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"GO . . . SPEAK . . . TO THE PEOPLE ALL THE WORDS OF THIS LIFE."

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The Canadian Evangelist

Is devoted to the furtherance of the Gospel of Christ, and pleads for the union of all believers in the Lord Jesus in harmony with His own prayer recorded in the seventeenth chapter of John, and on the basis set forth by the Apostle Paul in the following terms: "I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beseech you to walk worthily of the calling wherewith ye were called, with all lowliness and meekness, with long suffering, forbearing one another in love; giving diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, even as also ye were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all, and through all, and in all."—Eph. iv. 1-6.

This paper, while not claiming to be what is styled an "organ," may be taken as fairly representing the people known as Disciples of Christ in this country.

Creeds Divisive.

BY ROBERT STUART M'ARTHUR.

Church unity, even if it were desirable, will never be secured by insistence on the authority of the historic creeds. The more we know of the manner in which these creeds were formulated, the less authority can we attach to their teaching. They often obscure the truth which they are supposed plainly to declare; they are often far more difficult of comprehension than are the Scriptures on which they are supposed to be based.

"THE APOSTLES' CREED."

The so-called Apostles' Creed is an early summary of the Christian faith, with most of whose statements this writer is heartily agreed. He fully appreciates the high praise which St. Augustine gives it when he says regarding it, *Regula fidei brevis et grandis; brevis numero verborum, grandis pondere sententiarum.* It is to be highly esteemed as a compendium of doctrine, for its intrinsic worth and for the veneration in which it has been so long and so deservedly held by many bodies of Christians. One can almost agree with Dr. Schaff when he says that though it is "not in form the production of the apostles, it is a faithful compend of their doctrines, and comprehends the leading articles of the faith in the Triune God and His revelation, from the creation to the everlasting life, in sublime simplicity, in unsurpassable brevity, in the most beautiful order, and with liturgical solemnity; and to this day it is the common bond of Greek, Roman and evangelical Christendom." We object, however to its title. It is not, in any natural sense of the word, the Apostles' Creed; it ought never to have been called by this name. This is an example of what has been called a "pious fraud." All investigators now heartily agree that the so-called Athanasian Creed was not the work of the famous Athanasius, although it bears his name. Dr. Swainson does not hesitate to ascribe the origin of this title to a deliberate purpose to practice an imposition. He classifies this purpose with that which led to the "False Decretals," and the "Donation of Constantine." So we may say of the name of this other creed. The apostles never saw the creed to which their name is attached; they never heard of it, and perhaps would not be willing to endorse it in all its parts as we now have it. It

may be said that the title is now used with the understanding that it is simply a truthful compend of apostolic doctrine; that it sets forth apostolic principles of faith in God and in His revelation. But the title was intended to convey quite a different meaning; it was intended to convey the idea, which the Roman church now clearly teaches, that its clauses were actually contributed by the apostles. This church, on the authority of a writer under the name of Augustine, undertakes to name the clauses given by the different apostles. To the historical compiler and traditionalist Rufinus, of the fourth century, we are indebted for the earlier accounts of the origin of this creed. He affirmed that the apostles, before separating to the different nations, agreed upon "a form of sound words," and that when met together they composed this compend under the special influence of the Holy Ghost. But no careful historic student attaches importance to day to this testimony of Rufinus. There may have been, there doubtless were, various formulas of belief in existence from the earliest times; but no one can prove that the Apostles' Creed is so ancient by from four hundred to five hundred years. The most that can be claimed for the title is that it fairly represents the facts of Christian faith as taught by the apostles. We also know well that the clauses relating to the descent into hell, and to the communion of saints, are of later origin than are other portions of this creed. It may be affirmed that the so-called Apostles' Creed was substantially in existence from the end of the fourth century; but in its completed form it cannot be traced to a period earlier than about the middle of the eighth century. If this statement be correct, then it is about four centuries later in its present form than the earlier forms of the Nicene Creed. The clause, "He descended into hell," is one whose origin is involved in great doubt, and whose teachings are not accepted by many devout believers and profound scholars. We know that an alternative form is suggested, and if that form were universally adopted, fewer criticisms would be pronounced upon this ancient and confessedly beautiful compend of doctrine. A few changes and omissions would greatly add to the value of this creed for popular use. And such changes have, in some publications, been made. Men to day are quite as competent to make the changes as were those who made other changes through several centuries. We can do our thinking to-day as well as other men did theirs in their day.

