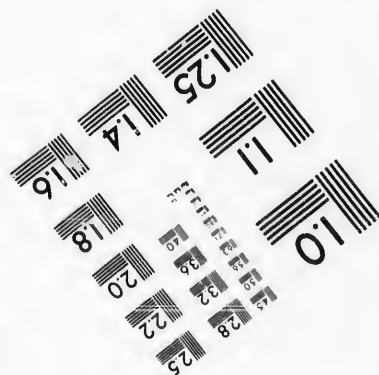
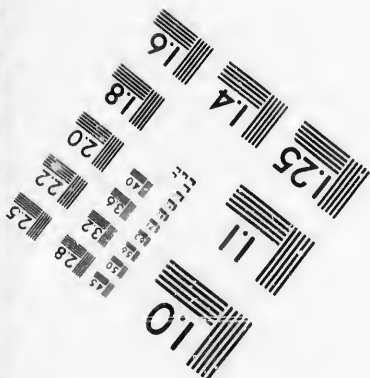
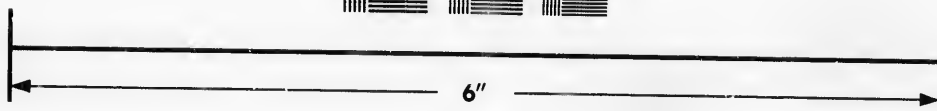
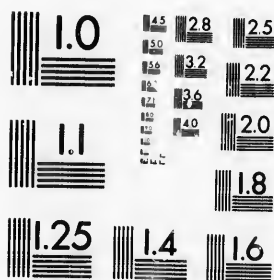


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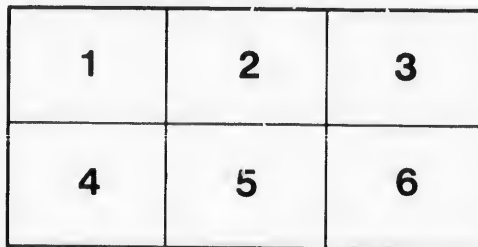
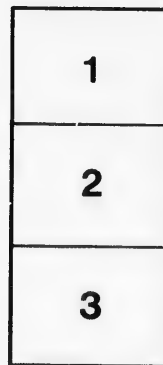
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WHO MAY BE COMMUNICANTS

— IN THE —

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH?

BEING THE SUBSTANCE OF

* A * Sermon *

PREACHED IN ST. ANDREW'S CHURCH, TORONTO.

ON SUNDAY, OCTOBER 23rd, 1887

— BY —

REV. D. J. MACDONNELL, B.D.

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Who may be Communicants in the Presbyterian Church?

Being the substance of a Sermon preached in St. Andrew's
Church, Toronto, on

Sunday, 23rd October, 1887,

BY THE MINISTER,

REV. D. J. MACDONNELL, B.D.

ACTS XVI. 31—"Believe on the Lord Jesus, and thou shalt be saved,
thou and thy house."

JOHN XIV. 21—"He that hath My commandments and keepeth them,
he it is that loveth Me."

What are the conditions of admission to full communion in the Presbyterian Church? Who may, and who may not, be communicants? These are questions which, in effect, I am often asked. Let me try to answer them plainly.

In the first place, let it be distinctly understood that the terms of admission to the Presbyterian Church ought not to be in any respect different from the terms of admission to any other branch of the Church of Jesus Christ. Every member of the Presbyterian Church is professedly a member of the Church of Christ; conversely, any member of the Church of Christ may be a

member of the Presbyterian Church. The question, therefore, with which I am dealing is, in reality, this: *What are the terms of admission to the Church of Jesus Christ?*

Let me give the answer under two heads:

I. In respect to *Creed*.

II. In respect to *Life*.

I. What are the terms of admission to the Church in respect to Creed? What must a man, or a child, believe in order to be a Church member in full communion? * Must he accept the Westminster Confession of Faith? or the Shorter Catechism? or the Apostles' Creed?

