our judgment of things depends upon the side from which we look at them. I have been greatly impressed with what seemed to me a remarkable agreement among the advocates of Revision. Without any consultation, they are in substantial accord as to the things that need amendment; differing chiefly in the forms of changes which have been offered as mere suggestions. But here comes the *Evangelist* of July 25th, in which Dr. De Witt declares himself equally impressed with "the remarkable diversities of attitude among writers favorable to Revision." He thinks this diversity amounts to a confusion of tongues, like that on the plains of Shinar. He detects a likeness between the advocates of Revision, and the "abounding activity in the same direction of the Apostles and Chief Revelator of the Church of the Latter-Day Saints, commonly called Mormons." He draws an unfavorable contrast between their desire for change and the conservatism of the Church of Rome, which in the three centuries since the Council of Trent has "defined only two pious opinions into dogmas of the faith." Let me assure my good brother that I have too much respect for him, and am too tenderly interested in the subject we are discussing, to be ruffled by these invidious, not to say odious, comparisons. I only wonder at them, and at the course of argument to which they belong, which seems to me at variance with

the spirit of Protestantism and of the Presbyterian Church. It smells of the Dark Ages, and has the ear-marks of the Schoolmen. Doubtless the difference between Dr. De Witt and myself is due to our different angles of vision. But I know not whether to call his angle acute or obtuse, when one of the four witnesses he summons to prove the confusion of tongues among the friends of Revision, is openly opposed to what he calls "patching up the Old Confession," and in favor rather of making a new one; though it is due to him to say that he claims to be exceptionally orthodox in preaching the doctrines of the Old. Of the other three witnesses, one is a layman and a lawyer, and uses popular rather than technical language; but Dr. De Witt may rest assured that there is no substantial difference between Mr. Day, Dr. Duffield, and myself; for we all hold the Calvinistic as opposed to the Arminian system of doctrine, and are loyal to the Confession of Faith according to our ordination vows.

But suppose the diversity of our views were as great as it is represented, is it greater than what existed in the Westminster Assembly? None knows better than Dr. De Witt how long and earnest were the debates in that Assembly; how many of their doctrinal statements were compromises of conflicting opinions (notably the one about "elect infants"); and by how small a majority some of the articles were adopted. And yet the result was a Confession which some of the opponents of Revision regard as so perfect that after two centuries and a half of study it is incapable of improvement; and so they join hands with those who desire, by keeping it unchanged, to break down the restraints of subscription, and practically to make the grand old creed simply a historic monument of the past. But inasmuch as the Word and Spirit of God are given to us even as to the Westminster divines, is it not reasonable

to hope that the Revision of our Creed will lead to as good results in the nineteenth century as it did in the seventeenth?

How fatal is the force and fallacy of words. We may not adopt the maxim that language is intended to conceal thought; but certainly it often fails to convey the writer's meaning, even in the hands of such a trained master of sentences as Dr. De Witt. After much reflection and consultation of dictionaries, I came to the conclusion that by "private opinions" my courteous opponent meant opinions held by very few and not generally accepted, especially as he used the parallel expression "passing individual opinions," and protested against *imposing* such private opinions upon the conscience of the whole Church. It is true I had glimpses of another meaning, but was unwilling to attribute it to him, because it would utterly destroy the force and relevancy of his argument. But in this I was completely mistaken. By "private opinion" Dr. De Witt now tells us he means "a pious opinion," however widely held, as distinguished from a *dogma de fide* (dogma of the faith) recognized and defined by the authority of the Church, and incorporated into its creed, after the manner of the Roman Catholic Church in "defining" the immaculate conception of Mary and the infallibility of the Pope. We think the illustration an unfortunate one, but let that pass. Now we understand each other. Dr. De Witt has a right to amend his pleading, and I accept the amendment. If he had done this at first, it would have saved a great deal of printer's ink. I admit fully that all the amendments to the Confession which have been proposed are "pious opinions," not yet "defined" and incorporated into our Creed by the authority of the Presbyterian Church. If they were there already, who would desire to put them there? But with this understanding, what becomes of Dr. De

Witt's argument against the proposed amendments upon the ground that they are "private opinions"? It is a bald *begging of the question* under discussion, and amounts to an individual assertion that these amendments *ought not to be adopted*, because they *are not already in the Confession*—only this and nothing more. And the same remark applies to the passage which my learned friend adopts and eulogizes from Dr. Warfield, provided of course he uses the terms "personal opinions," "individual preferences," and "idiosyncrasies," in the sense defined by Dr. De Witt of "pious opinions" not yet authorized by Church authority. But if he uses these terms in the common and popular meaning, we deny that any friend of revision desires to put his private opinions or idiosyncrasies into the Confession. As to the proposition that our liberal terms of subscription render any revision unnecessary, it is altogether aside from the question before us. No friend of revision complains that the Church is too strictly bound to her creed; we have all the liberty in that respect which we desire. But our contention is that the creed *does not with sufficient clearness express the faith of the Church in certain specified particulars*.

And this brings us to the most important part of Dr. De Witt's article—to the crucial point in this whole discussion. In response to my friend's challenge, I ventured to formulate a statement to be inserted in the chapter on the Decrees, in these words:

"God's eternal decree hindereth no one from accepting Christ as He is freely offered to us in the Gospel; nor ought it to be so construed as to contradict the declarations of Scripture that Christ is the propitiation for the sins of the whole world, and that God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."

Dr. De Witt rejects and condemns this amendment on two grounds:

1. Because it is expressed chiefly in Scripture language. He affirms that "being clothed in Scripture language, it violates the fundamental, constitutive, and historic idea of a creed statement." I know not by what authority this canon was enacted, nor where it is recorded; but I do know that it has been more honored in the breach than in the observance. The Apostles' Creed is a beautiful mosaic of Scripture phrases, without note or comment; and our own Confession contains many creed statements which Dr. De Witt, to be consistent, ought to condemn. I refer him to chap. ii., sec. 1; chap. vii., sec. 3; chap. xvi., sec. 2; chap. xxiii., sec. 1; chap. xxxiii., sec. 1. These and many other passages are clothed in Scripture language as thoroughly as my proposed amendment.

2. Dr. De Witt condemns and starts back in alarm from my amendment, because it contains "one of the most often quoted and debated verses in the long and unhappy controversy" between the Old and New Schools, the entire subject of which verse, he tells us, "has been taken out of the realm of our ecclesiastical disputes." He thinks to put that verse into the Confession would be "dangerous": it would become again, what he says it was before, like "the Psalter of Finnian among the Irish clans." He appeals to me, if I feel bound to propose an amendment, to formulate another, omitting this dangerous text, which he seems to regard as a dynamite bombshell. I feel the force of his appeal, and respect, though I do not sympathize with, his fears. "Peace, brother; be not over-exquisite to cast the fashion of uncertain evil." According to my recollections of that old controversy, which are probably more vivid than his own, not only this, but every other verse of Scripture relating to the doctrines of grace, were often quoted and earnestly debated. That controversy, however we may regret the bitterness and division to which it led, was

not altogether evil in its results. Our danger now does not lie in the direction of theological controversy, but in indifference to doctrinal truth, by which "the streaming fountain of God's Word sickens into a muddy pool of conformity and tradition." I have yet to learn that the Reunion has relegated any verse in Scripture to the realm of private and pious opinion. The Bible itself is our *primary* standard of faith and practice; the Confession is only *secondary*; and I do not believe that the transference of any text from the first to the second place, would imperil our peace.

But now I do not insist upon the precise wording of my amendment, as was clearly stated when it was first proposed. It is the *thing*, and not the *form*, that I contend for. It is a sad fact, and a grief to many hearts besides my own, that our Confession does not contain one declaration of the infinite love of God to men, nor one declaration of what every Presbyterian, Old School or New, devoutly believes, that Christ's sacrifice for sin is sufficient for all, adapted to all, and offered to all. We also believe that this fullness of the Gospel and its free offer, is perfectly consistent with all that our Confession and Catechisms teach about election and redemption, the assertions of Arminians to the contrary notwithstanding. If it is only the *language* of my amendment that offends and alarms my brother, let him find more acceptable words, expressing the same ideas, and I will adopt them. But if he objects to making this universally received "pious opinion" a dogma of the faith, then indeed we do differ so widely that no creed statement or subscription can bridge over the chasm.

HENRY J. VAN DYKE.

VII.

THE PRESBYTERY OF NEW BRUNSWICK AND THE WESTMINSTER CONFESSION.

At the June intermediate meeting of the Presbytery of New Brunswick, held on June 25th at Dutch Neck, the overture of the General Assembly anent the revision of the Confession of Faith was answered in the negative, *nemine contradicente*, as follows:

“The Presbytery of New Brunswick, having carefully considered the overture in relation to the revision of the Confession of Faith, proposed by the General Assembly, respectfully replies as follows:

“This Presbytery does not desire any revision of the Confession of Faith.”

The reasons to be assigned for this answer, as proposed in a paper presented by Prof. B. B. Warfield, were then taken up; but, on account of lack of time for full consideration, were laid over until the October meeting of the Presbytery. These reasons have been printed by order of the Presbytery, that all who are interested may have opportunity to consider them before the Fall meeting. They are as follows:

1. Our free but safe formula of acceptance of the Confession of Faith, by which we “receive and adopt it” as “containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures” (Form of Government, XV., xii.), relieves us of all necessity for seeking, each one to conform the Confession in all its propositions to his individual preferences, and enables us to treat the Confession as a public document,

designed, not to bring each of our idiosyncrasies to expression, but to express the general and common faith of the whole body—which it adequately and admirably does.

2. Enjoying this free yet hearty relation to the Confession, we consider that our situation toward our Standards is incapable of improvement. However much or little the Confession were altered, we could not, as a body, accept the altered Confession in a closer sense than for system of doctrine; and the alterations could not better it as a public Confession, however much it might be made a closer expression of the faith of some individuals among us. In any case, it could not be made, in all its propositions and forms of statement, the exact expression of the personal faith of each one of our thousands of office-bearers.

3. In these circumstances we are unwilling to mar the integrity of so venerable and admirable a document, in the mere license of change, without prospect of substantially bettering our relation to it or its fitness to serve as an adequate statement of the system of doctrine which we all heartily believe. The historical character and the hereditary value of the creed should, in such a case, be preserved.

4. We have no hope of bettering the Confession, either in the doctrines it states or in the manner in which they are stated. When we consider the guardedness, moderation, fullness, lucidity, and catholicity of its statement of the Augustinian system of truth, and of the several doctrines which enter into it, we are convinced that the Westminster Confession is the best, safest and most acceptable statement of the truths and the system which we most surely believe that has ever been formulated; and we despair of making any substantial improvements upon its forms of sound words. On this account we not only do not desire changes on our own account, but should look with doubt and apprehension upon any efforts to improve upon it by the Church.

5. The moderate, catholic, and irenical character of the Westminster Confession has always made it a unifying document. Framed as an irenicon, it bound at once the Scotch and English Churches together; it was adopted and continues to be used by many Congregational and Baptist Churches as the confession of their faith; with its accompanying Catechisms it has lately been made the basis of union between the two great Presbyterian bodies which united to constitute our Church; and we are convinced that if Presbyterian union is to go further, it must be on the basis of the Westminster Standards, pure and simple. In the interests of Church union, therefore, as in the interests of a broad and irenical, moderate and catholic Calvinism, we deprecate any changes in our historical standards, to the system of doctrine contained in which we unabatedly adhere, and with the forms of statement of which we find ourselves in hearty accord.

VIII.

DR. VAN DYKE ON THE ACTION OF THE NEW BRUNSWICK PRESBYTERY.

THE action of the Presbytery of New Brunswick, in answer to the overture of the General Assembly on revision, viz.: "This Presbytery does not desire any revision of the Confession of Faith," together with a paper presented by Dr. Warfield, giving reasons for that answer, laid over for future action, has been widely circulated among the ministers of our Church. However complete this document may be, as a summary of what can be said against the revision of our Confession, it does not fairly represent the views of those who are on the other side of the question. The following statements are therefore submitted to the candid judgment of all interested in the subject:

I. The object of the proposed revision is not to change the system of doctrine taught in our Confession, nor to repudiate, modify, or dilute any one doctrine of that system, nor to "conform the Confession in all its propositions to individual preferences," nor to "bring each of our idiosyncrasies to expression." We repudiate all such interpretations of our purpose. Our simple object is—by the correction of certain ambiguities, omissions, and mistaken interpretations of Scripture—to bring our Confession into more perfect harmony with other Reformed Confessions, and to make it more complete as the expression "of the general and common faith of the whole body" of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America.

II. The proposition that such a revision is *impracticable*

can be maintained only on one of two grounds: (1) That the work of the Westminster Assembly is perfect in itself, and in its adaptation to all time; or (2) that after two centuries and a half of Bible study, and two centuries of theological training, the Presbyterian Church is less able now to give adequate expression to her faith than she was in the days of the Westminster Assembly. Both these hypotheses are absurd.

III. The proposition that revision is *unnecessary*, in view of "our free but safe formula of acceptance of the Confession of Faith," is disproved by three patent facts: (1) Fifteen presbyteries have petitioned the Assembly for such a revision, and it is well known that these presbyteries embrace but a small part of those who favor the movement. (2) Some of the arguments opposed to revision are among the strongest proofs of its necessity. We call the attention of our brethren to the article on this subject by Dr. Briggs, in the last number of the *Presbyterian Review*, and especially to the following sentences: "I agree with Dr. Warfield that the true relief for a church that finds itself too strictly bound to a creed, is simply to amend the strictness of the formula of subscription. *I am in favor of such a movement in preference to revision, or a new creed, or a declaratory act.*" Dr. Briggs clearly discerns the alternative presented to us, and because we desire to relieve the consciences of those fifteen presbyteries and their sympathizers, without such "a comprehension" as he advocates, we are heartily in favor of the proposed revision. (3) It should be borne in mind that our Confession is not merely the standard and test of ministerial orthodoxy; it is a public document, the proclamation to the world of what the Presbyterian Church *now* believes. If it contains, or even *appears* to contain, anything which the whole body repudiates, or if it fails to embrace anything which

Presbyterians, and Christians generally, accept as an essential element of the Gospel which we preach, it ought in these respects to be amended, without regard to the terms of clerical subscription. The Church is more than the ministry.

IV. No one is competent to predict, much less to dictate, the precise form and extent of the revision, if it shall be accomplished. The amendments which have been proposed, or may yet be proposed, by individuals, or by presbyteries, are simply suggestions. If among them there shall be found any "individual preferences," or "idiosyncrasies," the fact that they *are* private opinions will necessarily prevent their adoption. But among the suggestions already made there are three which fully demonstrate the necessity and practicability of revision.

(1). It is the common faith of the whole Presbyterian Church, as now constituted, and of the Reformers, as expressed in creeds more venerable than the Westminster Confession, that God foreordains men to eternal death *simply and solely for their sins*. Dr. A. A. Hodge says, in his "Consensus of the Reformed Confessions": "It is no part of the Reformed faith that God created men in order to damn them, nor that His treatment of the lost is to be referred to His sovereign will. He condemns men only as judge, for *their sins*, to the praise of His glorious justice" (*Presbyterian Review*, vol. v., p. 295). In order to make the confession of our faith more explicit on this point, and to take away all pretext for the charge that we hold the contrary doctrine, it is proposed to amend the third section of the third chapter, by inserting the words *for their sins*. Will any opponent of revision maintain that the addition of these words would mar the integrity of our Confession, or graft an "idiosyncrasy" upon this public document?

(2). The whole body of the Presbyterian Church believe that all infants dying in infancy are elect, and therefore regenerated and saved. Dr. Charles Hodge says this "is the general belief of Protestants, contrary to the doctrine of the Romanists and Romanizers" ("Theology," vol. i., p. 27). It is proposed to put the expression of this common faith into our Confession. Does any one say that it is there by *implication* already? Then we ought to relieve troubled consciences and silence gainsayers by stating it *explicitly*. Does any one say the salvation of all dying infants is only a pious hope, suggested, but not clearly taught, in Scripture? The advocates of revision do not believe this; but if it is the common faith of the Presbyterian Church, then we insist that our Confession ought to stand clearly neutral on the subject, and no longer sanction the popular impression that we hold the abhorrent doctrine of the damnation of infants by the ambiguous phrase "*elect* infants dying in infancy."

