

Historic Creeds and Baptist Churches.

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Mr. President and Christian Friends:

Coming from the land of my adoption to the land of my birth to address you in this most interesting convention, conflicting emotions fill my heart. Here are the graves of my kindred dead, and here the homes of my kindred living. Here as a boy I gave my heart and life to Jesus Christ as my Saviour and Lord; and here I gave my enthusiastic loyalty to the Baptist denomination as representing the teachings of the New Testament regarding the subject and the act of baptism. With larger experience, riper age, and broader opportunity for knowledge, I emphatically reaffirm the convictions of my boyhood. The battle regarding the meaning of the word baptism has been fought, and the victory has been won. No scholar in Germany, Britain, America, or in any part of the world, can deny the Baptist view regarding that word without impugning his own scholarship. Linguistic science, church history, ecclesiastical art, and New Testament interpretation, alike by the profoundest scholars and the humblest Christians, emphatically teach that believers are the Scriptural subjects of baptism and that immersion is the Scriptural baptism. Baptism is the great apostolic and catholic ordinance. Thus do I congratulate you that we are in line with the most advanced scholarship of the day in the views we hold and the ordinances we observe.

I congratulate you also that we belong to a great and growing denomination. I confine my statistics at this point to the United States, as I am more familiar with the facts in that land. In 1870 the population of the United States was about 38,000,000, and the number of Baptists at that time was, in round figures, 1,500,000. The population of that country today is about 70,000,000, but the total membership in Baptist churches, not including seven or eight bodies that are Baptist but not in full membership with us, is nearly 4,000,000. The United States is probably the most rapidly growing country in the world, yet its population will not double since 1870 for perhaps ten years more, but the number of Baptists has already increased more than two and a half times during this period. It is thus seen that Baptists are growing more rapidly than is the population of the country; and Baptists receive almost no growth from immigration, as do Romanists, Lutherans, Episcopalians and Presbyterians. If the stream of immigration were cut off, it is extremely doubtful whether the Roman church would long hold its own in the United States.

BAPTIST STATISTICS.

The net gain of Baptists last year was 110,000; we gain more than 1,000 churches each year, and from 800 to 1,000 ministers each year. We have now, as already stated, nearly four million members of Baptist churches; we have 41,000 church organizations, 28,000 ordained ministers, seven theological seminaries, with \$3,500,000 of property; 27 educational institutions for women, with \$3,500,000 property; 51 seminaries and academies, with \$3,000,000 worth of property, and 36 universities and colleges, with \$16,000,000 worth of property; and we have 130 periodicals devoting their strength to the good of men and the glory of God. There are not fewer than 12,000,000 of the population who are identified with our churches or congregations as members or attendants; while boastful Romanism has only 7,800,000 in its whole constituency. It is thus seen that full one-sixth of the entire population of the United States is either members or adherents of Baptist churches. In 1784 there was but one Baptist in our country to 92 of the population; in 1810, 1 to 42; in 1840, 1 to 30; in 1860, 1 to 22, and today there is 1 to about 17. The value of our church proper is not less than \$80,000,000. We have in recent years made remarkable strides in the direction of higher education, probably no church of any name having given so much money to colleges and universities during the last quarter of a century as have Baptists.

INFANT BAPTISM.

I congratulate you also that as a denomination we make the Word of God our only rule of faith and practice. We consistently adopt the famous dictum of Chillingworth, "The Bible, the whole Bible, and nothing but the Bible, the religion of Protestantism. Historically, Baptists are not Protestants; they never were organically in the Roman church, and so never were obliged to protest as a body against its grievous errors. Doctrinally, they are the most consistent of all Protestants. The moment a church observes infant baptism it leaves the rank of consistent Protestants and passes over into the camp of the Romanists. There is neither a command for nor an example of infant baptism in the New Testament; and when it is observed as a church ordinance the principle of the Roman church, substituting the traditions of men for the teachings of the Bible, is introduced and recognized. Great authorities of many denominations can readily be quoted endorsing this view of the unscripturalness of infant baptism.

Thomas Fuller, the historian, says: "We do freely confess there is neither express precept or precedent in the New Testament for the baptism of infants."

SOME AUTHORITIES.

Luther says: "It cannot be proved by the sacred Scriptures that infant baptism was instituted by Christ, or begun by the first Christians after the Apostles." Neander says: "Baptism was at first administered only to adults, as men were accustomed to conceive of baptism and faith as closely connected. We have all reason for not deriving infant baptism from apostolic institution." Prof. Lange says: "All attempts to make our infant baptism from the New Testament fail. It is totally opposed to the spirit of the apostolic age, and to the fundamental principles of the New Testament." Dr. Hanna says: "Scripture knows nothing of the baptism of infants." Prof. Lange's words are weighty, and should be carefully pondered by Protestant defenders of this Papal emanation, when he further says: "Would the Protestant church fulfil and attain to its final destiny, the baptism of new-born children must of necessity be abolished. It has sunk down to a mere formality, without any meaning for the child."

If we do not accept the dictum of Chillingworth, what authority shall we adopt? Shall we accept the historic creeds as our guide? What men formulated in one century other men can oppose in another century. The manner in which most of the so-called historic creeds were formulated tends greatly to rob them of authority. They were, for the most part, mere compromises between contending parties; they are therefore entitled only to the authority of such compromises. The more we know of the circumstances of their formulation, the less importance are we disposed to attach to their affirmation. Let us examine some of these leading creeds in their order. Strictly speaking neither the so-called Apostles' or Athanasian Creed is Ecumenical; only the Nicene Creed rises to the dignity of that title. It is impossible in this brief review to go into all historical details, but the salient features of these creeds and the manner in which they were prepared can be presented even in an address of this character.