It may surprise some persons to be told that the candidate for membership in the Presbyterian Church is not required by any law of the Church to give his assent to any one of these statements of Divine truth. Assent to the Confession of Faith is required of office-bearers in the Church, but not of private members. The children of the Presbyterian Church are taught the Shorter Catechism, and must have their thinking largely moulded by that marvellous compendium of theology; but they are not required, when coming to the Lord's Table, to declare their acceptance of the teachings of the Catechism. Nor are they required to accept the Apostles' Creed. Individual Ministers or Sessions may ask assent to one or other of these documents, or to some other statement of truth; but no such assent is *prescribed* by the law of the Church. In the "Rules and Forms of Procedure" I find the following statement under the head "The Congregation:" "The members of a Congre-

* Every baptized child is, of course, a member of the Church, though not "in full communion."

gation entitled to all Church privileges are those who, upon profession of faith in Christ and obedience to Him, have been received by the Session into full communion." (Sec. 199). The duty of the Session in regard to applicants for admission to full communion is thus dealt with in the same book (Sec. 13): "The application" [*i.e.* to be received into full communion] "is then reported to the Session, and, when satisfied of the applicant's knowledge of Divine truth and of his Christian character and deportment, the Session receives him in such manner as may be deemed for edification."

Usage, I presume, varies very much. What is practically aimed at is assent to the "fundamentals" of the Christian faith. But what *are* the "fundamentals?" What is included under "faith in Christ, and obedience to Him?" For example, is it imperative that a candidate for admission to full communion in the Church should believe in the doctrine of the Trinity as traditionally set forth in the Nicene or the Athanasian Creed, or in the Westminster Confession? or that he should believe in the theory of the Atonement that prevails in the Church? or in the opinions handed down from the fathers concerning future punishment? To each of these questions I advisedly answer, No. I cite such questions as these boldly, rather than questions about the six days of creation, or about predestination, or final perseverance, because the former are the questions about which thoughtful men are troubled now-a-days.

Is it of no consequence, then, what a man believes about the points referred to? May he think what he pleases? Far from it. It is of great moment that he should think truly, under the guidance of the Spirit of

truth Himself, concerning such matters. Moreover, he will be a foolish man if he throw away as worthless the results of the thought of past generations. And, yet, it remains true that he is not bound by any traditional interpretations of, or deductions from, the Word of God, but is at liberty to go afresh to the fountain and drink for himself.

It may be granted, for instance, to be essential that a Christian man should believe in God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit; but it does not follow that he accepts all the statements of the Nicene Creed, or of the Athanasian, regarding these distinctions in the divine nature.

So, again, it may be held to be essential that he should believe in THE ATONEMENT of Jesus Christ, who "died for our sins according to the Scriptures," "who gave Himself for us," "who His own self bare our sins in His own body upon the tree;" but not that he should accept the theory of Anselm, or of Calvin, or of Wesley, concerning the nature of the sufferings of Christ and the way in which reconciliation to God is thereby secured. If, when he finds it stated in the Shorter Catechism that Christ offered up Himself "a sacrifice to satisfy Divine justice," he should wish to add that the offering was intended to satisfy Divine love not less than Divine justice, he will not be cast out as a heretic.

So, again, it may be regarded as essential that he should believe in the teaching of Christ as to "the eternal fire, prepared for the devil and his angels," into which the wicked shall "depart;" but it does not follow that he accepts mediæval beliefs about the tortures of the damned, or that he does not believe that there is light yet to be got from God's Word on this tremendous theme.

“Faith in Christ and obedience to Him.” These words evidently go down to the fundamentals. They echo the words of our two texts. What, then, is “faith in Christ?” What is meant by the reply of Paul and Silas to the jailer: “Believe on the Lord Jesus”?

These words clearly imply some belief *about* Jesus. We must believe some things *about* Him before we can believe *on* Him. Nay, we must believe great things about Him before we can believe on Him in the sense of the New Testament writers—before, that is, we can yield Him the absolute trust and the uncompromising obedience which He demands.

On the other hand, faith *in* Christ is consistent with much misbelief or imperfection of belief *about* Him. The little child of a year old believes in his mother and holds out his arms to her trustfully as he would not to a stranger: but his belief about her must be very embryonic. Many a man is a loyal subject of Britain who knows little of her history, and who could not pass an examination on the British Constitution. There are men ready to die for their country who could not explain the difference between the system of government in Britain and that in the United States. So with loyalty to Christ. Men may be ready to obey His least commandment—willing to follow Him whithersoever He leads—and yet may be sorely puzzled about the mystery of His Person.