(3). It is the common faith of the Presbyterian body, and of the whole visible Church of Christ, that the salvation of the Gospel is sufficient for all men, adapted to all, and freely offered to all, and that the eternal decree of God hinders no one from accepting it. The Scriptures are full of proof-texts to sustain this proposition. It underlies and pervades all our preaching of the Gospel, and is the constraining motive in all the aggressive work of the Church. And yet there is not, in all our Confession, one declaration which clearly comprehends or alludes to the teaching of Scripture on this point. The advocates of revision desire to amend the Confession in this particular. As to the assertion that it is not possible to frame a new statement on this subject which will *correlate* with the Confession as it is, or which will not mar the historic integrity of the venerable document; this is just what the enemies of our Calvinistic

system have always said, and what Calvinists have always denied. If the writer of this paper believed what has been said on this point by the opponents of revision, he would renounce the Confession as his standard, for the fullness and freeness of the Gospel is more precious to him than any historic monument. But he does not believe it. He has always read into the Confession, as perfectly consistent with the system of doctrine which it contains, the Scripture declarations that Christ is "the propitiation for the sins of the whole world," and that "God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." To relieve troubled consciences, to satisfy candid opposers of our system of doctrine, to promote the ultimate unification of the visible Church, which can never be accomplished upon any other basis, it is proposed to put into our Confession what we all believe concerning the fullness and freeness of the Gospel, in its sufficiency, adaptation, and offers to all men. It would be easy to suggest the form and place of the amendment, but it is enough for the present to insist upon its necessity and practicability.

HENRY J. VAN DYKE.

IX.

PROF. WARFIELD'S REPLY TO DR. VAN DYKE.

I HAVE read with great interest the criticisms upon the paper which was presented by me to the Presbytery of New Brunswick, with which Dr. Van Dyke has honored me in the *Herald and Presbyter* of July 31st. If I correctly understand the drift of Dr. Van Dyke's remarks, he argues that revision of the Confession is necessary; and he is willing to rest this alleged necessity on three criticisms of the Confession, which he states. It does not seem proper for me to pass these suggestions by without remark, and the less so, that the three points which Dr. Van Dyke has singled out are those which have been most frequently dwelt upon by those who advocate revision. We may hope, then, that if these do not prove adequate reasons for undertaking the task, it may be admitted that there is little serious call for it in the churches.

Probably, however, before entering into a discussion of these test criticisms, I ought to say a word in general about the New Brunswick paper, which has furnished occasion for Dr. Van Dyke's article. Let this be as brief as possible. That paper was intended to bring together what is, in essence, a threefold argument against the necessity of revision—an argument which, and only, if founded on facts, ought to prevail. It was intended to urge the following points, viz.: (1) Revision is not necessary in order to ease the consciences of our office-bearers in accepting the Confession; (2) it is not needed in order to correct any serious

infelicities in expressing the doctrines we profess ; and (3) it will throw difficulties in the way of the realization of hopes of church union, already being entertained by the Church. In all this there is no claim to perfection and infallibility for the Confession ; there is no arraignment of the right or power of the Church to undertake it. The question is a question of expediency. The point is, Does the Confession need revision in order to ease the consciences of our office-bearers in accepting it as a test of soundness, or in order to fit it to be our testimony to the truth of God, as taught in His Word, and our text-book of doctrine ? And the propositions which are defended are, (1) that as we accept it, as office-bearers, only for "system of doctrine," and it confessedly brings the system we profess to adequate expression, it does not need revision for the first of these reasons ; and (2) that as its statements of the truths that enter into this system are exact, full, complete, moderate, catholic, inclusive, and devout, it does not need revision for the second reason. If I properly understand Dr. Van Dyke, he does not take issue with the first of these propositions. He criticises my mode of stating it, indeed, as if it implied that advocates of revision desired change in the system of doctrine. This, "for himself, and as many as will adhere to him," he repudiates. The object of those for whom he speaks "is not to change the system of doctrine taught in the Confession, nor to repudiate or modify or dilute any one doctrine of that system." Surely, then, we may say that Dr. Van Dyke agrees that no change in the system of doctrine which the Confession teaches, or in "any one doctrine of that system," is needed. And that is my first contention. His whole case, then, is directed against my second contention, and is hung in the present paper on three selected instances, which he thinks "fully demonstrate the necessity and practicability of revision."

These three points concern the statement of the doctrine of reprobation ; the clause about "elect infants"; and the alleged absence from the Confession of sufficient recognition of the universal provision and free offer of salvation in Christ. I cannot deny that Dr. Van Dyke has chosen his points well. The issue made by them is distinct ; and it is probably on these three points that the decision of the general question will turn. But if this be true, I cannot but think that as the Church (to use an old rabbinical phrase) "sinks herself down in the book" during the coming months, she will, on this issue, feel constrained to vote for no revision. Certainly, speaking for myself, I do not desire revision at these points, and feel bound to affirm that the Confession stands in no need of revision in any one of them—that the opinion that it does, rests on a misapprehension of its teaching—and that the alterations that have been proposed would certainly mar it, and leave it a less satisfactory document than it now is. I owe to myself some words in justification of my venturing to differ so materially from so ripe a scholar and so thoughtful a theologian as Dr. Van Dyke.

I.

The third chapter of the Confession, "Of God's Eternal Decrees," as it was the occasion of the overture of the Presbytery of Nassau opening the present discussion, so it has borne, thus far, the brunt of objection to the Confession. To me it appears, however, a most admirable chapter—the most admirably clear, orderly, careful, and moderate statement of the great mysteries of God's decrees to be found in the whole body of the Reformed Confessions. How, then, shall we account for the offence which has been taken with it of late? I trust I shall be excused

for saying it frankly: it seems to me to have arisen from a very strange confusion, involving both the doctrine of reprobation on the one side, and the purport of the Westminster Confession on the other.

In order to explain what I mean, let me begin by reminding the readers of the *Herald and Presbyter* that the Reformed doctrine has always distinguished (under various names) between what we may call preterition and condemnation, and has always taught that preterition is sovereign (as, indeed, it must be, if election is sovereign), while condemnation, a consequent only of preterition, is "for their sins." The sentence which Dr. Van Dyke quotes from Dr. A. A. Hodge is perfectly, accurately expressed. "It is no part of the Reformed faith that God's . . . *treatment* of the lost is to be referred to His sovereign will. He *condemns* men only 'for their sins, to the praise of His glorious justice.'" But it *is* a part of the Reformed faith that preterition is sovereign, as Dr. Whittaker, in the age before the Westminster Assembly, clearly tells us: "Of predestination and reprobation it is our part to speak advisedly. But that the only will of God is the cause of reprobation, *being taken as it is contrary to predestination*, not only St. Paul and St. Augustine, but the best and learnedest schoolmen, have largely and invincibly proved." I do not know where this necessary distinction between the sovereignty of preterition and the grounding of the consequent condemnation on sin, is better put, in late writing, than in the late Dr. Boyce's (of the Louisville Baptist Seminary) "Abstract of Systematic Theology," which I mention here chiefly to call attention to the fact that Dr. Boyce's treatment is precisely that, even in its peculiarities, of the great Westminster divine, Dr. Thomas Goodwin. I prefer, however, to quote here another Westminster divine—Dr. John Arrowsmith—whose statement will serve to illuminate for us, not only

the subject itself, but the treatment of it in the Westminster Confession, and thus supply us with a starting-point for its study.

In his "Chain of Principles," Arrowsmith explains: "Preterition, or negative reprobation, is an eternal decree of God, purposing within Himself to deny unto the non-elect that peculiar love of His wherewith election is accompanied, as, also, that special grace which infallibly bringeth to glory. . . . This description carries with it a clear reason why the thing described goeth under the name of negative reprobation, because it standeth mainly on the denial of those free favors which it pleaseth God to bestow on His elect." When speaking later of the "consequents of the forementioned denials," he comes to "3. Condemnation for sin," and says: "This last is that which, by divines, is usually styled *positive reprobation*, and is clearly distinguishable from the *negative* in that the one is an act of punitive justice respecting sin committed and continued in. But the other is an absolute decree of God's most free and sovereign will, without respect to any disposition in the creature. I call them consequents, not effects, because, though negative reprobation be *antecedent* to them all, it is not the proper *cause* of them. This difference between the decrees *Aquinas* long since took notice of. 'Election,' saith he, 'is a proper cause, both of that glory which the elect look for hereafter, and of that grace which they here enjoy. Whereas reprobation is not the cause of the present sins of the *non-elect*, though it be of God's forsaking them; but their sin proceeds from the parties themselves so passed by and forsaken.'" The matter is capable of very copious illustration from the Westminster divines, but the demands of space forbid entering into it further here. Enough has been already quoted to point out that the Westminster divines had in mind, as, indeed, they

could not fail to have, the very obvious and necessary distinction between God's sovereign decree of preterition—"negative reprobation," as Arrowsmith calls it—which must be as free and sovereign as election itself, of which it is, indeed, but the negative statement, and His dealing with those thus passed by, which depends on their deserts. The fact that men are sinners does not affect the sovereignty of preterition; it only affects the treatment they are left to by preterition. If, for instance, out of the holy angels God chose sovereignly a certain number for some high service, involving special gifts of grace to them to fit them for it, the "leaving" of the rest would be just as truly "preterition" as in the case of fallen man; but the consequent treatment being but the "consequent," and not the "effect," of preterition, would be infinitely different, seeing that it is the effect of the deserts, whatever they may be, in which they are found to be left. Consequently *sin* is not the cause of preterition; *election* is the cause of preterition; *i. e.*, the choosing of some is the cause that "the rest" are left. Sin is the cause, however, of how the preterited ones are treated. And to guard this the Westminster men were accustomed to use a phrase they borrowed from Wollevius, which affirmed that sin is not the *causa reprobationis*, but the *causa reprobabilitatis*; that is, sin is not the cause of *reprobation* (otherwise the elect, who also are sinners, would be reprobates), but it is the cause of men being in a *reprobabile state*. These are not theological subtleties; they are broad, outstanding facts of God's dealing with men; and it is failure to note them that is causing much (not always wholly intelligent) criticism of the Confession in these last days.

So let us come back to Chapter III. of the Confession now, and note its structure. It opens with what is the finest and most guarded and most beautiful statement of the

doctrine of God's decrees in general, that has ever been compressed into so small a space (Sections 1 and 2). Then, proceeding to the special decree, dealing with His creatures' destiny, it *first* asserts the fact that this sovereign, particular and unchangeable decree extends also over this sphere of the destiny of the creature (Sections 3 and 4); and *then* proceeds to outline God's consequent dealing with the diverse classes (Sections 5-7); closing with a caution against careless handling of such great mysteries (Section 8). Were this the proper occasion for it, it would be a pleasure to expound this marvellously concise, full, and careful statement of an essential doctrine, in detail. Now, however, we are concerned only to ask what would be the effect of adopting the amendment to it proposed by Dr. Van Dyke, who desires that the words "*for their sins*" should be inserted into Section 3. "Will any opponent of revision," he asks, "maintain that the addition of these words would mar the integrity of our Confession?" I answer unhesitatingly, yes; the insertion of these words into Section 3 would be an intolerable confusion of the logical order and exactitude of statement of this now beautifully ordered and carefully phrased chapter. It would prematurely introduce the statement of the *ground* of God's actual dealings with *one* class into the statement of the *fact* that *two* classes are discriminated; it would confound the treatment of *pre-terition* (which is sovereign) with that of *condemnation* (which is based on sin); it would throw the whole chapter into such confusion as to render (as Dr. Monfort in the same number of the *Herald and Presbyter* sees) Section 7 superfluous, while affording us but a sorry substitute for that richer section; in the effort to prevent careless readers from misapprehending a plain and admirably ordered document, it would compel all careful readers to be offended by a bad arrangement and an insufficient theological discrimi-

nation. Speaking for myself, then, I do not hesitate to say that the present form of Chapter III. suits me precisely, and that the proposed change would be unacceptable and confusing, and appears to me to rest only on an unwillingness to take the trouble to follow the Confession in the logical ordering of its matter.

II.

If the current misapprehensions of Chapter III. are remarkable, I think we may characterize the interpretation of Chap. X., Sec. 3, which finds a body of non-elect infants dying in infancy, implied in its statement, as one of the most astonishing pieces of misinterpretation in literary history. It is so perfectly gratuitous as almost to reach the level of the sublime. And when Dr. Van Dyke adduces "the ambiguous phrase, '*elect* infants dying in infancy,'" as sanctioning "the popular impression that we hold the abhorrent doctrine of the damnation of infants," and as, therefore, one of the three cases in which the necessity for revision is obvious, he renders it easy for us to reply that the Confession is certainly in no need of revision to guard it from a wholly unreasonable interpretation.

The assertion that the clause in question necessarily implies, as its opposite, a body of non-elect infants dying in infancy, has been so often and so dogmatically reiterated of late years, however, that I shall need to ask the readers of the *Herald and Presbyter* to go with me to the text of the Confession before I can hope that they will credit my counter assertion that such an implication is a total misunderstanding of it. Let us observe, then, that we are now dealing with effectual calling, not with election. All questions of election have been settled seven chapters back; and this logically arranged Confession—the careful strictness of the logical arrangement of which has been made a reproach

to it—is not a document to rebroach that question at this late and inappropriate point. Let us observe, next, that in the apprehension of the framers of the Confession, effectual calling is the first step in the application of redemption to God's elect. To them, and them only, is given this grace. But how? "*By His Word and Spirit*"—and then a rich statement is made as to how this call works in and on them, so as that, though effectually drawn to Jesus, they come most freely and willingly. God's elect, then, are saved through the external call of the Word and the internal call of the Spirit conjoined. But what if God's elect die before they are capable of receiving this external call of the Word? Are they then lost? No, says Section 3; God's elect that die in infancy are regenerated and saved through the internal work of the Spirit, without the intermediation of the Word, and so are all others of the elect who are incapable of receiving such an outward call. Now, observe: There is no such distinction in the minds of the framers of the Confession at this point as "elect infants dying in infancy," and "non-elect infants dying in infancy." The distinction in their minds is that between "elect infants that reach the adult state," who are saved by the "Word and Spirit," and "elect infants dying in infancy," who are saved by the Spirit apart from the Word. This is the antithesis that was in their minds when they wrote this phrase; and they expected the reader to understand, as he read the words, "elect infants dying in infancy," that these were the opposites of those who, having reached adulthood, were saved by the intermediation of the Word. In short, "elect infants dying in infancy" is equivalent to "such elect infants as die in infancy," and *not at all* to "such infants dying in infancy as are elect." This is absolutely necessary to the progress of the thought. And this being so, the phrase does not start the question as to whether

there are non-elect infants dying in infancy at all. To raise that question here is perfectly gratuitous; and as it was not in the minds of the writers as they wrote this phrase, no proof that the majority of the Westminster divines believed that there were or might be non-elect infants dying in infancy, has any bearing on the interpretation of this passage. We deal with the Confession that they framed, and with what they teach in it—not with what outside of it they are known to have believed. And what they teach here is that all of God's elect that reach adult age are called by the "Word and Spirit," but such elect infants as die in infancy, and all others of the elect who are incapable of the outward call, are saved, apart from the outward call, by the Spirit's regeneration. How many there are—whether all or some of such beings—is a question wholly out of mind. The antithesis is that unless these infants die in infancy, or these others are really incapable of receiving the outward call, they cannot be saved without a knowledge of the Gospel—and *that* the fourth section goes on to assert. To raise any other antithesis here is to raise a false antithesis, which was not in the minds of the writers; and to make any inferences from this false antithesis is to read something of our own into the text. If we choose to raise such questions of our own, let us answer them; the Confession has not raised them, and does not answer them by statement or implication.

This interpretation of the bare text is powerfully supported by the history of the framing of this phrase in the Assembly. The chapter on effectual calling in the first form lacked Section 3, and therefore it was ordered ("Minutes," p. 134) "that something be expressed in fit place *concerning infants' regeneration in their infancy.*" Observe, this is the point in the minds of the Assembly—the *regeneration of infants in their infancy.* What they

wished to do was to show that Sections 1 and 2 did not exclude those who die in infancy from salvation, by the assertion that the effectual call came through the Word. It was the possibility and actuality of regeneration in infancy that they wished to assert, and this, and this only, they do assert,—without having in mind anything at all as to how many of infants dying in infancy are so regenerated, or implying anything at all about this matter, which they would have adjudged a wholly inappropriate subject to broach at this place. We read in the “Minutes” of debates about this section, but absolutely nothing of the debate turning on anything else than the memorandum quoted above suggests. The phrase that occurs once, “Proceed in debate about elect of infants” (p. 162), furnishes no ground whatever for an opposite inference. In the absolute uncertainty of what is meant by the phrase, “elect of infants,” it only tells us that Section 3 was carefully considered before it was finally accepted. All we know is, that it cannot mean anything inconsistent with both the memorandum which opened the debate and the formulated section which closed it. Dr. Van Dyke has somewhere in his papers in the *Evangelist* said (if my memory serves me), that he is aware that this Section 3 was arrived at by a compromise. If he will be so good as to point out the evidence for this, he would confer a favor on scholars. I have searched the “Minutes” in vain for any signs of such a compromise. To show that Westminster divines differed as to whether all or only some of those who die in infancy are saved, is nothing to the purpose. There is no evidence that they had this matter in mind when this section was being debated. We know that they were intending to assert that death in infancy did not snatch the soul from the Saviour; we know this is what they did assert. We have no right to infer any compromise in the matter or any debates here held on any other subject.

