

Debunking The Declaratory Statement

A series of articles by Rev. John Kennedy of Dingwall on the "Declaratory Statement". This series appeared in The Presbyterian Standard, the excellent Reformed magazine produced by the James Begg Society (JBS) in England. The JBS is committed to the propagation and promotion of genuine historic Presbyterianism in the UK.

Before we begin the first article, we would make two introductory comments. Firstly, we note that these articles are still relevant in our Australian context; for Kennedy is addressing the errors of the "Declaratory Statement" which the Presbyterian Church of Australia (PCA), among others, drape over the Westminster Confession. Secondly, it is our duty as Reformed believers to be aware of the serious doctrinal differences that stand between the EPC and the PCA. This is important for us, that we might not be confused and gloss over fundamental doctrinal differences, as the false ecumenical movement insists we should do. It is also important that we might be prepared and equipped to speak a word of admonition when called to do so in God's good providence. So that we might have the issues clearly before us, we now quote the PCA's "Declaratory Statement" in its entirety. EDBasis Of Union For The Presbyterian Church Of Australia

- The Supreme Standard of the united church shall be the Word of God contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments.

- The Subordinate Standard of the united church shall be the Westminster Confession of Faith, read in the light of the following declaratory statement (Ed).Declaratory StatementRedemption

That in regard to the doctrine of redemption as taught in the subordinate standard, and in consistency therewith, the love of God to all mankind, His gift of His Son to be the propitiation for the sins of the whole world, and the free offer of salvation to men without distinction on the ground of Christ's all-sufficient sacrifice, are regarded by this Church as vital to the Christian faith. And inasmuch as the Christian faith rests upon, and the Christian consciousness takes hold of certain objective supernatural historic facts, especially the Incarnation, the atoning Life and Death, and the Resurrection and Ascension of our Lord, and His bestowment of His Holy Spirit, this Church regards those whom it admits to the office of the Holy Ministry as pledged to give a chief place in their teaching to these cardinal facts, and to the message of redemption and reconciliation implied and manifested in them. God's Eternal Decree

That the doctrine of God's eternal decree, including the doctrine of election to eternal life, is held as defined in the Confession of Faith, Chapter III, Section 1., where it is expressly stated that according to the doctrine, "neither is God author of sin, nor is violence offered to the will of the creature, nor is the liberty of contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established"; and further, that the said doctrine is held in connection and harmony with the truth - that God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance, that He has provided a salvation sufficient for all, and adapted to all, and offered to all in the Gospel, and that every hearer of the Gospel is responsible for his dealing with the free and unrestricted offer of eternal life. Infants, and those without pale of ordinary means

That while none are saved except through the mediation of Christ, and by the grace of the Holy Spirit, Who worketh when and where and how it pleaseth Him; while the duty of sending the Gospel to the heathen who are sunk in ignorance, sin, and misery is imperative; and while the outward and ordinary means of salvation for those capable of being called by the Word are the ordinances of the Gospel, in accepting the subordinate standard it is not required to be held that any who die in infancy are lost, or that God may not extend His grace to any who are without the pale of ordinary means, as it may seem good in His sight. Man's Fallen Nature

That in holding and teaching, according to the Confession of Faith, the corruption of man's nature as fallen, this Church also maintains that there remain tokens of man's greatness as created in the image of God, that he possesses a knowledge of God and of duty - that he is responsible for compliance with the moral law and the call of the Gospel, and that, although unable without the aid of the Holy Spirit to return to God unto salvation, he is yet capable of affections and actions which of themselves are virtuous and praiseworthy. Liberty of Opinion

That liberty of opinion is allowed on matters in the subordinate standard not essential to the doctrine therein taught, the Church guarding against the abuse of this liberty to the injury of its unity and peace. Civil Magistrate

That with regard to the doctrine of the civil magistrate and his authority and duty in the sphere of religion, as taught in the subordinate standard the Church holds that the Lord Jesus Christ is the only King and Head of the Church, "and head over all things to the Church, which is His body." It disclaims, accordingly, intolerant or persecuting principles and does not consider its office-bearers, in subscribing the Confession, as committed to any principle inconsistent with the liberty of conscience and the right of private judgment, declaring in the words of the Confession, that "God alone is Lord of the conscience."

