

Debunking The Declaratory Statement #4

The fourth article in the Declaratory Statement. is in the following terms:

“That, while all who are saved are saved through the mediation of Christ, and by the grace of His Holy Spirit who worketh when and where and how He pleaseth; and while the duty of sending the gospel, the ordinary means of salvation, to the heathen who are sunk in a state of sin and misery and perishing for lack of knowledge is clear and imperative: the Church does not require the acceptance of her Standards in a sense which might imply that any who die in infancy are lost; nor does she bind those who accept these Standards to hold that God never in any case saves without the use of the ordinary means.”

This article is intended to qualify what is said in the Confession regarding the salvation of infants and of the heathen.

On the first of these subjects the Confession says “Elect infants, dying in infancy, are regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit.” This is just in effect saying that no one, conceived in sin, and born in iniquity, can be saved unless elected, redeemed, and regenerated. The authors of the Confession did not pretend to know from God's Word that all who die in infancy are elected, and saved, and they cared not for information, on such a subject, derived from any other source; nor do they say that any of them are lost. They have gone, in their statement on this subject, just so far as Scripture light availed for their guidance. And why should there be an attempt made, or permission given, to go further. Presumption alone can account for the anxiety to advance. in the Declaratory Statement, liberty to hold that all infants are saved is reserved, and this may be believed without thinking of them as elected, redeemed, and regenerated. This is the difference, and it is very considerable, between He Confession and the Statement: but it naturally follows from the drift of the articles going before.

The declaration, regarding the prospects of the heathen, is not only different from that of the Confession, but is directly opposed to it. The gospel is said to be “the ordinary means of salvation,” and it is declared that the Church does not “bind those who accept these Standards to hold, that God never in any case saves without the use of the ordinary means.” This cannot refer to infants and to idiots. It refers only to the heathen, and the Statement reserves liberty to believe that these can be saved without the gospel. Here, at any rate, there is an utter repudiation of Confessional teaching to be allowed within the United Presbyterian Church. For the Confession teaches that “men not professing the Christian religion cannot be saved in any other way, be they ever so diligent in framing their lives according to the light of nature and the law of that religion they do profess, and to assert and maintain that they may,” as is done in the Declaratory statement “IS VERY PERNICIOUS AND TO BE DETESTED.” And thus saith the Lord, “neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven, given among men, whereby we must be saved.” The Lord in His Word allows no hope of the salvation of any who call not on the name of the Lord - and He asks - “How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher and how shall they preach except they be sent?” There is no conclusion, therefore, to which we can come, but that which is set before us in the Scripture statement “Where there is no vision the people perish.” This may prove to be too strong for the sickly appetite of that weak sentimentalism which is the flabby substitute for the robust Scriptural religion of other days. But the paltry prattle of the Statement should go for nothing in ears accustomed to the clear trumpeting of the Confession, and the Divine utterances of Scripture.

In the fifth and sixth articles of the Statement, the attempt is made to assign to Voluntaryism the place of a term of communion in the United Presbyterian Church. The former of these contains the old bounce about the Confession teaching, or being supposed to teach, “compulsory or persecuting and intolerant principles in religion,” words at one time big because inflated, but which have become so trite and worn that except in the mouths of Voluntaries, they have shrunk into despicable littleness. But, taking the two articles together, they form a lock with which at last all who are not voluntaries have the door of access to the membership and offices of the United Presbyterian Church closed against them. We can no longer hear the argument so often used in the interests of union - that Voluntaryism is not a term of communion in the United Presbyterian Church.

But the attempt to invalidate the Confession reaches its climax in the last article, which declares that “liberty of opinion is allowed on such points in the Standards not entering into the substance of the faith.” And this liberty is to be guarded from abuse by the Church only in so far as this may be required in order to preserve “its unity and peace.” Who is to be judge of what does or does not “enter into the substance of the faith”? Is it the errant brother who desires to break through the Confession fence, or is it the Church? If the former. then what is the advantage of subscribing or having a confession? Every man may frame his own standard and there can then be no common ground to stand on. Or is it the Church? No, for the Church's function is limited to guarding the peace and unity of the Church. If these are not endangered, she has nothing to do in relation to any kind or degree of heresy. With faith and purity she need not concern herself, if she can only keep the household together in peace. Can anything be more humiliating than this as the chosen position of a Church! The specimen given, of things in the Confession, about which a difference of opinion is allowed, is “the interpretation of the “six days” in the Mosaic account of the creation.” What a strange sample this to choose! What objection can be taken to what is said of the six days in the Confession, that may not equally be adduced against the terms of the fourth commandment? If the objection was taken to the explanation of the word “create” given in the Confession, the statement would have been differently phrased. But if the fourth commandment and Hebrew xi 3 are placed together we rather think that the Westminster divines had good scripture ground for all they have said while those who are inclined to

differ from them, can find no basis for their faith except in the ever shifting deductions of geology.

We refrain from a closer examination of the spiritual condition of the United Presbyterian Church. We have no encouragement to attempt it. The exposure given, by her leading divines, of her theological tendencies, allows no hope of finding any very definite teaching in her pulpits, any very appreciable spiritual feeling among her people, any faithfulness in her discipline or any power to affect the public feeling except through politics unless it be in the way of helping the people of Scotland to forget the scriptural theology, and the fruitful godliness of other and better days.

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