What has been said surely vindicates the Confession from the charge that revision is necessary at this point in order to prevent its teaching that there are non-elect infants dying in infancy. Are the amendments offered in themselves acceptable? A thousand times no, I should say. First, to insert a statement that all those that die in infancy are elect *here*, would be out of place and order. This is not the place to treat of who are elect and who are not, but of *how God saves the elect*. Secondly, to insert such a statement anywhere would be an unnecessary burdening of the Confession with an explicit statement of what most Presbyterians believe, indeed, but not all feel justified in asserting to be revealed truth. For myself, I believe with all my heart that all dying in infancy are saved, and I believe that I can prove it from Scripture. But I think it far better to leave the Confession asserting, as it does assert, that God saves all the elect, whether reaching adult age or dying in infancy, rather than to force into it a dogmatic definition of a doctrine which many among us still believe rests on a pious hope rather than on clear Scripture. To do this, as Dr. De Witt has already unanswerably shown, is to move in the direction of narrowing our confessional basis, without necessity and without gain. The Confession already provides firm ground for all who believe that all those that die in infancy are elect, and it does this without dogmatism and without sacrificing its moderation and calm guardedness of statement. Why sacrifice this? *Cui bono?*

III.

I have left myself but little space to speak of the third test case adduced to prove the necessity of revision, and regard to the long-suffering of the *Herald and Presbyter* and to the patience of its readers leads me to curtail what I should

like to say, contenting myself, for the rest, to referring those who may be sufficiently interested to a recent number of the *Presbyterian Banner*, in which I have treated the general matter which lies at the base of the present question—the Confession's treatment of the love of God to man. Here the following few remarks, additional to what I have there said, must suffice. Dr. Van Dyke complains that "there is not, in all our Confession, one declaration which clearly comprehends or alludes to the teaching of the Scripture" on the sufficient provision and free proclamation of salvation for all men, and their accountability for rejecting it. I do not understand Dr. Van Dyke to complain that all this is nowhere gathered up in a single statement, nor can he intend to complain that the Confession does teach (as it certainly does) the doctrine of "the limited" (or better, "the definite") atonement. I understand him to mean that the Confession taken at large nowhere recognizes adequately the freedom of the great Gospel offer, and man's consequent responsibility for rejecting it. But certainly this is somewhat rationally charged. It can hardly be said that the Confession nowhere teaches that "the eternal decree of God hinders no one from accepting the Gospel," when everywhere the Confession teaches that God is not the author of sin (would it not be a sin to refuse the Gospel?), and that by the decree no "violence is offered to the will of the creature" (III. 1), nor is his liberty taken away (III. 1), and when it teaches that God freely proclaims the Gospel to all, as we shall immediately see. For to affirm that the Confession does not teach that the offer to all men is free, and that their acceptance of it would be saving, is to forget some of its most emphatic passages. The Confession indicates the duty of translating the Bible "into the vulgar language of every nation," on the ground that thereby, "the word of God dwelling in all plentifully, they may worship him in

an acceptable manner, and, through patience and comfort of the Scriptures, may have hope" (I. 8). Here is clearly asserted the duty of the free proclamation, and the value of the truth as proclaimed to all—that all may through it be brought to "hope." Again (VII. 6) it is declared that the ordinances of the New Covenant differ from those of the Old, in that the Gospel is held forth in them "in more fullness, evidence and spiritual efficacy to all nations"—certainly a broad enough basis for any preaching. But the Confession goes further than this, declaring with the greatest explicitness (VII. 3) that the Lord has "*freely offered unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ, requiring of them faith in him that they may be saved.*" It may be asserted, without fear of successful contradiction, that this Section 3 of the seventh chapter actually contains all that Dr. Van Dyke asks, *i. e.*, a full recognition of the universal, sufficient provision and the free offer of salvation to all, *alongside of* the statement of its special designation for the elect, and I do not see what need there is for a repetition of it elsewhere. Nay, it may even be maintained that we already have in the third chapter itself all the recognition of this freedom of proclamation which is appropriate in that place, it being not only declared in the opening of it that God's decree does not supersede man's liberty or responsibility, but also commanded at the end that the doctrine of predestination be not so preached as to deter man from seeking salvation, but only so as to encourage the seekers with the assurance that though it be they who are working out their own salvation with fear and trembling, yet it is God who is working in them both the willing and the doing according to His own good pleasure. The Confession requires that predestination be so preached "that men attending the will of God revealed in his word [there is the free offer], and yielding obedience thereunto [there is the recognition

of personal responsibility], may, from the certainty of their effectual vocation [there is the recognition of God's hand in what is experienced only as their own work], be assured of their eternal election [there is the encouragement to further effort]." No wonder the splendid sentence follows: "So shall this doctrine afford matter of praise, reverence, and admiration of God, and of humility, *diligence*, and *abundant consolation* to all that sincerely obey the Gospel." The order here is, (1) hear the Gospel, (2) obey it, (3) be encouraged and comforted, because God's hand is certainly in it; and that is (1) free proclamation of the word; (2) responsibility in accepting it; (3) praise to and confidence in God for His blessed work in us. I cannot, then, think the Confession in need of the third improvement which Dr. Van Dyke proposes. It has it already spread over its pages and, especially in VI. 3, explicitly stated.

In closing, then, I reiterate that I cannot but feel that the Confession, if it is to be judged by these three well-chosen examples, must be adjudged to be in no need of revision. And I cannot help noting that all of them seem to grow out of misapprehension of what the Confession does teach and how it teaches it. Why not so revise it as to make such misapprehension impossible, then? I can only reply that no document can be framed which is incapable of being misapprehended by the careless reader, and I am bound to say that, in my judgment, the Confession cannot be misapprehended in these points when carefully read. Most of the presently urged objections have arisen primarily in the minds of enemies of Calvinism, whose misapprehension (or misrepresentation) was a foregone conclusion, and have, by dint of much proclamation, been conveyed from them to us—for the best of us are not proof against outside influences. We have tested assertions of this kind, not as we should, by grounded and consecutive study of the whole

document, but by momentary aversion to the passages specially attacked, with our minds full of the attack. And so we have seen the sense in them which we were sent to look for. The remedy is not to revise the Confession in the hope of rendering misapprehension of it impossible, but to revise our study of the Confession, in the hope of correctly apprehending it. What the Confession needs is not revision, but study. And the present agitation will have been a boon to the Church, however it eventuates, if it brings the Confession even more into the minds of our membership; if it applies its forms of sound words to our conceptions of doctrine, and lays its devout spirit alongside of our aspirations heavenward. For the Confession is not only the soundest, sweetest, most exact and moderate statement of doctrine ever framed. It is a revival document. It was framed by revivalists, in a revival age. And it bears a revival spirit in its bosom. He who feeds on it will find, not only his thought quickened and his intellectual apprehension clarified, but his heart warmed and his spirit turned toward God.

BENJAMIN B. WARFIELD.

X.

DR. VAN DYKE'S REPLY TO PROF. WARFIELD.

I.

DR. WARFIELD'S answer to my article in the *Herald and Presbyter* for July 31st, contains much excellent theologizing, and is marked by the author's eminent ability. It must be confessed, however, that the pleasure which comes to me with everything from his affluent pen, is somewhat spoiled, in this instance, by his bearing toward those he opposes, and especially by the way in which he accounts for their desire to have the Confession revised. In the following extracts the italics are mine. "Most of the presently urged objections [to the Confession] have arisen primarily *in the minds of enemies of Calvinism*, whose misapprehension or misrepresentation was a foregone conclusion, and have, by dint of much proclamation, been *conveyed from them to us*—for the best of us are not proof against outside influences. We have tested assertions of this kind, not as we should, by grounded and consecutive study of the whole document, but by *momentary aversion* to the passages especially attacked, *with our minds full of the attack*. And so we have seen the sense in them *which we were sent to look for*. The *remedy* is not to revise the Confession in the hope of rendering misapprehension of it impossible, but *to revise our study of the Confession in the hope of correctly apprehending it*." By the courteous "we" in this passage the author evidently means the advocates of revision. And who are the men and brethren thus repre-

sented as taking their cue from the enemies of Calvinism, and ignorantly railing at the things they understand not? They are not only the members of the fifteen presbyteries who have formally asked for the revision, and are not likely to be satisfied with being sent back to their books. To these must be added all who have avowed themselves in favor of the movement, or may yet take part in its advancement. Nor can we confine our view to the ministers and members of our own Church. The Presbyterian Church of England, after having lain at the point of death for more than a century, has felt constrained in the day of her revival, and as an essential condition of her continued life, to frame a new and simpler creed, which, in all that constitutes the real excellence of the old Confession, will not suffer by a candid comparison with it. The United Presbyterian Church of Scotland, with great unanimity, has put forth an orthodox and admirable declarative statement, practically amending the Confession in the very points under discussion among us. The Free Church of Scotland is moving in the same direction. I feel sure that when he fully considers these facts, which in the heat of debate he seems to have overlooked, Dr. Warfield will revise his conclusions in regard to the causes which underlie the movement toward Confessional revision. It is too large to be ascribed to weakness or to ignorance. And I am equally sure that when we extend our views beyond the narrow and fading horizon bounded by the memories of the civil war in this country, the proposed revision will harmonize with the desire for Presbyterian *unity*, if not with some particular effort for organic union.

In the quiet woods where Dr. Warfield's articles have overtaken me, having no books bearing upon the subject but the Bible and the Confession, I have taken the remedy he prescribes, and read the Confession with the aid of his

expositions; but if the desire for revision be an evil disease, I have grown nothing better, but rather worse. It may be assumed, perhaps without presumption, that in sincerity of purpose, loyalty to the Calvinistic system of doctrine, and ability to comprehend our Confession, my mind is up to the average of the members, ruling elders, and pastors of our Church. If, after a lifetime familiarity with its teachings, I so grievously misapprehend the meaning of the Confession as to desire amendments which would narrow its scope, mar its beauty, and throw its whole logical order into confusion, is it, after all, so "admirably clear" upon the points under consideration as it is represented?

Before coming to the renewed discussion of these points, I must correct two or three mistakes in regard to my views, into which Dr. Warfield has unconsciously fallen. The first is small in itself, but puts me in an attitude which I am not willing to sustain. Dr. Warfield quotes, as from me, the phrase "for himself and as many as *will adhere to him.*" I cannot recall, nor find by diligent search, such an expression in any article from my pen. Perhaps the quotation-marks are a mistake of the printer. My opponent is further mistaken in supposing that I assent to the proposition that "revision is not necessary in order to ease the consciences of our office-bearers in accepting the Confession." If I have not attacked this statement at length, my dissent from it has been often intimated, and is now emphatically repeated. But the most serious mistake is the broad assertion that the Confession, as it now stands, "*confessedly* brings the system we profess to *adequate* expression." If this were so, what show of reason would there be for advocating a revision? And what sort of a debate is that in which the main point in controversy is assumed, on one side, as granted? The advocates of revision, while they admit and insist as strenuously as their opponents,

that the Confession contains the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures, contend that it is *inadequate*; that is to say, not on the square with the Scriptures in some of its doctrinal statements. Speaking for myself, I am in favor of revision (1) because as an exposition of Scripture the Confession is excessive on some points and deficient on others; (2) because by its overstatements and omissions it puts the Presbyterian Church in a false light before the Christian world outside of our own bounds, and gives occasion for misunderstandings which could easily be removed; (3) because it separates our theologians from our people by obscure passages which a change in phraseology would make plain without impairing the integrity of any essential doctrine; (4) because it puts an unnecessary strain upon the consciences of some of our office-bearers who are just as sound in the faith, though not as learned, as the opponents of revision; and especially upon the consciences of those who, by their training and office, are "representatives of the people"; (5) because as a dead law upon the statute-book weakens the force of all law, the rejected statements of the Confession impair its authority as a standard of orthodoxy and its strength as a bond of union; (6) because in persuading our brightest young men to enter the ministry, and our best laymen to accept the eldership, notwithstanding their scruples about adopting the Confession, the freeness of the terms of subscription is insisted upon until our liberty is in danger of degenerating into license; and finally, (7) because some of the leading opponents of revision advocate, as its alternative, such a loosening of the terms of subscription as will make the old Confession nothing more than a historic monument.

The advocates of revision have not undertaken to do it. They have suggested amendments simply to show that the Confession can be improved, not in its system of doctrine,

but in its doctrinal statements. They have not insisted upon the precise form of these amendments. Certainly I have not attempted to revise the Confession, nor to show in detail how it should be done. With this understanding, speaking only for myself, I am willing to stake the issue upon the three positions Dr. Warfield attacks. This introduction is so long that it will be better to reserve my defense of these three positions for another article.

II.

The careful reader of Dr. Warfield's articles will observe that he begins his attack upon the proposed amendments of the Confession by adopting an amendment of his own. The third chapter, to which so much of this discussion relates, is entitled "*Of God's Eternal Decree.*" This title is the key to the interpretation hanging at the door. But Dr. Warfield quotes it thus: "*Of God's Eternal Decrees.*" This, of course, was not done with the intention of amending it. Neither is it a slip of the pen or a typographical error, for the same mistake crops out repeatedly in his whole article, and may fairly be called an unconscious adjustment of the subject to the exigencies of the argument. The argument on his side hinges upon the assumption that the decree of God, as defined in this chapter, is not singular, but plural. He insists upon the distinction between negative reprobation and positive reprobation; that is, between preterition or the purpose of God to pass by the non-elect, and His purpose to punish them for their sins; the first being "an absolute decree of God's most free and sovereign will, without respect to any disposition in the creature." He quotes and approves the foregoing sentence from Dr. Arrowsmith, and refers to the writings of other Westminster divines to show that the Assembly "had in mind" this distinction between negative and positive rep-

robation. But the truth is, the mind of the Assembly was very much divided in regard to this third chapter, and the best evidence of what was in their minds is the fact, strangely overlooked by Dr. Warfield, that, after a long and tough debate, the title of it was settled in the singular number. This decision is rigidly adhered to. It underlies the whole chapter, and must underlie its interpretation. "The most wise and holy counsel of his own will" in Section 1 is changed in Section 3 to "the decree of God," and, in Section 5, to "his eternal and immutable purpose"; but in this interchange of synonymous terms the singular form is carefully preserved. The decree of God by which Section 3 says "some men and angels are predestinated to everlasting life, and others foreordained to everlasting death," is one and the same with "the most wise and holy counsel of his own will," whereby He has "unchangeably ordained whatsoever comes to pass." This one counsel, decree, or purpose must therefore include not only the preterition of the non-elect, but their condemnation and punishment; for the predestination, both of the elect to life and of the non-elect to death, is the one expression of the one purpose or counsel of God's will whereby He has foreordained "whatsoever comes to pass." This is the theory of the third chapter. It recognizes no distinction between negative and positive reprobation. The counsel, purpose, or decree by which the elect are chosen, and the non-elect passed by, includes at the same time and upon the same ground the destiny of both classes, and "all the means thereunto." By changing the title of the chapter to "God's eternal decrees," and interpreting it upon that theory, Dr. Warfield has made himself liable to the same advice he gives to others—to go back and study his Confession.

There is a marked difference in the treatment of this subject between the Confession and the Catechisms. In

the latter the one decree or purpose is spoken of as the decrees of God, and as "the wise, free, and holy acts of the counsel of his will." And these acts of the divine will are further represented as embodied in two covenants: the one, the covenant of life, established "when God had created man," and the other the covenant of grace, entered into in full view of the fact that "all mankind by the fall had lost communion with God, and were under his wrath and curse" (Shorter Catechism, Questions 12, 19, 20; Larger Catechism, Questions 12, 30, 32). We will not discuss now the significance of these differences, except to observe that they clearly indicate a difference of opinion in the Westminster Assembly which these varied statements were intended to compromise. There were then, as now, two opposing theories in regard to the relation of God's eternal decree to the salvation or perdition of men, which, for the sake of unlearned readers, it may be well to explain in simple language.

The first maintains that God predestinates or foreordains men to life or to death, not as created and fallen, but simply as creatable and fallible, and without regard to their condition or deserts as sinners; or, in the language of Dr. Arrowsmith, which Dr. Warfield quotes with approbation, by "an absolute decree of his free and sovereign will, without respect to any disposition in the creatures." This theory is called "supralapsarian," which signifies *before*, or *above*, the fall. There is no doubt that this theory was held by many in the Westminster Assembly, especially among the Independents, who constituted the majority, and that it reached its legitimate conclusion and climax among their descendants in New England, in the old maxim, of which we heard so much in our youth, that "a man must be willing to be damned for the glory of God before he can be saved."