"THE APOSTLES' CREED."

The so-called Apostles' Creed, or Symbolum Apostolicum, is an early summary of the Christian faith with most of whose statements most of us are heartily agreed. We fully appreciate the high praise which Augustine gives it. 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 faith in the Triune God and His revelation, from the life everlasting, 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 never ought to have been called by this name. This title is an example of what has been called a "pious fraud." The most that can be claimed for the title "Apostles' Creed" 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 the 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 confessedly beautiful compend of doctrine.

AN OBJECTIONABLE CLAUSE.

But it would be much better entirely to omit this objectionable clause. It is based on a passage of Scripture whose interpretation is extremely doubtful. It adds nothing valuable to the thoughts expressed by the associated clauses. It is quite unnecessary to state—especially as the Scripture is doubtful on the point—where our Lord was between His crucifixion and resurrection. Thus a few changes and omissions would greatly add to the value of this creed for popular use; and such changes have been made in the Peoples' Worship and Psalter, of which volume your speaker is an editor. Men today are quite as competent to make needed changes in creeds as were those who made other changes through several centuries. We can do our thinking today quite as well as other men did theirs in their day. Each age must do its own thinking. The tendency is to give the truths taught by Christ precise dogmatic statements. Formulations of Christian doctrine are the expression of the Christian consciousness and reason of different periods. The fact makes a judicious study of creeds peculiarly valuable. The early objects of the creeds was to distin-

guish between Christians on the one hand, and Jews and Pagans on the other; but no creed ought ever to be the rule of faith. That position and authority belong to the Bible alone.

THE NICENE CREED.

To the Nicene Creed more serious objections may be offered. The circumstances of its origin tend greatly to lessen the authority of its statements. We know that the controversies regarding the person and work of Christ which began in the second century were prolonged into the third and fourth centuries under various phases of belief, and forms of statement.

INVOLVED IN OBSCURITY.

It is also true that the Nicene Creed does not now appear in its original form; and the history of many of its later clauses is involved in greater obscurity. Whether they are to be attributed to the Niceno-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 the 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 devious rather than unitive. The Nicene Creed did not stop the sway of Arianism even at that 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 today. 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 historical fact. The Nicene Creed, moreover, is in some of its parts too abstruse, too metaphysical and 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 form in which it appears in English properly represents 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 thus thrust between the Christian and his Bible we do not for a moment believe. Whatever tends to debase, or even 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 simple 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 Arians, 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 Council of Constantinople, A. D. 381. Not until the fifth century were the words "and from the Son" (Filioque) added. The Filioque clause was adopted by the Western church at the Council of Toledo in the year 589; but this creed has remained without this clause as the Ecumenical Creed of the Eastern church. 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, or the Symbolum Quicunque, as it is often called, is known as one of the three great creeds of the church, but no intelligent student now supposes that it was prepared by Athanasius, the famous father of the fourth century, whose name it bears. He himself nowhere mentions it in any of the old MSS. of his works; neither do any of his contemporaries or writers immediately following him. Prominent men of the Church of England, while adopting the creed as a whole, strongly disapprove of its damatory clauses. These damatory 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 upon their fellow-men. Rather than be obliged to recite such creeds, many excellent Christian men would become open infidels; indeed, the tendencies of such creeds is to multiply unbelievers. Although received in the Greek, Roman and Anglican churches, this creed is omitted from the service of the Protestant Episcopal church in America, its omission led to very sharp discussion, but the opponents of this creed prevailed. How can men, without doing violence to all their reasoning powers, adopt creeds which

attribute regenerating creeds which affirm of purgatory, and who substantiation or even that several so-called amount of heathen principle of sound Ch taught in Protestan Scriptural Christian Such doctrines a If such teachings we men would rather I superstitious devote necessitates. It is a Anglican churches a the so-called Athan told, mumble the stultify their intellig them. Such creeds a or moral dishonesty, than half believe ma

After the so-called general symbols of the reformation. At the Church of Rome four statement of doctrin previous creeds. Th aggression of Prote Famous Remonstrat synod to settle the church, was passed Westminster Assembl was issued June 12, bly was solemnly op the two Houses of Pa Tuisse. Among the great deliberations son, Lightfoot, Colen greatly predominated terianism is on all th began in 1643, and there was a sitting a these five and a half this is the latest, so t The Confession is a cal doctrines; it is scholarly beauty. learning and piety; ant thought of a gre colored the history practices of several national reform org Confession. In 1643 of Dr. Lightfoot, v giving the choice as t baptism, and in the y their decision, and d legal mode of bap human parliament, a the ultimate author minister Confession, document remarkab scholarly breadth a can speak lightly of confession. Were y strongly oppose the it ought rather to b wisdom and theologi byterian church mus made, rather than Westminster Confess conserve doctrine. not secure unity no what practical grain denomination has no term, and yet, with in America today, it practice than are the and strong creeds." student of current cl it is to go to the Wo practice than to allo creeds which were of promises—to come b

THE LAMBETH CONFESION.

The Lambeth Confession of 1594 is a statement of the church unity. It was adopted by the locally adopted variation to the varied called of God into it analyzes the remarks pate, he inevitably fi apostolic succession present a great ma endorse the Historic successors, and, in th have had successors, the claim to an unbro terms. This church of the church, calli Many in Europe w various names, ap The Protestant Epis and some other chur selves on their apost it was necessary that Lord; the office, the