What is to be done in the case of such persons? Are they to be excluded from Church fellowship until they can pronounce the Shibboleth of the creeds? The Church is tolerant of much imperfection in the conduct of her members provided only “the root of the matter” is in them. Is not the author of “Ecce Homo” right when he maintains that “we ought to be just as tolerant

"of an imperfect creed as we are of an imperfect prac-
 "tice? Everything which can be urged in excuse for
 "the latter may also be pleaded for the former. If the
 "way to Christian action is beset by corrupt habits and
 "misleading passions, the path to Christian truth is
 "overgrown with prejudices and strewn with fallen
 "theories and rotting systems which hide it from our
 "view. It is quite as hard to think rightly as it is to
 "act rightly, or even to feel rightly. And, as all allow that
 "an error is a less culpable thing than a crime or a
 "vicious passion, it is monstrous that it should be more
 "severely punished; it is monstrous that Christ, who
 "was called the friend of publicans and sinners,
 "should be represented as the pitiless enemy of bewil-
 "dered seekers of truth. How could men have been
 "guilty of such an inconsistency? By speaking of what
 "they do not understand. * * * * * To the world at
 "large it seems quite easy to find truth, and inexcusable
 "to miss it. And no wonder! For by finding truth
 "they mean only learning by rote the maxims current
 "around them.

* * * * *

"Thus Christian belief is fully as hard a thing as
 "Christian practice. It is intrinsically as hard, and
 "those who do not perceive the difficulty of it under-
 "stand it just so much less than those who do. Christ's
 "first followers, as we have seen, were far from possess-
 "ing the full Christian belief. Not till long after His
 "departure did they arrive at those conclusions which
 "are now regarded as constituting Christian theology.

* * * * *

"But when it is once acknowledged that to attain
 "a full and firm belief in Christ's theology is hard, then

“it follows at once that a man may be a Christian without it. * * * * Do we find Him” (*i.e.* Christ) “frequently examining His followers in their creed, and rejecting one as a sceptic and another as an infidel? Sceptics they were all, so long as He was among them, a society of doubters, attaining to faith only at intervals, and then falling back again into uncertainty. And from their Master they received reproofs for this, but reproofs tenderly expressed; not dry threats nor cold dismissal. Assuredly those who represent Christ as presenting to men an abstruse theology, and saying to them peremptorily, ‘Believe or be damned,’ have the coarsest conception of the Saviour of the world. He will reject, He tells us, those who refuse to clothe the naked or tend the sick, those whose lamps have gone out, those who have buried their talents, not those whose minds are poorly furnished with theological knowledge.”—*Ecce Homo*, pp. 82, 83, 84, 90, 91.

These are true words. It is not a matter of little moment what a man believes about the person of Christ; it is his duty to seek to know the truth concerning this great subject, and it is the duty of the teachers in the Church to “expound unto him the way of God more carefully” on this theme; but it is possible for him to entertain mistaken notions regarding it and yet to have true faith in Jesus Christ. There are men who deny in terms the Deity of Christ, who yet bow before Him with more absolute reverence and submission than some of those who in terms acknowledge His Deity. Here is a man who says, ‘Jesus Christ is God, and I worship Him;’ and yet he strives for riches as keenly, and regards his brother’s rights as little, as if Jesus had never said, “Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon the earth,” and as

if His Apostle had never written, "Not looking each of you to his own things, but each of you also to the things of others." Yonder is a man who says, 'I accept Jesus as my Saviour and my Lord: but I cannot tell whether he is equal to the Father or not;' but the man's whole life is a following of the precepts of Jesus as to purity, unworldliness, gentleness, self-forgetfulness, love to God and man. Which of these two men would Jesus welcome as His disciple? Can it be doubted that He would say of the latter as He said of the man whom the disciples forbade to cast out devils because he "followed not" them: "Forbid him not; for there is no man which shall do" these things "in My name, and be able quickly to speak evil of Me"?

True faith in Jesus Christ is consistent with much misbelief about His person. We have read in the Sunday School lesson for to-day of a woman touching the hem of Christ's robe under the impression that she would get some good from this contact. 'Superstition!' we say; and so it was: yet there was true faith in that woman's heart. She knew her sore need of healing, and she believed in the power of Jesus to heal; and His love met her faith with a ready response. So, doubtless, there is many a poor soul repeating *Pater Nosters* and counting beads in a way that provokes a pitying smile, who yet has some germ of true faith in the unseen Lord whose image is before her; and these uninstructed, yet genuine, believers will go into the kingdom of heaven before some self-complacent and self-indulgent Protestants who confound knowledge of theology with faith in Jesus Christ.