The second theory maintains that men are predestinated to life or to death as fallen creatures; that the elect are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father in Jesus Christ, through sanctification of the Spirit (Eph. i. 4; 1 Peter i. 2), and that the non-elect are left to the foreseen consequences of their own sin, which sin "God was pleased, according to his wise and holy counsel, to permit, having purposed to order it to his own glory" (Confession, Chap. VI., Sec. 1), and which consequences "had no less been certain, unforeseen." This theory is called "sublapsarian," which signifies *after*, or *under*, the fall. There can be no doubt that this theory is distinctly recognized and taught in the familiar language of the Shorter Catechism, which declares that God "did not leave all mankind to perish in the estate of sin and misery" into which the fall had brought them; but "having of his mere good pleasure from all eternity elected some to everlasting life, did enter into a covenant of grace to deliver them out of the estate of sin and misery, and to bring them into an estate of salvation by a Redeemer." There can be just as little doubt that this theory has always prevailed in the Presbyterian Church of this country. Dr. A. A. Hodge, in his "Outlines of Theology," admits that the "supralapsarian" is the most logical theory according to the ordinary rules of human judgment. But he proceeds to show that these rules cannot be applied to the mysteries of revelation; that the supralapsarian theory is unscriptural; that the elect are chosen and the non-elect passed by, out of the number of fallen and actually sinful men; that predestination includes reprobation in both its negative and positive aspects, and that to represent God as reprobating the non-elect by a sovereign act, without respect to the fact that they are sinners, is to impeach the righteousness of God. I do not pretend to quote him with verbal accuracy, but feel sure

that I do not misrepresent his meaning. From his "Consensus of the Reformed Creeds," I quoted in the *Herald and Presbyterian* of July 31st, the following sentence: "It is no part of the reformed faith that God *created men in order to damn them*, nor that His treatment of the lost is to be referred to His sovereign will. He condemns men only as a judge for their sins to the praise of His glorious justice" (*Presbyterian Review*, vol. v., p. 296). In repeating this passage Dr. Warfield omits the italicised clause. Perhaps the disjunctive "nor" warrants his doing so. But the omitted phrase, "that God created men in order to damn them," is the popular and just description of the "supralapsarian" theory, which it was evidently Dr. Hodge's intention to repudiate and condemn as no part of the reformed faith. The use Dr. Warfield makes of the remainder of the passage is a refined subtlety I cannot accept. He tells us that "preterition," or the passing by of the non-elect, is no part of their treatment. Now, I will not dispute with my learned opponent about the meaning of a word, but, illustrating divine things by human—which is the only way we can apprehend them—if I see two men drowning, and having the ability to save both, resolve to save one and not the other, by that resolution I have treated the other in a way that cannot be justified by my simple resolution. And though we are not able, and are not required, to "justify the ways of God to men" in this particular, we have no warrant in Scripture or in reason to refer it simply to the sovereignty of His will.

It may be true, as Dr. Warfield affirms, that "the fact that men are sinners does not affect the sovereignty of preterition"; but, then, sovereignty is not the only attribute of the divine will—which is but another name for God's whole nature in action. He is holy, just, and merciful, as well as sovereign, and these attributes belong to every act

of His will, and every purpose which determines those acts; in short, they pervade and control every part and phase of that one comprehensive decree which includes "whatsoever comes to pass." To say that preterition is "an absolute decree of God's most free and sovereign will, without respect to any disposition in the creature," is to say, in other words, that God creates men in order to damn them. It is true, and I devoutly believe, that the elect "are chosen in Christ out of God's mere free grace and love, without any foresight of faith, or any other thing in the creature, as conditions, or causes, moving him thereunto" (Chap. III., Sec. 5). But even if we admit the inference that the foreseen sins of the non-elect are not the moving cause of their being passed by, it by no means follows that preterition is "without respect to any disposition in the creature." There are necessary conditions which are not moving causes. Aside from its theological bearing, the "supralapsarian" theory is founded on an abuse of human language, and imposes impossible conditions on human thought. To say that God decrees to save some, and not to save others, without respect to the fact that they are all sinners, lost and ruined in the fall, is about as reasonable as it would be to say that the humane society had resolved to save some, and not to save others, from drowning, without respect to the fact of their being in the water. The Scripture says that "we are chosen in Christ Jesus that we might become holy and without blame." We must, therefore, have been considered as *unholy* and *blameable* when we were chosen.

Now, let us apply these principles to the revision of the third chapter of the Confession. The first and second sections are complete in themselves—"express and admirable." Though I do not see in them all the sweetness and revival influences which Dr. Warfield sees, my intellect

submits to, and my heart approves, the majesty of their truth, especially when I read them in the light of the Catechism, and with the aid of the distinction between God's permissive and active decrees (Larger Catechism, Q. 19). But the third section, regarded as an independent proposition, I utterly reject. It is "supralapsarian." It is out of harmony with the general teaching of our Standards. It is not believable to most of our ministers and people, except as we read into it what I propose to insert as a permanent amendment, so that its concluding clause will read: "And others foreordained, *for their sins*, to everlasting death." It is true that this little phrase, so big with meaning, occurs in the seventh section, and if that section is retained the phrase would be repeated. I fail to see, however, that this repetition would mar the beauty of the chapter, or create such a horrible confusion in its logical order, as Dr. Warfield apprehends. Clearness of meaning is the first quality of a logical order and of a good style. It is always better to repeat than to run the risk of being misunderstood. But I propose to make this amendment of the third section in connection with the proposal to omit the fourth and seventh sections entirely. These sections contain inferences from the doctrine of the chapter which, however logical, are not essential parts of the doctrine itself, and put a stumbling-block in the way of many who thoroughly believe that doctrine. There are a multitude of such inferences, which, if they were all put into our Confession, would make every chapter as long as a book of Calvin's "Institutes," and narrow the document in an inverse ratio to its enlargement. I further propose to supply the places of the omitted sections by some such statement as the following: "God's eternal decree hindereth no man from accepting Christ, as He is freely offered to us in the Gospel; nor ought it to be so construed as to contradict

the declarations of Scripture, that Christ is the propitiation for the sins of the whole world, and that God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." Now, let any man read this third chapter of the Confession, as thus amended, and if it appears to him that its beauty is marred, its sweetness lessened, its order confused, or the integrity of its doctrine impaired by the change, I can only say that both my taste and my orthodoxy differ from his. And so let us agree to differ in the embrace of God's love, and in the exercise of the charity it inspires. I shall be compelled to try the patience of the readers of the *Herald and Presbyter* by another article.

III.

In regard to the phrase, "elect infants dying in infancy" (Chapter X., Section 3), I have taken two positions: that it was adopted as a *compromise*, and that it is *ambiguous*. The first is quite unimportant, and would be surrendered, but for Dr. Warfield's saying that the proof of it would "confer a great favor upon scholars." With this challenge he lays down a new and strange law as to the competency of testimony in the case. He tells us that "it is nothing to the purpose to show that the Westminster divines differed as to whether all, or only some, who die in infancy are saved," because "there is no evidence that they *had this matter in mind* when this section was debated." Does he forget that a little while before, when discussing the third chapter of the Confession, he undertook to demonstrate what "the Westminster divines had in mind," by quoting not only from *their* works, but from the works of men who lived in the preceding age? But let that pass; we are not discussing the principles of logic, nor the question of personal consistency.

He says again: "There is an absolute uncertainty as to what is meant by the phrase 'elect of infants.' All we know is, that it cannot mean anything inconsistent with both the memorandum that opened the debate and the formulated section which closed it." I answer this astounding deliverance, and at the same time present the proof that the formulated conclusion was a compromise, by the following quotation from Dr. Mitchell: "This statement (elect infants dying in infancy), it has been averred, necessarily implies that there are non-elect infants dying in infancy who are not regenerated and saved. It does not seem to me, when fairly interpreted, to imply any such thing. *It might have been susceptible of such an interpretation had it been allowed to stand in the form which it appears to have borne in the draft first brought into the Assembly—elect of infants, not elect infants*" ("The Westminster Assembly," p. 397). The meaning of the phrase "elect of infants" is not uncertain, nor is the formulated conclusion of the debate identical with it. That conclusion was evidently a *compromise*. The word is not used in any offensive sense, but simply to express the idea that the phrase "elect infants" was substituted for "elect of infants," after long debate, to bring together and cover the conflicting opinions that *all* dying infants are saved, and that only *some* of them are saved. It is, therefore, *ambiguous*; it may be interpreted either way, and was so intended to be. Dr. Warfield admits this, and, indeed, it is the very ground upon which he defends the statement of the Confession as it now stands, and says "a thousand times no" to all proposed amendments. For himself, he "believes with all his heart that all dying in infancy are saved, and that he can *prove it from Scripture*"; but he would not have his own faith, and what Dr. Hodge declares to be the common faith of the Protestant world, put into the

Confession, lest it should offend some who may not have "like precious faith." It is devoutly to be wished that he would consent, in the exercise of the same comprehensive charity, to amend out of the Confession some things which the great majority of the Protestant world and of the Presbyterian Church do not believe.

Dr. Warfield's labored argument to show that the Confession, as it now stands, "does not *necessarily* imply a body of non-elect infants dying in infancy," has no pertinence to anything that has been said by the advocates of revision. Certainly no such statement has fallen from my pen. But I do say that the ambiguous phrase "elect infants" *sanctions*—that is to say, it gives color, plausibility, and force to—the popular impression that Presbyterians believe the abhorrent doctrine of the damnation of infants. This is a simple and patent fact. If it were true that all who stumble at the phrase "elect infants" are ignorant or insincere, that is no reason why we should not remove the stumbling-block, when it can be done so easily and without in anywise impairing our doctrine. While the change of *elect* into *all* would be most acceptable to me, I do not insist upon this form of the amendment, and am entirely willing to accept the suggestion of Dr. Monfort and others, and let the section read, "*All elect persons* who are incapable of being outwardly called," etc. But Dr. Warfield asks, *Cui bono?*—what's the use of *any* amendment? Answer: (1) It will put away a bone of contention and a rock of offence. (2) It will silence gainsaying and remove reproach. (3) It will bring comfort to tender consciences and sorrowful hearts. (4) It will relieve our theologians from the onerous task of repeating to successive generations the same old explanations, which, to the popular mind, do not explain, but leave the problem as dark as it was before. "Elect infants" is not a Bible

phrase. It belongs to the cloister. Let it be handed over to the ecclesiastical museum.

We come now to the third, and, in my judgment, the most important amendment suggested to show the necessity for revision. It refers to a radical defect in the Confession, considered as a whole, and in regard to its suitability to be the banner and symbol of the Church in this pre-eminently missionary age, as distinguished from the age of the Westminster Assembly. Of course, we all believe—if we use words accurately—in a definite atonement. The atonement is limited, in fact, to those who *receive* it. But Christ did more than make an atonement. He offered a sacrifice and satisfaction to divine justice which is infinite in its own nature, and as an expression of God's love for the whole world. From that love no individual of the human race, elect or non-elect, is excluded. I do not believe that God hated Esau (Rom. ix. 13), or that that Christ who is the express image of the Father, hated the reprobate inhabitants of Jerusalem over whom He wept, in any other sense than that in which we are required to "hate father and mother" in order to be His disciples. Now, I affirm, and challenge proof to the contrary, that our Confession of Faith—excellent and admirable as it is in other respects—does not contain one declaration of the infinite love of God for all men as it is revealed in the Gospel, or one declaration of the infinite fullness of the Gospel salvation as sufficient, suitable, and offered to all sinners, or one declaration which clearly comprehends, or even alludes to, the teaching of Scripture on these points. And if it contains no one declaration which covers all, or any, of these points, then it does not cover them as a whole, for the whole is no greater than the sum of its parts. Dr. Warfield's answer to this charge is a remarkable example of ability to draw conclusions which are not in the premises. Let me beg the patience of our readers for a review of his arguments in detail.

1. In the proposed amendment on the subject we are now considering, it is affirmed that "God's eternal decree hinders no one from accepting Christ as He is freely offered to all sinners in the Gospel." Dr. Warfield meets this by quoting from Chap. III., Sec. 1, the declaration that "God is not the author of sin," and asks, triumphantly: "Would it not be a sin to *refuse* the Gospel?" I reply, that if a man is hindered by a divine decree from accepting the Gospel, he *cannot* refuse it, and there would be *no sin* in his not doing what Almighty God prevented him from doing. To be *hindered* from accepting, and to *refuse* to accept, are not synonymous, or even reconcilable, terms. This vicious circle does not touch the question. The statement that "no violence is offered to the will of the creature" comes nearer the point. It *implies* that God's decree does not hinder any man's acceptance of the Gospel. This has never been denied by me; but what I contend for is, that a truth so vital ought to be in the Confession, not merely as an inference which a logician can draw out of it, but as a clear and explicit statement which he who runs may read.

2. Dr. Warfield affirms that the Confession teaches that "God freely proclaims the Gospel to *all*, as we shall presently see." And then he proceeds to cite passages in which the word "all," or any equivalent of it, does not occur, except in one, and there its antecedent and equivalent is "nations," and not every sinner of the human race. He quotes from Chapter I., Section 8, the declaration that the Scriptures "are to be translated into the language of *every nation* into which they come; that the word of God, dwelling plentifully in all, they may worship him in an acceptable manner, and, through patience and comfort of the Scriptures, may have hope." But does this prove that the Confession contains "one declaration which clearly comprehends or alludes to the teaching of Scripture on the sufficient pro-

vision and free proclamation of salvation *for all men*"? As well might we insist that the Articles of the Methodist Church (if they teach the duty of translating the Scriptures into all languages, as I believe they do) contain a clear declaration of the Calvinistic system of doctrine which, as we believe, is taught in the Holy Scriptures.

3. He quotes again from Chapter VII., Section 6, the declaration that "the ordinances of the new covenant differ from those of the old in that the Gospel is held forth in them in *more* fullness, evidence, and spiritual efficacy to all nations." On this I will make no comment.

4. The last citation which he makes, in his judgment settles the question. He says: "It may be asserted, without fear of successful contradiction, that this Section 3 of Chapter VII. contains all that Dr. Van Dyke asks, *i. e.*, a full recognition of the universal sufficient *provision* and the free *offer* of salvation to *all*." But does it? Let us quote the whole section: "Man, by his fall having made himself incapable of life by that covenant [the covenant of works], the Lord was pleased to make a second, commonly called the covenant of grace, *wherein* he freely offered unto *sinners* life and salvation by Jesus Christ, requiring of them faith in him that they may be saved, promising to give unto *all* those that are *ordained unto life* the Holy Spirit to make them willing to believe." Now, on the face of it, this section says not one word about, nor makes the least allusion to, the universal sufficient *provision* of salvation for all. It does not even affirm that the Gospel is *offered* to *all* sinners. But let us look a little further and see what this covenant is *wherein* life and salvation are freely offered to sinners. Surely the *offers* here spoken of cannot go beyond the intent and purpose of the covenant *wherein* they are made, even as the stream cannot rise higher than its fountain. The second covenant is thus de-

scribed in the Shorter Catechism, Q. 20: "God, having out of his mere good pleasure from all eternity, elected *some* to everlasting life, did enter into a covenant of grace to deliver *them* out of the estate of sin and misery, and to bring them into an estate of salvation by a Redeemer." Now, I submit to Dr. Warfield that he has not made out his case. Neither this nor any other section of the Confession which he has quoted contains the declarations in regard to which I have said the Confession is deficient.

It is hardly needful for me to say that I thoroughly believe in the *special* love of God for *some*—that is, for the elect—and gladly admit that the Confession contains the best statement of this doctrine ever formulated by uninspired men. But I believe also, and so does Dr. Warfield, in the *infinite* love of God *for all sinners*, including the non-elect, even the love that yearned over Ephraim and wept over Jerusalem, and says to all the impenitent, "How often would I have gathered you, and ye would not." As the banner of a missionary Church, and a professed statement of the whole system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures, the Confession ought to contain some clear, explicit, and luminous declaration of a truth which underlies all true preaching of the Gospel and all Christian activity for the conversion of the world. Its deficiency in this regard is real and not imaginary. It is far better to admit and seek to amend this defect than to deny or defend it by far-fetched arguments and doubtful inferences. Some such amendments as I have proposed to the third chapter, which is the proper place to insert it, would neither mar the Confession nor impair our orthodoxy. But it would take away a reproach from the name of Calvinism and bring our Standards nearer to the faith, the love, and the zeal of the Church.

HENRY J. VAN DYKE.

XI.

LETTER BY PROF. SHEDD.