THE NICENE CREED.

To the Nicene Creed more serious objection may be offered. The circumstances of its origin tend greatly to lessen the authority of its statements. We know that the controversies which began in the second century were prolonged into the third and fourth centuries under various phases of belief and statement. This creed sprang out of the heart of this long and troublous conflict; it was literally a compromise, and it is to be received only as such. In the council held in 325 at Nicæa, summoned by Constantine, there were three distinct parties—the Athanasian,

the Eusebian and the Arian. The Arian, or heretical party, was comparatively few in numbers, and its direct influence was not great at any time in the council, but its indirect influence through the Eusebian, or middle party, was marked at every stage of the discussion. For a time this middle party was able to hold the orthodox, or Athanasian, party with a firm grasp. We all admit that there was much that was grand and imposing in the Nicene Council. No church council so imposing had met previous to that time, and perhaps few of like character have met since. But we know also that at times this council conducted itself in a manner altogether unbecoming a solemn assembly of Christian men met for a high and holy purpose. Drafts of creeds were torn in pieces by the excited assembly, and the "lord of misrule" reigned occasionally with uninterrupted sway. The council was at times more like a ward caucus of average politicians than like a council of grave and reverent men. Even the presence of soldiers as police officers could not prevent shameful outbreaks.

It is also to be said that the Nicene Creed does not now appear in its original form; and the history of many of its later clauses is involved in great obscurity. Whether they are to be attributed to the Nicene Constantinopolitan Council is not generally known, even by the most careful investigators. Some affirm that the enlarged creed appears in a work written before the meeting of this latter council. The exact facts probably never will be known. It must be admitted also that these creeds are not, to any great degree, conservators of doctrine; they are often divisive rather than unitive. The Nicene Creed did not stop the sway of Arianism even at the time; it magnified, and in a certain sense, dignified Arianism, and led, for a time at least, to its more rapid spread. Creeds are not conservative of doctrine in England or America to-day. The churches whose creeds are longest and strongest differ more among themselves as to their faith and practice than do churches in which there is no creed, in the technical sense of that term. This is not the expression of an opinion; it is not the formulation of an argument; it is simply the statement of an historic fact. The Nicene Creed, moreover, is in some of its parts too abstruse, too metaphysical and too philosophical for general adoption. It is difficult for any man to give a clear interpretation of some of its expressions. There may be doubt as to whether the forms in which it appears in English properly represent the thought of the original; but the interpretation, after a true translation has been made, is much more difficult than the translation itself. It would puzzle any teacher of religion to make an explanatory statement of some clauses in this creed which would be intelligible to the minds of immature thinkers and inexperienced believers, or even to those of maturity and experience. That creeds have their use, we do not for a moment deny; but that they should be thrust between the Christian and his Bible, we do not for a moment believe. Whatever tends to dethrone, or even

to disparage the Word of God, is so far to be rejected. We are unable to see the advantage of emphasizing the value of elaborate creeds. We cannot discover their practical use in Christian life and work, and we know that in many instances they have divided the church, when a simpler statement of God's Word would have united God's people. It is often much more difficult, as already suggested, to interpret the creeds than to interpret the Scriptures on which their statements are supposed to be based. The Nicene Creed did not settle the contradictory opinions in the church at that time. Especially was the doctrine of the person of Christ immediately disputed by the semi-Arians and Eusebians. There was also difference of opinion as to whether or not the Holy Spirit was created by the Father. Several synods met, but failed to agree upon any statement regarding these and other matters. The result was that certain additions to the Nicene Creed were adopted at the second Ecumenical Council at Constantinople, A.D. 381. Not until the fifth century were the words "and from the Son" (Filioque) added. This was known as the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed. The fact is, in proportion as creeds become inclusive they also become exclusive. They are, therefore, as was said before, divisive rather than unitive.