"Faith in Christ and obedience to Him." The only faith in Jesus that is worth anything is faith that

obeys—"faith working through love" "He that hath My commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me." The loyal subject is the one who springs to arms at his country's bidding—not waiting to settle all disputed questions of political science. The true Christian is the man who obeys Christ without waiting to solve all the problems of theology. He has warrant for hoping that, in the very path of obedience, there will come fuller light as to "who" the "Son of Man" is. "If any man willeth to do His will, he shall know of the teaching." To the warm-hearted, sceptical Thomas, the Resurrection of Jesus seemed too great a fact to be accepted on any testimony without the evidence of his own senses; but he had been ready to "die with" his beloved Friend, and when the gracious Master offered him the proof he sought, his obedient soul cried out, "My Lord and my God." There are not a few in our day to whom the Deity of Christ seems too great a truth to be believed, whose hearts would nevertheless bound with a joy unintelligible to those who have never wrestled with doubts, if it could only be made clear to them that that doctrine is not a mere speculation of theologians, but the statement of a blessed reality.

"Believe on the Lord Jesus, and thou shalt be saved." What, then, is His relation to me? In what respect am I to believe on Him? The word "saved" indicates that I am to believe in Him as a *Saviour*. I believe in my physician as a healer: I may not understand his method of treatment, but I do his bidding in the matter of medicine. I believe in my friend as a friend—one whom I can trust: I may not understand his theological or scientific opinions, but I am quite sure that he will

stand by me in the time of trial—that he will prove himself a friend in need. Jesus is Saviour: “He shall save His people from their sins:” I am to believe in Him as Saviour. When He says to me, “This is My blood of the covenant, which is shed for many unto remission of sins;” “Be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven,” I am to take Him at His word, just as I do my physician, when he says, ‘Use this medicine, and you will be well to-morrow.’ When He says, “Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest,” “Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me,” I am to come and take His yoke—the yoke of submission to the Father’s will, which He asks me to bear side by side with Himself, and learn the blessed lesson of obedience. When He says, “I am the Bread of Life,” “The bread that I will give is My flesh for the life of the world,” “He that eateth Me, he also shall live because of Me,” I am to appropriate Him and feed on Him, by thought and love and trust and obedience, for the nourishment of my spirit’s life, just as I feed on the daily bread which the Father gives for my bodily life.

I may ask, ‘What has Jesus done for me that I should believe in Him as my Saviour?’ Let us look at some of the answers given in the New Testament to this question.

Hear Paul answer it: “Who, being in the form of God, counted it not a prize to be on an equality with God, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men; and, being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, becoming obedient even unto death, yea, the death of the cross. Wherefore also God highly exalted Him, and gave unto Him

the name which is above every name ; that in the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven and things on earth, and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." (Phil. II. 6-11.)

Or listen to the glowing sentence into which he condenses the whole redeeming work of Christ: "Who loved me, and gave Himself up for me." (Gal. II. 20.)

Hear Peter answer the question: "Who His own self bare our sins in His own body upon the tree, that we, having died unto sins, might live unto righteousness."—(1 Peter II. 24.)

Hear John answer it: "Herein was the love of God manifested in us" (*i.e.* in our case) "that God hath sent His only begotten Son into the world that we might live through Him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins."

Paul, Peter and John agree entirely as to the ground on which the claims of Jesus rest. He is the "only begotten Son," who was "in the form of God," who "emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant," who "gave Himself up for me," who "bare our sins," who is "the propitiation for our sins." Here is a personality that is unique ; here is One who occupies a unique relation to God, and man, and sin. He is "the Way;" shall we not "come" by Him unto the Father? He is "the Truth;" shall we not "learn" Him, and be "taught in Him, as truth is in Jesus"—all truth embodied in Him, all principles of true living contained in Him? He is "the Life;" shall we not "arise from the dead" and come to Him that we "may have life?" Shall we not realize in our experience His great word, "I came that they

may have life, and may have it abundantly?" He is "the True Vine;" shall we not cling to Him, as the branch to the vine-stock, that, sharing His life, as the branch shares the sap that flows through the stem, we may grow and bear fruit? He is "the Resurrection;" shall we not believe in Him, that we may "never die?" He is "the First, and the Last, and the Living One," "alive for evermore:" shall we not with untroubled hearts yield ourselves to His keeping, who has the keys of Hades and of death, who will open the way for us to pass through, into the very presence of God?

II.—In respect to *Life*. What are the conditions, as regards conduct, of becoming a communicant in the Church?