THE question whether the Westminster Confession shall be revised, has been properly referred to the whole Church represented by the Presbyteries. The common sentiment of the denomination must determine the matter. The expression of opinion during the few months prior to the Presbyterian action is, therefore, of consequence. It is desirable that it should be a full expression of all varieties of views, and as a contribution toward it, we purpose to assign some reasons why the revision of the Confession is not expedient.

1. In the first place it is inexpedient, because in its existing form as drawn up by the Westminster Assembly it has met, and well met, all the needs of the Church for the past two centuries. The Presbyterian Church in the United States since 1700 has passed through a varied and sometimes difficult experience. The controversies in the beginning between the Old and New Lights, and still more the vehement disputes that resulted in the division of the Church in 1837, have tried the common symbol as severely as it is ever likely to be. But through them all both theological divisions were content with the Confession and Catechisms as they stood, and both alike claimed to be true to them. Neither party demanded a revision on any doctrinal points; and both alike found in them a satisfactory expression of their faith. What is there in the Presbyterian Church of to-day that necessitates any different statement of the doctrine of decrees, of atonement, of regeneration,

or of punishment, from that accepted by the Presbyterian Church of 1837 or 1789? Are the statements upon these points any more liable to misconception or misrepresentation by non-Calvinists now than they were fifty or a hundred years ago? Are there any more "weak consciences" requiring softening explanations and relaxing clauses in the Church of to-day than in former periods? And with reference to the allowable differences of theological opinion within the Presbyterian Church, is not a creed that was adopted and defended by Charles Hodge and Albert Barnes sufficiently broad to include all who are really Calvinistic and Presbyterian in belief? What is there, we repeat, in the condition of the Presbyterian Church of to-day that makes the old Confession of the past two hundred years inadequate as a doctrinal Standard? All the past successes and victories of Presbyterianism have been accomplished under it. Success in the past is guaranty for success in the future. Is it not better for the Church to work on the very same old base, in the very same straight line?

2. Revision is inexpedient, because the reunion of the two divisions of the Church was founded upon the Confession as it now stands. A proposition to unite the two branches of Presbyterianism by first revising the Westminster documents would have failed, because in the revision individual and party preferences would have shown themselves. But when the Standards, pure and simple, were laid down as the only terms of union, the whole mass of Presbyterians flowed together. It is to be feared that if a revision of the Confession should take place, there will be a dissatisfied portion of the Church who will prefer to remain upon the historic foundation; that the existing harmony will be disturbed; and that the proposed measures for union with other Presbyterian bodies will fall through.

3. Revision is inexpedient, because it will introduce new difficulties. The explanations will need to be explained. The revision that is called for is said by its more conservative advocates, not to be an alteration of the doctrine of the Confession, but an explanation only. Now *good* and *sufficient* explanations of a creed require more space than can be afforded in a concise symbol intended for use in inducting officers and members. Such full and careful explanations have been made all along from the beginning, and the Presbyterian Board of Publication has issued a large and valuable library of them. No one need be in any doubt respecting the meaning of the Confession who will carefully peruse one or more of them. He who is not satisfied with the Westminster doctrine as so explained, will not be satisfied with it at all. But if brief explanations are inserted into the Confession itself, their brevity will inevitably expose them to misunderstanding and misconception. Take an illustration. An able minister and divine, whose Calvinism is unimpeachable, suggests that Confession III. 3 shall read, "By the decree of God, for the manifestation of His glory, some men and angels are predestinated unto everlasting life, and others foreordained [for their sins] to everlasting death." If the clause in brackets is inserted without further explanation, the article might fairly and naturally be understood to teach that the reason why God passes by a sinner in the bestowment of regenerating grace is the sinner's sin. But St. Paul expressly says that the sinner's sin is not the cause of his non-election to regeneration. "The children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, it was said, the elder shall serve the younger. Esau have I hated" (Rom. x. 11-13). The reason for the difference between the elect and non-elect is not the holiness or the sin of either of them, but God's sovereign good pleasure. "He hath mercy on whom He will

have mercy, and whom He will He hardeneth" (Rom. ix. 18). An explanation like this, without further explanation such as the proposer would undoubtedly make, would not only contradict Scripture, but change the Calvinistic doctrine into the Arminian. The reason for non-election would no longer be secret and sovereign, but known and conditional. All this liability to misconstruction is avoided by the Confession itself as it now stands. For in Confession III. 7, after saying that the "passing by" in the bestowment of regenerating grace is an act of God's sovereign pleasure, "whereby He extendeth or withholdeth mercy as He pleaseth," it then adds that "the *ordaining to dishonor and wrath*" is "for sin." Sin is here represented as the reason for the judicial act of punishment, but not for the sovereign act of not regenerating. The only reason for the latter, our Lord gives in His "Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Thy sight."

Other illustrations might be given of the difficulty of avoiding misconception when a systematic creed is sought to be explained, particularly in its difficult points, by the brief interpolation of words and clauses. The method is too short. More space is required than can be spared. It is better, therefore, to let a carefully constructed and concisely phrased creed like the Westminster stand exactly as it was drawn up by the sixty-nine commissioners, in the five weekly sessions for nearly nine years, and have it explained, qualified, and defended in published treatises, in sermons, and especially in catechetical lectures. Had the ministry been as faithful as it should in years past in catechetical instruction, there would be little difficulty in understanding the Westminster creed. The remedy needed is in this direction, not in that of a revision.

4. Revision is inexpedient, because there is no end to the process. It is like the letting out of water. The doctrine

of the divine decrees is the particular one selected by the Presbytery whose request has brought the subject of revision before the General Assembly. But this doctrine runs entirely through the Westminster documents, so that if changes were made merely in Chapter III. of the Confession, this chapter would be wholly out of harmony with the remainder. Effectual calling, regeneration, perseverance of the saints, are all linked in with the divine decree. The most cursory perusal will show that a revision of the Confession on this one subject would amount to an entire recasting of the creed.

5. Revision is inexpedient, because it may abridge the liberty of interpretation now afforded by the Confession. As an example of the variety in explanation admitted by the creed as it now stands, take the statement that "God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, in the beginning, created or made from nothing the world, and all things therein, in the space of six days." He who holds the patristic view that the days of Genesis were periods, and he who holds the modern opinion that the days were solar, can subscribe to the Westminster statement. But if revised in the interest of either view, the subscriber is shut up to it alone. Another example is found in the statement respecting the guilt of Adam's sin. The advocate of natural union, or of representative union, or of both in combination, can find a foothold, provided only that he holds to the penal nature of the first sin. Another instance is the article concerning "elect infants." As the tenet was formulated by the Assembly, it may mean (*a*) that all infants dying in infancy are elected as a class, some being saved by covenanted mercy, and some by uncovenanted mercy; (*b*) that all infants dying in infancy are elected as a class—all alike, those within the Church and those outside of it, being saved by divine mercy, nothing being said of the covenant;

(c) that some dying infants are elect, and some non-elect. Probably each of these opinions had its representatives in the Assembly, and hence the indefinite form of the statement. The writer regards the first-mentioned view as best supported by Scripture and the analogy of faith; but there are many who advocate the second view, and perhaps there may be some who hold the third. The liberty of opinion now conceded by the Confession on a subject respecting which the Scripture data are few, would be ill exchanged for a stricter statement that would admit of but one meaning.

6. Revision is inexpedient, because the Westminster Confession, as it now reads, is a sufficiently broad and liberal creed. We do not say that it is sufficiently broad and liberal for every man and every denomination; but it is as broad and liberal for a Calvinist as any Calvinist should desire. For whoever professes Calvinism, professes a precise form of doctrine. He expects to keep within definite metes and bounds; he is not one of those religionists who start from no premises, and come to no conclusions, and hold no tenets. The Presbyterian Church is a Calvinistic Church. It will be the beginning of its decline, as it already has been of some Calvinistic denominations, when it begins to swerve from this dogmatic position. It must therefore be distinguished among the Churches for doctrinal consistency, comprehensiveness, and firmness. But inside of the metes and bounds established by divine revelation, and to which it has voluntarily confined itself, it has a liberty that is as large as the kingdom of God. It cannot get outside of that kingdom, and should not desire to. But within it, it is as free to career as a ship in the ocean, as an eagle in the air. Yet the ship cannot sail beyond the ocean, nor the eagle fly beyond the sky. Liberty within the immeasurable bounds and limits of God's truth, is the

only true liberty. All else is license. The Westminster Confession, exactly as it now reads, has been the creed of as free and enlarged intellects as ever lived on earth. The substance of it was the strong and fertile root of the two freest movements in modern history—that of the Protestant Reformation and that of Republican Government. No Presbyterian should complain that the creed of his Church is narrow and stifling.

And here we notice an objection urged against the Confession relative to the tenet of limited redemption. It is said that it is not sufficiently broad and liberal in announcing the boundless compassion of God toward all men indiscriminately, and in inviting all men without exception to cast themselves upon it. But read and ponder the following statements:

“Repentance unto life is an evangelical grace, the doctrine whereof is to be preached in season and out of season by every minister of the Gospel, as well as that of faith in Christ. It is every man’s duty to endeavor to repent of his particular sins particularly. Every man is bound to make private confession of his sins to God, praying for the pardon thereof, upon which, and the forsaking of them, he shall find mercy. Prayer with thanksgiving being one special part of religious worship, is by God required of all men. Prayer is to be made for all sorts of men living, or that shall live hereafter, but not for the dead. God is to be worshipped everywhere in spirit and in truth, and in secret each one by himself. God in His Word, by a positive moral Commandment, binds all men in all ages. The grace of God is manifested in the second covenant, in that He freely provideth and offereth to sinners a Mediator, and life and salvation in Him. The ministry of the Gospel testifies that whosoever believes in Christ shall be saved, and excludes none that will come unto Him. God is able to search the heart, hear the requests, pardon the sins, and fulfil the desires of all.”

These declarations, scattered broadcast through the Westminster Confession and Catechisms, teach the universality of the Gospel, except no human creature from the offer of it, and exclude no human creature from its benefits. Their

consistency with the doctrine of election is assumed, but not explained, in the Confession of Faith. And no revision of this, by the mere interpolation of a few words or clauses, will make the subject any clearer or stop all objections.

7. Revision is inexpedient, because the Westminster Standards already make full provision for those exceptional cases, on account of which revision is claimed by its advocates to be needed. It is said that there are some true believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, who cannot adopt all the Westminster statements, who yet should not be, and actually are not, excluded from the Presbyterian Church; that there are tender consciences of good men whose scruples are to be respected. But these cases are referred by the Form of Government to the church Session, and power is given to it to receive into membership any person who trusts in the blood of Christ for the remission of sin, although his doctrinal knowledge and belief may be unsatisfactory on some points. He may stumble at predestination, but if with the publican he cries, "God be merciful to me a sinner," he has the root of the matter in him and is a regenerate child of God. But why should the whole Presbyterian Church revise its entire creed so as to make it fit these exceptional cases? Why should the mountain go to Mohammed? Why should a genuine but deficient evangelical knowledge and experience be set up as the type of doctrine for the whole denomination? These "babes in Christ" need the education of the full and complete system of truth, and should gradually be led up to it, instead of bringing the system down to their level. There is sometimes a misconception at this point. We have seen it stated that the membership of the Presbyterian Church is not required or expected to hold the same doctrine with the officers; that the pastor, elders, and deacons must accept the Confession of

Faith "as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures," but that the congregation need not. But this error arises from confounding the toleration of a deficiency with the endorsement of it. Because a church Session tolerates in a particular person who gives evidence of faith in Christ an error respecting foreordination, or even some abstruse point in the Trinity or the incarnation, it does not thereby endorse the error. It does not sanction his opinion on these subjects, but only endures it, in view of his religious experience on the vital points of faith and repentance, and with the hope that his subsequent growth in knowledge will bring him to the final rejection of it. The Presbyterian Church tolerates theatre-going in some of its members—that is to say, it does not discipline them for it. But it does not formally approve of and sanction theatre-going. A proposition to revise the Confession by inserting a clause to this effect, in order to meet the wishes and practice of theatre-going church members, would be voted down by the Presbyteries.

The position that the officers of a church may have one creed, and the membership another, is untenable. No church could live and thrive upon it. A Trinitarian clergy preaching to an Arian or Socinian membership, would preach to unwilling hearers. And although the difference is not so great and so vital, yet a Calvinistic clergy preaching to an Arminian membership, or an Arminian clergy to a Calvinistic membership, would on some points find unsympathetic auditors. Pastor and people, officers and members, must be homogeneous in doctrine, in order to a vigorous church-life. If, therefore, a certain class of members is received into a church, who do not on all points agree with the Church creed, this is not to be understood as giving the members generally a liberty to depart from the Church creed, or to be a reason for revising it.

The case is different with the officers of the church. There is *no exceptional class* in this instance. Neither the Session nor the Presbytery have any authority to dispense with the acceptance of any part of the Confession of Faith, when a pastor, elder, or deacon is inducted into office. There is no toleration of defective views provided for, when those who are to teach and rule the Church are put into the ministry. And this for the good reason that ministers and elders are expected to be so well indoctrinated, that they are "apt to teach" and competent to "rule well." Some propose "loose subscription" as a remedy, when candidates of lax or unsettled views present themselves for licensure and ordination. This is demoralizing, and kills all simplicity and godly sincerity. Better a thousand times for a denomination to alter its creed, than to allow its ministry to "palter with words in a double meaning"; than to permit an Arian subscription to the Nicene Symbol, an Arminian subscription to the Westminster Confession, a Calvinistic subscription to the Articles of Wesley, a Restorationist subscription to the doctrine of endless punishment.

For these reasons, it seems to us that the proposed revision of the Westminster Confession is not wise or expedient. The revision of a denominational creed is a rare occurrence in ecclesiastical history. Commonly a denomination remains from first to last upon the base that was laid for it in the beginning by its fathers and founders. And when revision does occur, it is seldom in the direction of fullness and precision. Usually the alteration is in favor of vague and looser statements. Even slight changes are apt to be followed by greater ones. The disposition to revise and alter, needs watching. In an age when the general drift of the unregenerate world is away from the strong statements of the Hebrew prophets, of Christ and His in-

spired Apostles, it is of the utmost importance that the regenerate Church, in all its denominations, should stand firm in the old paths, and hold fast to that "Word of God which is sharper than a two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit."

W. G. T. SHEDD.

XII.

DR. VAN DYKE ON PROF. SHEDD'S LETTER.

WHATEVER Dr. Shedd writes, is like himself : clear and without guile as the cloudless sky. His recent article in the *Evangelist* will be regarded by many as the ablest argument hitherto presented on the negative side of the question. Keeping constantly in view his admirable example of candor and courtesy, I propose to review his seven reasons against the expediency of revising the Confession of Faith.

1. "In its existing form the Confession has well met all the needs of the Church for the past two centuries. . . . All the past victories and successes of Presbyterianism have been accomplished under it. Success in the past, is the guarantee for success in the future." To which we answer: (1) not every sequence is a consequence; (2) the exclusive connection between the Confession of Faith, especially those portions of the Confession which it is proposed to amend, and the past success of the Presbyterian Church, is not very apparent. It is quite possible that the greater part of this success may be due to other causes. The Methodist Church has grown faster than we have. So of late years has the Episcopal Church. Are these results attributable to their rejection of our Confession? (3). Success in the past is *not* the guarantee for success in the future, except so far as the future shall *imitate* the past in adapting itself to changed conditions. The Presbyterian Church of Scotland had wonderful success for a century

under her old Confession. She swept Popery out of the land, and set up the Reformed faith. Yet she did not hesitate to lay aside the old, and adopt the Westminster Confession. The Presbyterian Church in this country succeeded well for a hundred years, before she adopted the Westminster Standards, and did not hesitate to revise them, in order to make that adoption possible. The question now before us, is whether another revision has not become necessary, in order to adapt the Confession to the present condition and wants of the Church. To settle this question upon the principle of *letting well enough alone*, is not true conservatism, but a blind worshipping of the past, with which our fathers seem to have had no sympathy.

2. "The Reunion of the two divisions of the Church was founded on the Confession as it now stands. . . . It is to be feared that if a revision should take place, there will be a dissatisfied portion of the Church who would prefer to remain upon the historic foundation." (1). There is reason to fear that if revision does *not* take place, there will be a still larger dissatisfied portion of the Church, and thus while we avoid Scylla, we may run into Charybdis, by keeping the helm down too hard. (2). The revision now proposed is no more radical, and will no more change the foundations, than the revisions already accomplished since the Reunion. The Book of Discipline and the Form of Government are just as *historic* as the Confession is. (3). There is no indication that the revision now proposed will open the old controversies between the Old and New Schools, which were happily closed by the Reunion. That Reunion was based not on "the *Confession* as it *now stands*," but upon the *Standards* as they *then were*, and included no pledge that these Standards should never be altered. The Standards themselves provide for their own amendment; and they *have been* largely amended *since* the Reunion.