THE ATHANASIAN CREED.

The so-called Athanasian Creed is known as one of the three great creeds of the church; but no intelligent student now supposes that it was prepared by Athanasius in the fourth century. He himself nowhere mentions it; neither do any of his contemporaries or writers immediately following him. A careful examination of its contents shows that it could not have been written by him, as it omits points which were vital in his time. It is in Latin, and Athanasius wrote in Greek. Late in the sixth century this creed became the subject of general comment, but not until later did it acquire the title of Athanasian. This title was probably given it during the Arian controversies in Gaul, as this creed was supposed to express the views of Athanasius. We do not know who was its author; probably its authorship will never be known. It has been attributed to many men in many countries, but no authoritative statement can be made. Prominent men of the Church of England, while adopting the creed as a whole, strongly disapproved of its damnatory clauses. These clauses are quite shocking in their severity and assumption; indeed, they are little less than blasphemous. It is difficult to conceive how uninspired men dare so pronounce condemnation on their fellow-men. Rather than be obliged to recite such a creed, many excellent Christian men would become open infidels; indeed, the tendency of such creeds is to multiply unbelievers. How can men, without doing violence to all their reasoning powers, adopt creeds which attribute regenerating power to baptism—infant or adult—creeds which affirm the existence and purifying power of purgatory, and which teach as true the doctrine of transubstantiation, or even consubstantiation? The fact

is, that several so-called Christian creeds contain no small amount of heathen superstition rather than the principles of a sound Christianity; and these principles are taught in Protestant as well as in Roman churches. A scriptural Christianity repudiates these errors *in toto*. Such doctrines are alike unscriptural and unreasonable. If such teachings were true Christianity, many true men would rather be intelligent unbelievers than the superstitious devotees which honest faith in such teachings necessitates. The writer knows of ministers of a church, parts of whose creeds they ask their assistants to recite. They would stultify their intelligence and conscience by repeating them. Such creeds are a temptation to intellectual inanity or moral dishonesty. Better fully believe few things than half believe many things.

LATER CREEDS.

After the so-called Athanasian Creed there are no general symbols of faith worthy of attention since the Reformation. At the Council of Trent, 1545 to 1563, the Church of Rome found it necessary to give a more detailed statement of doctrine than could be found in any of its previous creeds. The decrees of Trent are the fixed and authoritative symbols of that church. Since the Reformation the most noted confessions are the Lutheran, Calvinistic, or Reformed, the Anglican, or Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England, and the Puritan, or Westminster Confession. The Thirty-nine Articles were originally forty-two, and are supposed to have been chiefly composed by Cranmer. In 1571 they were revised by convocation and Parliament. The Westminster Confession was the result of the great Puritan excitements of the seventeenth century. The Long Parliament, in 1640, set itself to consider the question of the reformation of religion. On Nov. 23, 1641, "The Famous Remonstrance," suggesting the calling of a synod to settle the peace and good government of the church, was passed. Out of this proposal came the Westminster Confession. The ordinance summoning it was issued June 13, 1643. Among the notable divines participating in these great deliberations were Rutherford, Gillespie, Henderson, Lightfoot, Coleman and Selden. The Presbyterians greatly predominated. The sittings began in 1643, and continued until Feb. 22nd, 1649, and during these five and a half years there were 1,163 sessions.

As this is the latest, so it is the most elaborate of the creeds. In 1643 the assembly, through the influence of Dr. Lightfoot, voted by a majority of one against giving the choice as between immersion and sprinkling as baptism; and in the year following Parliament sanctioned their decision and decreed that sprinkling should be the legal mode of baptism. The Westminster Confession is a document remarkable for its rhetorical skill, for its scholarly breadth and for its Christian devotion. No one can speak lightly of so historic, learned and devout a confession. Were this writer a Presbyterian, he should strongly oppose the revision of this historic confession. (Continued on page 2.)