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"THEY GNAW THEIR TONGUES"

[CONTRADICT EACH OTHER].

Rev. Mr. Williamson, of Cleveland, favors a revision of the Confession and is quoted in the Cleveland *Leader* thus: –

"We may not get a system of doctrine that dovetails together with perfect accuracy, but what is better, we get more perfectly into the heart of Christ and his teaching. Doctrinal system is not ignored or underestimated, but in order to the completeness of its logic it must not be allowed statements and syllogisms which are not in harmony with the general tenor of the Scriptures. The only document of the past to which we are willing to be shackled is the Bible.

"No sweeping changes seem to be thought of by any. Although its forms of statement in many instances are not those of the present day, they are not thought to be of such a nature as to make necessary any retouching. Not so, however, in several instances, particularly chapter third, on God's Eternal Decrees, and chapter ten, section third, on Elect Infants. Some of the opponents of revision show how wonderfully logical they are, and how admirably phrased, so as to suit supralapsarian and sublapsarian, and that any change would tend to narrowness rather than breadth of statement. I have read their arguments, and been much impressed by them, and then I have re-read chapter third, and in spite of their arguments my moral sense has been no less shocked than when in my boyhood days I first read the Confession. *Indeed, I find my soul recoiling from these statements with increasing rather than diminishing force.* I read of the distinction between preterition and reprobation which is here so nicely allowed for, but I find my mind still almost fiercely rebelling against the [R1168 : page 5] dogmatic statements I here find. I find also, on comparing notes with those who, like myself, know little and care less about the theological subtleties, that the idea of God which

this chapter presents is utterly abhorrent to them. And I cannot help feeling that there is something in their experience of moral revulsion that is as worthy of being taken into account as the logic of the systematic theologian. If, as some of us believe, we have

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in order to the completeness of our system, the quicker we get back there the better. It is proposed to insert in this chapter third something concerning the love of God which will, and specially as inserted here, relieve the hardness of the Confession, and do what many believe it now fails to do as it ought – put God before the world more as the New Testament reveals him. But we are told this is altogether unnecessary; that this truth is by no means lost sight of, and to prove it a number of clauses are gathered together from different portions of the Confession expressive of this truth. Inasmuch as they have been picked out and put together we shall have to confess that they are there, but we should never have surmised it, from the simple reading of the Confession. This truth, it strikes me, is of enough importance to be put where we can find it without searching for it. It ought to stand forth so plainly that no one could help seeing it. I am glad if there are any upon whom the Confession already makes this impression. There are a good many of us upon whom it does not.

"As for the section on elect infants, I for one do not care, except as a matter of historical knowledge, what meaning it was intended originally to convey. I know what meaning it would convey to the average mind of to-day, and I doubt whether any amount of historical information will make him believe it means anything else, and that is that, of those who die in infancy, some are elected to salvation and some are not. *The Presbyterian Church does not believe this.*"

And yet, if you ask a Presbyterian what he believes, he will refer you to the Westminster Confession and Catechism. And if you attend an installation service, you will hear the vow of the ordained man that he will believe and preach *only what* this creed declares to be the

truth. Notwithstanding this, Dr. Schaff declares that he subscribes to it with mental reservations; and Mr. Williamson probably the same way. And the latter publicly tells us that the Presbyterian Church as a whole disbelieves it. What can be the object of this beating about the bush, much of which is misrepresentation, if not downright fraud? It is to perpetuate the sect, not its doctrines, of which they are becoming ashamed.

Why not abandon all such human systems and confessions, now used for tying men's tongues and consciences, and let each other stand free to study God's Word untrammelled, and to build, *each for himself*, such a creed as he shall find authorized in God's Word; adding to his creed or subtracting therefrom continually, as he continues to grow in grace and in knowledge and in love of God. This is the attitude which God designed: this is the liberty wherewith Christ made us all free. Why surrender our liberties and enslave our consciences and tongues to a sect, or the decisions of majorities in sects? If all of God's children were really free, thus, it would not be long before they would be at perfect oneness of heart and nearly at one in faith and work – the only true union.

"Arise and shine in youth immortal;
Thy Light is come, thy King appears.
Beyond the centuries' swinging portal
Breaks a new dawn – The Thousand Years."

– *Fannie Reid*.