3 and 4. Dr. Shedd's third and fourth reasons against revision, are but two phases of the same argument. In the first he says it "will introduce new difficulties: the explanations will need to be explained." In the second he says "Revision is inexpedient, because there is no end to the process; it is like the letting out of water." (1). Very well, we admit that *there is no end to the process*. And so long as the Bible is our supreme standard, to which all human Confessions are subordinate, and so long as men differ in the interpretation of Scripture, there *can* be no end to the process. It is in that very process that the life of the Church largely consists, under the perpetual guidance of God's providence and Spirit. If it were otherwise, there would be no need of Confessions at all, nor even of theological seminaries and teachers of divinity. (2). But if Dr. Shedd means that there is at this time any special risk in revising our creed beyond what existed, for example, in the days of the Westminster Assembly; if he means that the Presbyterian Church of to-day cannot be trusted to revise her own creed, lest she should break more than she mends, I must beg leave to differ with him entirely. That illustration of the letting out of water, is a good one; but to my mind, it bears a warning exactly opposite from what it suggests to Dr. Shedd. It is better to let the water run in legitimate channels. If we keep the flood-gates screwed down just where the Westminster Assembly left them, the flood-tides of thought, of zeal, and of missionary spirit—in regard to which the Church in our day will suffer nothing by comparison with the Church of two hundred and fifty years ago—may make a way for themselves more sweeping and destructive than any revision under our constitutional restrictions can possibly be. (3). There never has been, and I do not believe there ever will be, a better time for such a revision than the present. The gates of the Ecclesi-

astical Janus are shut. The spirit of peace and the longing for unity are not hindrances, but helps. It would be easy to show that the providential preparation and the divine guidance which have been so largely claimed for the Westminster Assembly, belong as fully and as manifestly to us as to them.

5. "Revision is inexpedient, because it *may* abridge the liberty of interpretation now afforded by the Confession." In this quotation I have italicised the word *may*, for that is the point of the whole objection. Dr. Shedd does not affirm that it *will* abridge the liberty of interpretation, but he gives a timely warning when he says that it *may*. Very well; let us heed the warning, and see to it that if the revision takes place, it does not restrict the right of private judgment which is now freely exercised by us all. I cannot see any danger of such a result in any of the amendments hitherto proposed. (1). In regard to the *six days of creation*, some may have objected to the Confession, under the misapprehension that it interprets the days to mean periods of twenty-four hours; but when it is understood that the Confession (the Catechisms also) simply transfers without expounding the language of Scripture, no advocate of revision will be in favor of amending it at this point. (2). As to "elect infants," while for one I would prefer to change the phrase to "*all* infants," and cannot see that it would narrow the Confession to put into it what the whole Presbyterian Church believes, yet the advocates of revision would be satisfied to omit all reference to infants as a special class, and let the section read, "All elect persons who are incapable of being outwardly called by the ministry of the Word, are saved by Christ through the Spirit, who worketh when, where, and how He pleaseth" (Chap. X., Sec. 3). What restriction of liberty would be involved in this amendment? The advantages gained by getting rid of the strife-produce-

ing ambiguity, "elect infants dying in infancy," are obvious, and need not be repeated.

6. "The Confession as it now reads is a sufficiently broad and liberal creed; . . . it is as broad and liberal for a Calvinist as any Calvinist should desire."

Without any discussion of what is meant by *broad* and *liberal* in this connection, I beg leave to say that I am a Calvinist, thoroughly agreeing with Dr. Shedd in all that he says about the importance of a definite creed within the limits of God's truth, and claiming as he does to be as free within those limits as "a ship on the ocean, or an eagle in the air." But for these very reasons I am in favor of revising the Confession, and amending some of its statements. So far as it applies to me, Dr. Shedd is mistaken when he says "an objection is urged against the Confession relative to the tenet of *limited redemption*." Here again I will not dispute about words. But I believe that *redemption* used as a comprehensive term for the ultimate results of Christ's mediation in behalf of men, is *limited in fact* to those who, to use Paul's expression, *receive the atonement*. But I believe also that God's love to men, which prompted the gift of His Son to the world, is unlimited, except by the bounds of the human race, that Christ offered a sacrifice and satisfaction to divine justice for the sins of the whole world; and that the salvation revealed to us in the Gospel is sufficient for all, adapted to all, and offered to all, so that "no man is lost for the want of an atonement, or because there is any other barrier in the way of his salvation than his own most free and wicked will" (Dr. A. A. Hodge, "Outlines of Theology," p. 420). These statements are abundantly warranted by Scripture. And in regard to them we affirm that our Confession of Faith is sadly deficient as a summary of Scripture doctrine. Dr. Shedd has sincerely and ably endeavored to prove the contrary. But

even he has failed; and what can the man do that cometh after the King? Not one of the fragments he has skilfully woven together out of the Confession, nor all of them combined, can be accepted as a declaration of God's infinite love for all men, and of the infinite sufficiency and universal offer of the Gospel. They were not intended, as their connection shows, to teach any such doctrine, and they do not teach it. But even if they could be logically construed into such a conclusion, a truth so clearly taught in Scripture, and so vital in its connection with the missionary zeal and preaching of the Church, ought not to be left for theologians to *deduce* out of the Confession; it ought to be emblazoned on her Standards so clearly that he who runs may read it.

7. Under his seventh reason, Dr. Shedd inadvertently puts the advocates of revision in a position they are not willing to occupy. He says, "Revision is inexpedient, because the Westminster Standards already make full provision for *those exceptional cases on account of which* revision is claimed by its advocates to be needed." No one has asked for revision on account of any exceptional cases. The pleading for exceptional cases is all on the other side—in behalf of some who *may* hold the supralapsarian theory of God's eternal decree, or the possible damnation of some "infants dying in infancy." Thank God these *are* exceptional cases! When we advocate such an amendment of the third chapter of the Confession as will purge it from all suspicion of teaching that God creates men on purpose to damn them, and such an amendment of the tenth chapter as will take away all pretext for the charge that we believe some dying infants are not elect, and such an addition to the whole Confession as will make it clearly declare God's infinite love and willingness for the salvation of all men—we are seeking not to provide for exceptional cases,

but to bring our Standards into more perfect harmony with the Scriptures, and with the faith of the Presbyterian Church. We are trying to be patient under the charge of seeking to make the Confession more narrow and exclusive; but we feel its injustice, nevertheless.

With much that Dr. Shedd says about the danger of our liberty in subscription to the Standards running into license, I am in hearty agreement. Because this danger is clearly perceived, and because some of our opponents advocate a greater liberty of subscription as the practical and necessary alternative of revision, therefore we are the more earnest in advocating the amendment of the Confession. We see the dangers on both sides. But on the one side they are obvious and easily avoided, because they are foreseen and provided for by the constitutional process, through which any revision must be accomplished. Every proposed amendment must be definitely formulated, openly discussed, and submitted to the vote of the whole Church as represented in the Presbyteries. On the other side, the dangers to which Dr. Shedd refers, are an indefinite force, working in secret, undermining the foundations, and revealing themselves after the mischief has been wrought. How far these dangers are real and operative at the present time, it is not competent for me to judge. But it is proper to add, that I do not believe there is any wide-spread defection in our Church from the system of doctrine taught in our Confession. The Presbyterian Church, as represented in our Assembly, was never more sound in the faith, nor more loyal in adhering to her Standards, than she is to-day. I do not know of a minister or elder whom there is reason to suspect of dishonesty in professing sincerely to receive and adopt the Confession. At the same time, and in perfect consistency with this loyalty, there is a wide-spread demand for the amendment of some of the doctrinal state-

ments of our creed. This demand is spontaneous, and cannot be suppressed. Our missionary zeal, our love for, and sympathy with, the holy catholic Church, of which God's Spirit is the everlasting endowment, and all that is best in the spirit of our times, lies back of it, and urges it forward. The revision will come, sooner or later, as sure as the sunrise. Now, it seems to me, is the time to make it with safety. It is better to lift the constitutional flood-gates and let the water run, than to dam it up, and run the risk of a future inundation.

HENRY J. VAN DYKE.

XIII.

FURTHER REMARKS BY PROF. SHEDD.

MY article upon revision, to my surprise, has elicited several elaborate and able replies from well-known and influential Presbyterians, that call for some answer. I do not propose to notice in detail all the arguments of my respected friends, Van Dyke, Nelson, and Day, who have honored my views with their objections. I should have to write a volume in order to this. My belief is, that a sufficient reply to all of their fault-finding with the Confession as it now stands, may be found in any good Calvinistic treatise in theology. To every one of their objections respecting the Westminster statement of the doctrine of decrees, I would undertake to furnish a conclusive answer from the "Systematic Theology" of my honored predecessor, Dr. H. B. Smith (see pp. 114-140). Here is one difficulty in the case. The discussion of the abstruse subject of decrees has to be carried on in an article of a half column, or column, of a newspaper. An objection can be stated in a few lines, but the reply cannot be so given. A misconception can be presented in a paragraph, but the correction of it requires a column or a broadside. Leaving, then, the great bulk of the objections urged by my friends against the Westminster Standards to be answered by their systematic expounders and defenders, I wish to fortify my general position by two additional remarks.

1. In the first place, my contention is, that the Confes-

sion does not need revision, because there are *no such errors* in it as are alleged by my critics. I do not assert that the Confession is either inspired or infallible, or that the Church has no right to revise it. But I do assert that there is no such error in the statement of the doctrine of decrees as is affirmed by the advocates of revision.

With much that Dr. Van Dyke says, I heartily agree. If all the advocates of revision were as sound theologians as he is, there would be less hazard in the attempt to revise. But I utterly disagree with him when he asserts that the Confession needs (*a*) "such an amendment as will purge it from all suspicion of teaching that God creates men on purpose to damn them," and (*b*) "such an addition as will make it clearly declare God's infinite love and willingness for the salvation of all men."

Respecting the first assertion, I deny that there is any phrase or clause in the Confession which, when fairly interpreted by its context and other parts of the Standards, justifies this suspicion. I cannot, of course, in this short article, cite and examine all the passages in proof. I can only say, without fear of contradiction, that I am supported in this denial by all the expounders and defenders of the Westminster Standards. I do not know of one who asserts that the phraseology concerning decrees even suggests, much less warrants, the sentiment that "God creates men on purpose to damn them." Will Dr. Van Dyke say that his revered theological instructor, Dr. Charles Hodge, would have conceded for an instant that there is any ground for this charge in the Westminster statement concerning reprobation? And does he not believe that Charles Hodge correctly understood the phraseology of the Confession?

Respecting the second assertion, that there is no "clear declaration" in the Westminster Standards "of God's infinite love and willingness that all men should be saved," I

have already quoted a series of passages from them which Dr. Van Dyke says "were not intended, as their connection shows, to teach any such doctrine, and do not teach it," but which have been universally regarded, both by systematic theologians and practical preachers, as plain and explicit proof of the doctrine of the infinite sufficiency of Christ's atonement, the infinite compassion of God, and the universal offer of the Gospel. If they do not prove this, what *do* they prove? They certainly do not teach that God feels compassion for only the elect.

It seems to me that these two assertions of Dr. Van Dyke contain implications that would carry him a great deal further than he would be willing to go. It seems to me that in representing the Confession to be positively defective and erroneous on two such very important points as these, not to speak of others which he mentions, he is giving aid and comfort to the enemy. He is virtually telling the opponents of Calvinism that they are correct in their aspersions on the Westminster symbol; in their assertion that it is a hard and repellant system. He is saying to the world, that for two centuries the Presbyterian ministry, in teaching the creed which they have subscribed, have been teaching, by implication at least, that God creates men on purpose to damn them, and have not clearly taught that God feels infinite compassion for the souls of men, and sincerely desires their salvation, and that now it is time to stop such teaching. The Presbyterian creed, he contends, has been wrong on these two points, and now it should be set right. Will the Presbyteries take this view of the subject? Will they put this brand of reproach on their predecessors?

I have the same difficulty with the similar allegation of error in the Confession made by my friend Mr. Day. I suppose that I do him no injustice in classing him with the

Liberals, and of this class he says: "The issue in their minds is this, viz.: the Confession of Faith in some of its statements is *wrong*. There is *error* in it, and the error is *vital*." He then charges upon the Confession an error which, with all due respect, it does not contain. He states what he understands the doctrine of the Confession to be, in the following words: "According to this doctrine, if God's decrees to everlasting death were unconditioned and without reference to sin, but for His own glory, then if man had not fallen, still the non-elect would have existed, and would have gone to their final doom of everlasting death, and that without sin. If this be the doctrine of the Confession, I feel bound to say that I do not believe it, but abhor it." He then adds: "It seems to me that sections 2, 3, 4, and 7, of Chapter III. of the Confession lead to this enormity and absurdity."

Now I acknowledge that if this is a correct statement of what the Westminster Confession teaches concerning God's decree of reprobation, I should be as strongly in favor of its revision as any one. I have been a professor in Union Seminary twenty-six years, and once in every five years the Board of Directors, who themselves subscribe to the Confession, and of whom no one is more respected and influential than Mr. Day, have summoned me before them, and in accordance with the constitution, have required me to affirm, "in the presence of God and of the Directors of the Seminary," that I "solemnly and sincerely receive and adopt the Westminster Confession of Faith as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures." But had I supposed at any time during all these years, that I was required to subscribe to such a creed as Mr. Day represents the Westminster to be upon the subject of decrees, I should have refused subscription and tendered my resignation. But the Confession, instead of teaching that God's

decrees of election and reprobation were made “without reference to sin,” and that “if man had not fallen, still the non-elect would have existed and would have gone down to their final doom of everlasting death, and that without sin,” distinctly postulates and supposes *the existence of sin*, as the moral state and condition out of which some men are elected, and in which some men are left and reprobated. “They who are elected, *being fallen* in Adam, are redeemed by Christ. The rest of mankind, God was pleased, according to the unsearchable counsel of His own will, whereby He extendeth or withholdeth mercy *as He pleaseth*, for the glory of His sovereign power over His creatures, to pass by, and ordain them to dishonor and wrath for their *sin*, to the praise of His glorious justice” (Confession III. 6, 7). How is it possible, in the face of these statements, to say that the Confession teaches that “if man *had not fallen*, still the non-elect would have existed, and would have gone down to everlasting death, and that without sin”? The Westminster Confession, like the Dort Canons, is infralapsarian. In the order of nature, it places the decrees of election and reprobation after the apostasy of Adam and his posterity. It presupposes that all men are guilty and lost sinners by this event, having no claim upon the mercy of God. Then God decides to overcome the sin of the major part of them, by “the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost,” and the minor portion, He decides to leave to their own free will and self-determination in sin. He leaves these sinners severely alone, to do just as they please; to “eat of the fruit of their own ways, and be filled with their own devices.” The former decision is election; the latter is reprobation. The Confession takes the ground that God is not under obligation to save any sinner whatever, and that He consequently has the right of a sovereign ruler to de-

termine how many criminals He will pardon, and how many sinners He will save. If this is not the way in which the Confession teaches the doctrines of election and reprobation, I will submit to correction.

2. In the second place, my contention is that there has been *no such change in the doctrinal views* of the great majority of Presbyterians, as is asserted by some of the advocates of revision, and assigned as the reason for it. Dr. Van Dyke is not one of this class. He says that "the Presbyterian Church, as represented in our Assembly, was never more sound in the faith, nor more loyal in adhering to her Standards, than she is to-day." This is also my belief. But I draw a different conclusion from this state of things from his. As there has been no alteration in doctrinal views, I see no need of altering the creed. If there really is the very same state of religious opinion in the Church of to-day, that existed in 1870, 1837, and 1789, there will be the same satisfaction with the Confession now as then. No revision was demanded at those epochs, and none will be demanded now.

But a very common and a very passionate argument that I have seen in some newspapers, both secular and religious, is that the Presbyterian Church is *dissatisfied* with the Confession; that its congregations will not endure the preaching of its distinguishing tenets, and that its ministers have ceased to preach them—in brief, that the progress of civilization and physical science has antiquated the doctrines of the fathers, and that all creeds must be revised, and all churches adjusted to the spirit of the age. This is not the sentiment or the argument of my honored friend, but if revision is entered upon, he will not find everybody so moderate as himself. He thinks that the true way when the flood rises, is to "let the water run in legitimate channels." It seems to me that the better way is to strengthen

the dam, and keep it strong. To cut a hole in the dam, or to let the water cut it, does the mischief.

A writer in *The Interior*, who is quoted in the *Evangelist*, strangely says that my "argument presupposes that the Church is, or may possibly now be, (*sic*) *dissatisfied* with some of the statements of the Confession." My argument presupposes the exact contrary. I oppose revision on the ground that the present generation of Presbyterians has the very same religious experience that their fathers had, and finds a satisfactory expression of it in the very same Confession and Catechisms. If I supposed that the great majority of the Presbyterian Church is dissatisfied with their Standards, believing that they teach or countenance errors of doctrine, I would advise revision; not because I think that there are errors, and that the revision would be an improvement, but because I would have a church honest and frank in saying what it believes.