There is an idea generally prevalent that a man should not "join the Church" without giving up a good many things which are regarded as inconsistent with a profession of religion. It is held that the professing Christian must not only give up whatever is sinful, but also refrain from many things that are lawful for other people. He must "come out and be separate" from the world, and especially from what are called "worldly" amusements and indulgences. The lists of such amusements and indulgences vary in length according to the views, prejudices and upbringing of those who make them. Dancing, card-playing, theatre-going, billiards, the use of tobacco, the drinking of wine and spirits, are often found among the proscribed pleasures.

Now, there is no manner of doubt that Christ calls on His followers to "give up" much. "If thy right hand causeth thee to stumble, cut it off and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish and not thy whole body go into

hell." Whatever hinders the spiritual life—whatever threatens the destruction of faith and love and purity and hope and joy in the Lord—must be given up at any cost. The real trouble is that, as a rule, the idea of "giving up" does not go nearly far enough. "If any man will come after Me, let him *deny himself*, and take up his cross and follow Me." That is the far-reaching demand of Jesus Christ. It is not the giving up of *things*, but the giving up of *self*, that He requires. A man may give up the use of tobacco or wine, and yet may be far enough from being a true Christian—may retain "self" in the form of a love of money, for example, that eats his soul like a canker. A man may give up the card-table or the theatre merely because he has grown tired of these forms of recreation, and may retain "self" in the form of a temper that makes his home a bear-garden, and a tongue "full of deadly poison." The attempt to draw a clear line between amusements that are lawful for Church members and amusements that are not lawful is generally useless, and is often mischievous. The effect is, on the one hand, to alienate not a few true disciples of Jesus who are indulging, with the clear approval of their own consciences, in some form of forbidden recreation: and, on the other hand, to lull to sleep, in fancied security, many persons who do not reflect that the chief danger arises from excessive indulgence in what is in itself lawful and right.

The real question is, Have you given *yourself* up to the Lord? Then you will eat, or drink, or dance, or play, or smoke, "to the glory of God:" or, if you cannot do so, you will give these things up. If you find that any one of them cannot be fitted into its place in the service of Christ, in the strengthening of your body, or the

refreshing of your mind, or the gladdening of your heart, so that you may be the better fitted for His service, you must let it go. Moreover, you will do well to take the counsel of wise Christian friends as to your choice of amusements, and listen to what they may have to say from their own experience as to the injurious tendencies of certain forms of recreation, rather than follow heedlessly the lead of the giddy and worldly.

The Presbyterian Church wisely makes no laws on these matters, though it sometimes gives advice. What it seeks—what Christ seeks—is to have men “renewed in the spirit of” their “mind,” and then trained to clearer Christian discernment and more fervent Christian love. The life of the Christian is not to be one of mere negations, but a gloriously positive, rich full, blessed life. The New Testament is full of striking antitheses, in which the positive side of life is set over against the negative. The negative side is thus expressed, “Denying ungodliness and worldly lusts;” it is immediately followed by the positive, “We should live soberly and righteously and godly in this present world.” The prohibition, “Make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof,” is closely connected with the injunction, “But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ.” “Ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh,” writes St. Paul. If you ask, How is this to be accomplished? he gives the answer in the same verse, “Walk by the Spirit.” He warns against drunkenness: “Be not drunken with wine, wherein is riot;” and then, knowing the uselessness of mere prohibitions for the conquering of a vicious habit, he adds, “but be filled with the Spirit.” If He forbids “foolish talking or jesting, which are not befitting,” he tells how the

tongue is to be actively employed, "but rather giving of thanks." He finds the antidote to the excesses of liberty in the law of love: "Only use not your freedom for an occasion to the flesh, but through love be servants one to another." He gives an ugly catalogue of "the works of the flesh:" "Fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousies, wraths, factions, divisions, heresies, envyings, drunkenness, revellings, and such like;" but he exhibits by way of contrast a beautiful bunch of heavenly grapes which are "the fruit of the Spirit:" "Love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, temperance." He states in one terse sentence the general principle of which he gives so many illustrations: "Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good."

Such is Christian life—a gloriously positive, strong, full life, calling into play all our powers in the service of Him who makes us "free indeed." "If ye know these things, blessed are ye if ye do them." "Whatever ye do, in word or in deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus."

Let a man thus believe in Jesus as his Saviour from sin and thus obey Him as the Lord of his spirit, and the Church of Jesus Christ ought to welcome him into its ranks as a true disciple.