And here the whole matter hinges. If there has been a change in doctrinal sentiment in the majority of the Presbyterian Church, the Confession will be changed, and ought to be. But if there has not been, it will not be changed, and ought not to be. The majority must rule. As Mr. Day says, "We are trying to find out, by asking for revision, which class is the mountain, and which is Mohammed." For this reason, the coming vote of the Presbyteries will prove to be one of the gravest and most far-reaching in its consequences, of any that have ever been passed in the history of the Church. It will determine how far, or how little, the Church has drifted from the old anchorage.

W. G. T. SHEDD.

XIV.

DR. VAN DYKE IN REPLY TO PROF. SHEDD.

FROM the beginning of this discussion there has been, on the part of some who resist revision, an ill-concealed disparagement of their opponents. It grieves me to see my venerated friend, Dr. Shedd, falling into their way of speaking. It is true, indeed, that no man has a better right than he to speak *ex cathedra*, and sweeping judgments come with a better grace from him than from some smaller men. But for this very reason they are the more to be regretted. The following sentence occurs in the introduction to his "Further Remarks upon Revision," published in the *Evangelist* of Oct. 10th: "My belief is that a sufficient reply to all their fault-finding with the Confession as it now stands, may be found in any good Calvinistic treatise in theology." As I read this sentence, my heart said, That is not like Dr. Shedd; it is the position, rather than the man, that speaks it. Is it like the broad-minded scholar and courteous gentleman, to characterize all that has been written by the advocates of revision as "*fault-finding* with the Confession," and to intimate that the writers are either ignorant of any good Calvinistic treatise, or unable to comprehend its contents? There is a fair collection of such treatises in my library. The last addition to it is Dr. Shedd's "Dogmatic Theology," which I have read and pondered from beginning to end. But so far from curing, it has increased my desire for the revision of the Confession. What has failed to cure me of

this "fault-finding," is not likely to prove a panacea for the other advocates of revision. Are such men as Dr. Schaff and Dr. McCosh and Dr. Herrick Johnson unacquainted with the contents of Calvinistic treatises, or incapable of understanding their bearing upon the Confession of Faith? Are the Presbyterian Church of England, and the United Presbyterian Church of Scotland, and the great majority of the Free Church of Scotland, a set of ignorant fault-finders, for whose unrest the best prescription is a saturated solution of some good treatise on Calvinistic theology? The advocates of revision might retort upon their judges, by saying that the best remedy for this iron-clad conservatism of human and uninspired words, would be to lay aside all treatises on theology, all sectarian names and traditional prejudices, and to come back with unbiassed minds to the study of God's Word. But dogmatism and assumptions of superiority on either side, are out of place in such a discussion as this.

Let us all dismount from the high horse, and meet each other on equal footing. This is said not so much with reference to Dr. Shedd as to some smaller men, who are likely to be confirmed in their assumptions of exclusive orthodoxy by his unguarded words, the full force of which I am persuaded he did not consider.

The "two additional remarks" with which Dr. Shedd "fortifies his general position," really cover the whole ground of the discussion.

I. He affirms that "there are *no such errors*" in the Confession as the advocates of revision allege. We affirm that there *are* such errors; and so we stand face to face. The issue thus joined is to be tried before the whole Presbyterian Church, and whatever may be the formal decision on the Assembly's overture, in the wholesome discussion it has awakened, *the revision is being made in the hearts and*

minds of intelligent readers. Such readers will not forget that the errors we desire to correct are not in the system of doctrine, nor in any doctrine of the system, but simply in *statements* which can easily be amended without in anywise affecting the integrity of the Confession. My venerated friend quotes me correctly as desiring "such an amendment of the Confession as will purge it from all suspicion of teaching that God creates men on purpose to damn them, and such an addition as will make it clearly declare God's infinite love and willingness for the salvation of all men." We do not differ in this discussion upon any question of theology. It is delightful to observe how entirely we agree as to what the Confession *ought* to teach. We differ only on the question of fact as to what the Confession *does* teach. He *denies*, and I *affirm*, that there is need of amendment upon the two points above recited. If I stood alone in this position, it would be all right to brush me aside, and set me to studying some good Calvinistic treatise. But inasmuch as such ministers as Dr. McCosh, Dr. Schaff, Dr. Nelson, and Dr. Johnson, and such elders as Henry Day, and a multitude like him whom I could name—and the whole Presbyterian Church of England, and the great majority of the Presbyterian Churches of Scotland, stand in the same position on this question of fact—would it not be charitable and wise for such a man as Dr. Shedd to say, "Very well, brethren; I think the Confession *ought* to teach what you demand, and I believe that it *does* so teach; but inasmuch as you cannot see with my eyes, I am willing that these human and fallible words should be so amended as to make their meaning plainer"? How does Dr. Shedd prove that there is no need to purge the Confession from the suspicion of teaching the supralapsarian dogma that God creates men on purpose to damn them? I submit to his own candid judgment that his argument concedes all that I have asserted.

He says: "I deny that there is any phrase or clause which, *when fairly interpreted by its context and other parts of the Standards*, justifies this suspicion"—that is to say, he *reads into* the third section of the third chapter the explanations of its bald statement which are found in other parts of the Standards. The advocates of revision propose to *put into it*, as a permanent addition and explanation, just what Dr. Shedd and other theologians read into it; so that the unlearned reader may not misunderstand it, and the opponents of our system of doctrine may not quote it to our disadvantage. As it now stands, not merely as a phrase or clause, but as a complete section, it teaches that God foreordains men to eternal death simply for His own glory, without regard to their character or deserts. This I do not believe. If I understand him, Dr. Shedd does not believe it. It is horrible! If in saying this I give "aid and comfort to the enemy," let it be so. Truth is better than party victory. No man who believes in Christ is my enemy, even though he be an Arminian. He is my friend, and I desire to make my doctrine as plain and as agreeable to him as truth will allow. I agree with all Arminians, and with all Christians, that God foreordains men to eternal death *for their sins*; that it would not be for His glory, but for His dishonor, to do otherwise; and I want to put that little phrase, *for their sins*, into the section referred to, so that there may be no occasion to defend it or even to explain it by other parts of our Standards.

In reply to the question whether my "revered theological instructor, Dr. Charles Hodge, would have conceded for an instant that there is any ground for this charge in the Westminster statement concerning reprobation," I answer in Dr. Hodge's own words: "The symbols of the Westminster Assembly, while they clearly *imply* the infralapsarian view, were yet *so framed as to avoid offence to those*

who adopted the supralapsarian theory" ("Theology," vol. ii., p. 319). The essence of the supralapsarian theory, which Dr. Hodge utterly rejected and condemned, is fairly expressed in the popular phrase that God creates men on purpose to damn them. The third section of the third chapter of the Confession was so framed as not to offend those who held the supralapsarian theory. It is one of the sops that were thrown to that Cerberus. Whether Dr. Hodge, if he were now living, would be in favor of amending that section, so as to bring it more into conformity with the rest of the Standards and with his own teaching, it is not competent for me to say. But if he were here, and opposed to the revision, with all my love and reverence I should be opposed to him, just as I am opposed to Dr. Shedd. This question is not to be settled by the authority of great names. The fact that the Confession has been accepted and defended by so many great and good men, is no proof that it cannot be, nor that it ought not to be, amended. That argument, if it should prevail, would dam up the stream of Scripture interpretation and cause it to "sicken into a muddy pool of conformity and tradition."

In regard to the other amendment, viz. : "Such an addition to the Confession as will make it clearly declare God's infinite love and willingness for the salvation of all men," Dr. Shedd and I again stand face to face, not on a question of theology, but of fact. I deny that the Confession contains any such declaration; he affirms that it does. But I cannot see it, even with the aid of his elaborate demonstrations. If I were alone in this, I would willingly conclude that the failure to see it is due to my own blindness. But there are multitudes in the same position. Would it not be a charitable and wise concession on the part of Dr. Shedd and those who agree with him to consent to the in-

sersion into the Confession of one, clear, comprehensive, and explicit statement of what he says is already there in broken lights and scattered fragments?

II. In the second remark by which Dr. Shedd fortifies his general position, he affirms that "there has been *no such change in the doctrinal views* of the great majority of Presbyterians, as is asserted by some of the advocates of revision, and assigned as a reason for it." He adds: "Dr. Van Dyke does not belong to this class." This was evidently designed to do justice to my position, for which I thank him. But whether the exception thus made in my favor can be accepted, will depend upon the meaning of *doctrinal views*. Dr. Shedd doubtless means that there has been no such change in the faith of the Church in all or any of the *doctrines* which constitute the system taught in our Confession, as to require or warrant a change in any *doctrine* essential to that system. In this I entirely agree. And I am glad that Dr. Shedd agrees with me in the belief that our Church as a whole was never more loyal to the essential doctrines of our Confession than she is to-day. I do not know of any one who advocates revision upon the ground that its *doctrines* ought to be changed, though there are some who oppose revision, because they desire to be released entirely from subscription to those doctrines. But "doctrinal views" is a very broad, not to say ambiguous, term. It includes methods of interpreting the Confession, theories outside of Confessional limits, and opinions concerning the adequacy and correctness of certain doctrinal *statements* in the Confession itself. In these respects there has been a very great change in the doctrinal views of the great majority of Presbyterians,—such a change as now warrants, and will ultimately compel, a revision of the Confession.

(1). The supralapsarian theory, whose advocates the West-

minster Confession was so framed as not to offend, the same theory which went to seed in the Emmonsism and Hopkinsianism of New England—the theory whose essence is that God creates men in order to damn them for His glory, and whose legitimate conclusion is that we must be *willing to be damned* before we can be saved—has passed away from the Presbyterian Church, where it never had much entertainment, and, thank God, it is no longer even a ghost to frighten children. As this theory is dead, whatever was put into our Confession to conciliate its advocates, ought to be carried out and buried with it.

(2). There has been a change amounting to a revolution in the views of Calvinists, and especially of Presbyterians, in regard to the salvation of dying infants. I will not repeat the history of opinion on this subject, so admirably set forth by Dr. Prentiss in the *Presbyterian Review*, and by Dr. Briggs in his recent book called “Whither”; nor restate the argument of Dr. Hodge and others for the salvation of all dying infants; nor review the explanations by which it is attempted to reconcile the phrase, “elect infants,” with the present faith of the Church. To illustrate the extent of the change in doctrinal views at this point, I will quote two passages. The first is from Dr. Twisse, the moderator of the Westminster Assembly, in a book entitled “The Riches of God’s Love unto the Vessels of Mercy.” He says: “If many thousands, even all the infants of Turks and Saracens, dying in original sin, are tormented by Him (God) in Hell fire, is He to be counted the father of cruelties for that?” [Quoted by Dr. Briggs in “Whither,” p. 125. There is a more horrible passage quoted on page 124, from Samuel Rutherford, one of the Scotch Commissioners in the Westminster Assembly.] The other passage to which we gladly turn is from Dr. A. A. Hodge: “In the history of the world, since Adam, all the

souls of those that have died before birth or between birth and moral agency have been redeemed in Christ. Through all the ages,—from Japan, from China, from India, from Africa, from the islands of the sea,—multitudes, flocking like birds, have gone to heaven of this great company of redeemed infants of the Church of God.” The change indicated by these two extracts is immense. If there were no other, it would warrant and ultimately *compel* a revision of the Confession. Dr. Shedd and others think there is not going to be much of a shower, but we tell him the windows of heaven are opened. He proposes to “strengthen the dam” by insisting that it is all right, and letting it severely alone. We propose to strengthen it, not as he says, “by cutting a hole,” but by lifting the constitutional flood-gates to take off the pressure, while we take out some rotten planks like “elect infants” and put in some sound Gospel timber in the form of a declaration of God’s infinite love for all men. If our opponents are afraid that this will not be well done, the best course is for them to join the movement and help us to keep it within conservative limits

HENRY J. VAN DYKE.

XV.

A NOTE FROM DR. SHEDD.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE NEW YORK EVANGELIST :

Will you grant me the space to disclaim the interpretation which Dr. Van Dyke puts upon my use of the phrase "fault-finding with the Confession." I employed it in no discourteous sense, but to express what seems to me the simple fact in the case. Dr. Van Dyke contends that the Confession does not proclaim the love of God towards all men. This, if true, is a fault in it. He contends that it teaches by implication that God creates some men in order to damn them. This, if true, is a fault.

I do not think that my phraseology warrants his assertion that I "intimate" that "he is ignorant of any good Calvinistic treatise, or unable to comprehend its contents." My repeated expressions of respect for his theological learning and orthodoxy, should have precluded such a charge as this. All I wish to say, and all that I do say, is that these alleged faults in the Confession are noticed by systematic expounders of it, who deny that they are there, and give their proof. I mentioned this fact, merely to indicate what is the *common understanding* of the Confession by this class of persons, not quoting them at all as having *ex cathedra* authority in the matter. I expressly say that my limits forbid the examination of passages in proof, and hence I adopt this short method of citing the theologians in regard to the meaning of the Confession, as a lawyer would cite the expositions of jurists like Kent and Story, as to the meaning of the Constitution.

Yours truly,

W. G. T. SHEDD.

XVI.

GOD'S INFINITE LOVE TO MEN.

GOD'S clearest and most permanent revelation of Himself is in the person and life of Jesus Christ, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God. The incarnate Word is infinitely above the written Word, which derives its chief value from the fact that it testifies of Him. And therefore the portions of Scripture which record Christ's life and teaching are pre-eminently called the Gospels.

In the teaching of Christ two truths stand side by side as clear as the sun; and whether we can demonstrate their consistency or not we are bound to believe, to defend, and to proclaim both of them.

The *first* is God's *sovereignty* in the bestowal of grace upon sinners. He does what He pleases with His own. "I thank Thee, O Father, God of heaven and earth, because Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent and revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Thy sight." Quotations could easily be multiplied on this point, but this one is enough.

The *second* truth, revealed not only in the word of Christ, but in actions speaking louder than words, is *God's love for all men*, and His compassionate regard even for those who perish in their sins. "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father," is one of those sayings of His which penetrate the depths of God's unsearchable judgment, and without explaining them to our comprehension nevertheless leave them luminous forever. What Christ is, God is; what

Christ does, God does; what Christ says, God says. If there is anything in our theology which contravenes this foundation truth it must be wrong.

Now see Christ as He laments and weeps over reprobate Jerusalem. They whose house was left unto them desolate, and from whose eyes the things that belonged to their peace were hidden, were certainly non-elect. They were not chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world, nor predestinated to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. And yet the only Redeemer of God's elect laments and weeps over them. It was not merely the man Jesus, but God manifest in the flesh who did and said these things. We see the Father in Him standing on Mount Olivet and saying, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often *would* I have gathered you and ye *would not*." Examples might be multiplied on this point, but this one will suffice.

These two truths, God's *sovereignty* in the bestowal of His grace, and His *infinite love for all men*, are the hinges and turning-points of all Christian theology. The *anti-Calvinist* denies the first. The *hyper-Calvinist* or *supralapsarian* denies the second, holding that God creates some men on purpose to damn them, for His glory. The true Calvinist believes both and insists that they are consistent. It is upon the union of these two truths that the strength and beauty of our theology depends. The ultimate and dominant reason why I advocate the revision of the Westminster Confession is that it does not state these two truths in their relations and harmony. It is full of God's sovereignty in the choice of the elect, and overflows with the declaration of His special love for them, all of which I devoutly believe. But it contains no summary of those Scriptures, and of those acts and words of God in Christ, which explicitly teach that He is the Saviour of all men, and not willing that any should perish, but that all should

come to repentance. In former articles I have stated the proposition thus: *Our Confession does not contain one declaration of God's infinite love to men, nor one declaration that Christ's sacrifice for sin is sufficient for all, adapted to all, and offered to all.* This statement was made not rashly, but advisedly, reverently, and in the fear of God. Will the good brethren who are so much offended by it have the patience to notice the preciseness of its wording? It does not say that the Confession *denies*, or even that it contains no *implication* of God's infinite love to all men, but that the Confession contains no *declaration* of this great truth, nor of the sufficiency, adaptation, and universal offer of the Gospel salvation, in which God's infinite love to men is embodied. Some have garbled this statement, and held up parts of it to scorn. Let them pass. Others, among our ablest theologians, have fairly met and attempted to disprove it by quotations from the Confession itself. But they have not succeeded. The most they claim to have shown is that there are statements in the Confession which *imply* what I maintain it does not *declare*.

It is useless to go over the ground again. Let our ministers and intelligent laymen read the Confession for themselves and judge between us. For however valuable the testimony of "Experts" may be--and on this point I do not dispute what *The Presbyterian* has so well said,—the ultimate decision of the question of Revision rests with the whole Church represented in her Presbyteries. The Confession is the symbol and standard of the whole Church, a professed statement of what Presbyterians believe.

Even if the doctrine of God's infinite love for all men can be logically deduced from its statements by our theological experts, that is very far from being sufficient. A truth so vital to the common faith of Christendom, and so intimately related to the missionary zeal by which the

Church of to-day is eminently distinguished from what she was in the time of the Westminster Assembly, and for two centuries after, ought to stand out upon her banner with the same clearness that it has in the inspired gospels. It is no answer to our objection to observe that our missionary zeal has sprung up and flourished in spite of this alleged defect in our Standards; for it is quite in accordance with the economy of God's providence and grace that the life and experience of Christians should precede and mould the formulation of their Creed. This principle is illustrated in the whole history of Christian doctrine. The Presbyterian Church in this country may resist, but she cannot ultimately prevent the application of this principle.

For these reasons I have ventured, in response to the call of the General Assembly, to suggest that we amend the third chapter of our Confession by inserting some such statement as the following: "God's eternal decree hindereth no one from accepting Christ as He is offered to all men for salvation in the Gospel; nor ought it to be so construed as to contradict the declarations of Scripture that Christ is the propitiation for the sins of the whole world, and that God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."

If any man objects to the *wording* of this amendment, let him frame a better one and I will accept it. But if any one says, as the Arminians do, that the truth it is intended to embody is inconsistent with our system of doctrine, or that its adoption would mar the strength and beauty of our Confession, I differ with him absolutely and uncompromisingly, because I am a Calvinist.

HENRY J. VAN DYKE.

XVII.

GOD'S INFINITE LOVE TO MEN AND THE WESTMINSTER CONFESSION.

By all means the most plausible argument in favor of a revision of the Westminster Confession turns on the alleged absence from that document of a due declaration of the love of God to mankind. It can surprise no one, therefore, that so able a reasoner as Dr. Van Dyke speaks (in *The Presbyterian* for October 5th) of the failure of the Confession, in his view, to state the two truths of the sovereignty of God and His "infinite love for all men," in their relation and harmony, as "the ultimate and dominant reason" why he advocates its revision. I believe that this alleged failure cannot be more strongly or more convincingly argued than it has been by Dr. Van Dyke in the paper referred to. No reader of it will fail to feel that if this be the state of the case, so serious a lack in our Confessional statement ought to be remedied. Only, when we go back to the Confession itself we discover that the reading of it does not leave the same impression upon the mind that was left by the reading of Dr. Van Dyke's paper. The Confession begins with a most moving description of God's character as the God of love (ii. 1), and traces His loving dealings with the children of men, on from plan to act, and from act to act, until He brings those whom His love sought out into the fruition of glory; and the reader feels the document to be suffused from end to

end with the glow of infinite compassion. He cannot rise from reading it without a deep sense that here there is no lack of insistence upon the fundamental Christian doctrine that "God is love."

Now, how are we to account for the different impressions made on the mind by Dr. Van Dyke's account of the Confession and by the Confession itself? Possibly the following considerations will help us to understand it:

1. Dr. Van Dyke appears to set God's sovereignty and His love unduly over against one another. In the view of the Confession, as of the New Testament, (as, for example, in Ephesians, i. 5, where predestination is according to the *good-pleasure* of His will,) God's electing grace is the *expression* of His infinite love for men. So sharply does Dr. Van Dyke oppose God's sovereignty and God's love for all men, however, as truths whose consistency we may find it hard to demonstrate, that the reader is apt to understand him as thinking of electing grace as a *limitation* of God's love. Thus the highest exercise of love plays the part, in his paper, of clouding the manifestation of infinite love. This unfortunate result is partly due to what seems an undue emphasis upon the word "all" in the phrase, "God's infinite love for all men," which is so used as inevitably to suggest the idea of equal and indiscriminating love for each and every man, distributively. The complaint that the Confession does not give its proper place to the "love of God for all men" thus almost passes into a complaint that in the Confessional scheme God's infinite love for the non-elect is not made a co-hinge with His sovereignty in the bestowal of His grace.

When we escape from these suggestions, however, and ask seriously what place should be given to the truth of God's infinite love for men indiscriminately, as *distinguished from* His special love to His chosen ones, among

the architectonic principles of a Confession, it would seem that we are obliged to assign it a position which, though fundamental, yet would not be prominent in such a sense as implies frequent or pervasive assertion. A Confession which confined itself to declaring God's indiscriminate "love for all men," and its fruits in blessings equally universally given, would be lacking in all the most precious doctrines of the Scriptures. A Confession which followed with equal minuteness and fullness the dealings of God with the non-elect and the elect, would be overburdened with the darker shadows of man's sin and God's holy justice. Is not the Westminster Confession's way the true one?—to lay the foundations firm in a full description of God as the God of love (ii. 1), and then give its strength to the exhibition of this love in its highest manifestations from the eternal election "in the beloved" to the reception into glory, with only such incidental mention here and there of the non-elect as the occasion demanded? In one word, ought we to demand that a Confession should be framed as if it were a proclamation of God's love to sinners? That is the function of a sermon. A Confession, on the other hand, is the Christians' expression of what God has done for them, and as such it ought not to be expected to contain more than clear recognition of God's love for all men, but should lay the stress rather on the exhibition of that love to His children.

2. And this leads me to the second criticism I wish to make on Dr. Van Dyke's paper. And that is, that he appears to me to make an unreasonable demand in the amount and kind of recognition he asks for God's universal love, in the Confession. He is not satisfied with its recognition by clear or frequent "*implication*"; he demands explicit "*declaration*." I understand him to allow that it is "implied," as, indeed, others who agree with him in his gen-

eral contention (or, *e. g.*, Dr. Candlish) certainly admit. But he insists that nothing will be satisfactory except an explicit "*declaration*" of "God's infinite love to men." Now, the unreasonableness of this demand is easily made evident by the simple remark that in it Dr. Van Dyke asks of the Confession more than can easily be found on the surface of the New Testament. The New Testament does not seem to "contain one explicit declaration" of God's infinite "love to all men." I would not like to be misunderstood here. It is not I who throw doubt on this precious truth being a doctrine—or say rather, *the* doctrine—of the New Testament. But, as it happens, it is a doctrine taught by clear "implication" in other doctrinal statements rather than by precise "declarations" of itself. The New Testament declares that "God is love," and so does the Confession say that He is "most loving, gracious, merciful, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin; the rewarder of them that diligently seek Him." The New Testament, in one unique passage, says that "God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son"; but to say that He loved "the world" collectively is only "implicatively" to say that He loved "all men" distributively; and, besides this one passage, no other brings the words "loved" and "mankind" into immediate conjunction. Well, the gist of what I am urging is that if we can be satisfied with the New Testament when it teaches this fundamental doctrine only by necessary "implication," we need not be so stringent in insisting that a like mode of teaching it—by "implication" rather than by explicit "declaration"—is intolerable in the Confession.

That the Confession does "imply" God's infinite love to man is evident, it seems to me, without a quotation of passages. This is the fundamental idea of the Confession

as well as of the New Testament; all its doctrine is but an orderly development of God's love to man—election itself and all its consequents being, as I have said, not the limitation, but the expression of His love for men. But it is also capable of being made evident by passages. We have just quoted the rich description of God's loving nature from ii. 1, and that God "is good and doeth good unto all" (xxi. 1) is asserted in detail on every convenient occasion. Nor are there lacking passages which assert the free offer of salvation in Christ and the responsibility of man in accepting or rejecting Him. He is the "mediator between God and man" (viii. 1), and God has "*freely offered unto sinners* life and salvation by Jesus Christ, requiring of them faith in Him that they may be saved" (vii. 3)—a passage the universality of which is not taken away, but rather established, by the fact that it proceeds to say that God gives more than this offer to those who are ordained to life. I submit that these clear "implications"—if any one chooses to call them so—of the universal side of the Gospel are as much as should be asked for in a Confession, and that any Confession ought, as our Confession does, to give the stress and main portion of its teaching to the great things that God does for man in the actual and complete saving of multitudes from penalty and sin, rather than to the (comparatively) little things He does in proclaiming the Gospel freely to all. All that ought to be asked is that this latter important side of truth should be fully recognized.

3. Lastly, I am constrained to say that the amending section which Dr. Van Dyke proposes for insertion into the Confession, in order to supply its assumed defect in this matter, seems to me entirely unnecessary, because all that it asserts is already provided for in the Confession as it stands. This section is divided into two clauses. The

first declares: "God's eternal decree hindereth no one from accepting Christ as He is offered to all men for salvation in the Gospel." But what possible need can there be for this assertion after the Confession has declared that by the decree no "violence is offered to the will by the creatures, nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established"? All that is proposed finds itself already asserted here. The second clause runs: "Nor ought it to be so construed as to contradict the declaration of Scripture that Christ is the propitiation for the sins of the whole world, and that God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." But how can it be so construed when the long-suffering God, who is "the rewarder of them that diligently seek Him," has "freely offered unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ, requiring of them faith in Him that they may be saved"? The Confession is probably long enough already, and it is scarcely necessary to add to it merely in order to say over again, in other words, what it already provides for.

BENJAMIN B. WARFIELD.

XVIII.

THE CONFESSION AND GOD'S INFINITE LOVE TO MEN.

I AM reluctant to utter another word on Revision lest hearers should be wearied by my much speaking, and lest in my honest zeal for the cause I should appear to be hostile to those with whom I am in substantial agreement. May God give us all persevering grace to speak the truth in love, and to demonstrate that the *odium theologicum* is a thing of the past. It is not necessary, so far as we are concerned, but it may not be amiss for the sake of others, to say that the personal relations between Dr. Warfield and myself are of the most friendly kind, and that next to Christ and the Holy Catholic Church, Princeton Seminary, by tender memories and still more precious hopes, holds the largest place in my love and loyalty. I honestly think, and use the boldness of a friend to say, that the recent announcement in the secular press to the effect that "Princeton stands firm" in opposition to all Revision, is regretted by many of her most devoted friends. For "Princeton" represents something more than the opinions of the honored men who now fill her professorial chairs as worthy successors of those who have finished their course. She has a future as well as a past to conserve, and nothing can more effectually paralyze her power for good than the public impression that her future is to be only a stereotyped repetition of the past. The Revision against which it is pro-

claimed that she *stands firm*, will come; it *has come already* in the Church at large, and in the hearts of many of her own most cherished alumni. Wise churchmanship teaches that she should seek to guide rather than to arrest the inevitable movement.

These convictions are greatly confirmed and strengthened by both the admissions and the denials of Dr. Warfield's article in *The Presbyterian* of November 2d. He admits that the Confession does not contain one explicit *declaration* of the infinite love of God to men. This is all I have contended for. I have, indeed, intimated, and think it would not be difficult to prove, that the *implications* for which he contends are "far-fetched and little worth." But it is not necessary to insist upon this. It is enough to justify and urge on the movement for Revision, that the ablest defenders of the Confession, as it is, admit that it does not contain one explicit declaration of the infinite love of God for men as men, and that all its positive declarations are confined to the expression of God's love for the elect. My ultimate and dominant reason for advocating Revision is confirmed as a fact by my candid opponent. He denies only the inferences I draw from this fact. Let us look at some of his denials.

1. He asks "in one word, ought we to demand that a Confession should be framed as if it were a proclamation of God's love to sinners?" Now, no advocate of Revision has contended that a Confession ought to be *merely* a proclamation of God's love to sinners, and therefore, if Dr. Warfield's question has any pertinence to this discussion it is intended to affirm that our Confession *ought not to contain any such proclamation*. In other words, he admits that the Confession contains no such declaration as we think it ought to contain, but insists that, so far from being a defect, this omission is one of its crowning excellences. He

adds, "*that* (the proclamation of God's love to sinners) is the function of a sermon." I will not push these premises to their logical conclusion, nor charge upon my brother the inference, from which I am sure he would shrink, that there ought to be one system of doctrine for the minister's study and another for his pulpit. It will be enough to say that this is just the difficulty with which some of our Presbyterian pastors have labored and groaned in secret, that our Confession does not set forth the Gospel as our loyalty to Christ and our love for the souls of men compel us to preach it, and that too much of our time and strength is consumed in defending our Creed against objections which could easily be removed by such a revision as we advocate. We do not desire a Confession which would "confine itself to declaring God's indiscriminate love to all men." We have never used the word "indiscriminate" in such a connection. And we admit that a creed so "confined" would be "lacking in all the most precious doctrines of Scripture," except the one precious truth of God's infinite love. We do not propose to exclude God's special grace for His own elect. But we propose to add what we preach, that He is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." This would not "set God's sovereignty and His love unduly over against one another," neither would it "overburden the Confession with the darker shadows of man's sin and God's holy justice." It would bring our Creed more into conformity with God's Word, and illuminate and sweeten it with the very light and sweetness of the Gospel.

2. Dr. Warfield has one eminent qualification for a teacher of dogmatic theology, the courage of his convictions. Being thoroughly convinced that the Confession contains all it ought to contain, as an exposition of Scripture, and that the demand for an explicit declaration of

God's infinite love to men is unreasonable, he does not hesitate to deny that the New Testament contains any such declaration. This is the crucial point in the whole controversy. Dr. Warfield contends that the New Testament teaches God's infinite love to men, not explicitly, but only by *implication*; that the Confession teaches the same truth in the same way, and therefore he insists that we ought to be satisfied with the Confession as it is. I do not admit that the Confession teaches it even by *implication*. But conceding, for the sake of the argument, that it does, I affirm that in this respect our Creed is not in harmony with the Scriptures. They teach God's infinite love to men explicitly, in repeated and varied declarations. I have a list of more than fifty familiar texts to sustain this position, not one of which is incorporated in our Confession, and only two of them are found among the appended proof-texts. The declarations of the ninth chapter of Romans, "Jacob have I loved and Esau have I hated"; "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy," are quoted half a dozen times, but we look in vain for the crown and climax of the apostle's argument, "God hath concluded them all in unbelief that He might *have mercy on all*" (Rom. xi. 32), for the simple reason that there is no place for it, not even a branch on which it might be tied as an orange on a Christmas tree.

"God is love" is quoted, but it is too big for the head it covers. I submit to Dr. Warfield that "*God is love*" and "*God is most loving*" are not co-extensive, and that the latter does not even imply His love for all men. It may easily be construed consistently with the horrible declaration of the *Formula Consensus Helvetica*: "The Scriptures do not extend to all and each God's purpose of showing mercy to man, but restrict it to the elect alone, the reprobate being excluded, even by name, as Esau, whom God hated with an eternal hatred" (Con. vi.).

The text, "God so loved the world," etc., is quoted in connection with the Covenant of Grace to deliver *some*—*i. e.*, the elect—out of the estate of sin and misery. I am glad Dr. Warfield does not adopt "the common gloss of (some) theologians," that "the world" means only the elect. But he tells us that this text is *unique*, that is to say, according to Worcester, "it is without an equal or another of the same kind," or as my brother puts it, "besides this one passage no other brings the words *loved* and *mankind* into immediate conjunction." Of course, he does not stickle for the mere words; he means that the *ideas* of the two words are nowhere else brought into immediate connection. How precious, then, is that one text. Let us put it into our Confession, in all the fullness of its gracious meaning, and inscribe it upon our banner as an ensign for the nations. But is it unique? Is this the only declaration of God's love for the world? When Christ stood and wept over apostate Jerusalem and said, "How often would I have gathered you and ye would not," did He not exhibit and declare God's love for all men, even the non-elect? When the apostle says, "Christ is the propitiation, not for our sins only, but also the sins of the *whole world*," that "God is the Saviour of *all men*, especially of them that believe," that "He is not willing that any should perish, but that *all should come to repentance*," that "He will have *all men to be saved*"; is there not in these words an explicit declaration of God's infinite love to men? Even admitting that the infinite love of God for men, and the sufficiency and free offer of the Gospel salvation, are only impliedly set forth in the New Testament; is it not the function of a Confession to expound and summarize the Word of God, and to furnish those whom the Church ordains and sends forth an explicit declaration of the doctrines by which they are to discipline all nations, and of the Gospel they are to preach in all the earth to every creature?

I am persuaded, upon their own showing, that but for two things, (1) an honorable but easily exaggerated sentiment that all things should continue as they were before the fathers fell asleep, and (2) a vague fear that there is somewhere in the Church a sleeping giant whom it is very dangerous to wake up; all such men as Dr. Warfield would consent to revision and seek to guide it to safe conclusions. With the conservative sentiment I have a large sympathy; but do not share at all in what seems to me an unfounded and unworthy fear.

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