This "Declaratory Act" of the PCA has its origins in Scotland with the Declaratory Act of 1892. This "Act" was the result of the breakaway of the Free Presbyterian Church from the Free Church of Scotland. Kennedy's articles were written against the proposed "Declaratory Statement" of the United Presbyterian Church, which was embraced within the union, in 1900, between the Free Church of Scotland with the UPC. Thus, when the church seeks unity through compromise the faithful are forced to separate in order to maintain the truth. Compromise might tolerate error but it has no place for the

faithful.

The reader will find that Kennedy's total repudiation of the "Declaratory Statement" is shared by the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Australia. Kennedy of Dingwall's Answer To "The Declaratory Statement"

"We are now to look in on the state of religion in each of the three great Presbyterian Churches of Scotland. Of course we do not pretend to have an intimate acquaintance with the spiritual condition of the ministry and membership of two of these Churches. But we know enough of the condition of each of them, and of the tendency of religious opinion, as indicated in publications which these Churches either avow or tolerate to enable us to form some opinion regarding them. We choose to begin with the United Presbyterian Church, and we are not anxious to give any reason for doing so.

It was within a body, incorporated with, and represented by, that Church, the first deviation from the views of the fathers, as to the relation between Church and State, appeared. If that new light was not from heaven, we might expect two results to follow from its introduction - the secularising of the tone of feeling, and the extension, to other departments, of divergence from the good old ways. And these two results have actually followed. Voluntaryism (the view that there ought to be no established church, and that the only valid relationship between church and state is that there should be no relationship [Ed]) has proved to be a phase of political feeling, exercising a chilling influence on the spiritual life of the Church, and the decline of the power of godliness which resulted from this, has been followed by a departure of religious opinion from the dogmatic position of the standards. This has lately very manifestly appeared. It might have been seen at an earlier stage, in the mode in which charges of heresy were dealt with; but in the recent proposal to attach to the Confession of Faith a Declaratory Statement in which its distinctive Calvinism is utterly repudiated, and United Presbyterian subscribers of the Confession are allowed liberty to believe as much or as little of it as they are disposed, this is so apparent that it can no longer be hidden. The Church herself proclaims the declension, and calls upon all Christendom to observe it. The proposed Declaratory Statement we have examined with some care, and we hesitate not to affirm, that it is utterly inconsistent with the Confession, yea, that it is, to a considerable extent, quite contradictory of its teaching; and that the honest course, on the part of those who propose to attach this disreputable thing to our grand old Confession, would be, to substitute for the Confession a standard entirely new.

The first Declaration of the Statement is in these terms:-

"That in regard to the doctrine of Redemption, as taught in the Standards, and in consistency therewith, the love of God to all mankind, His gift of His Son to be the propitiation for the sins of the whole world, and the free offer of salvation to men without distinction on the ground of Christ's perfect sacrifice, are matters which have been, and continue to be, regarded by this Church as vital in the system of gospel truth, and to which she desires to give special prominence."

Here is at the outset a statement which is shamefully untrue. The doctrine of universal love and that of universal atonement are not consistent with the doctrine of redemption as taught in the Standards. The proof of this is not difficult. This much, at any rate, no one can dispute - that there is no statement in the whole Confession of Faith, or in either of the Catechisms, in which such doctrines are directly taught. No one will attempt to produce any such statement. But we confidently challenge the production of any statement out of these documents from which such doctrines can be logically inferred. The only one, in all the Confession, that can be referred to in this connection, is the statement that God, "freely offereth unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ." Men may expose their ignorance by insisting that a universal offer, or, rather, an offer to all who hear the gospel - for a universal offer is as thorough a figment as universal love - must imply universal love and universal atonement, but this is a very different thing from proving their assumption. At any rate, it can be very easily shown, that the Westminster divines did not intend to permit any such inference to be drawn from any of their statements. For if what is said of the free offer in the Confession is not contradicted by the Declaratory Statement, there is much besides in the confessional doctrine of Redemption that is utterly inconsistent with it. For -

- It can be shown that the only love and grace referred to in the Confession, are limited to a peculiar people.
- That this peculiar love accounts for election, defines the bearing of the purpose of salvation, and determines the destination of provided grace.
- That in the exercise of this love in providing salvation God passed by all who were not elected.
- That it was in pursuance of the purpose of electing love God gave His Son, as His Lamb, to be an offering for sin.
- That the designed result of the Son's mediation and death was the fulfilment of the purpose of God's electing love.
- That the atonement effected the redemption by price of all for whom it was offered. And,
- That to all, for whom Christ died, the Holy Ghost shall effectually apply the redemption purchased for them.

Now, if these propositions can be shown to present the teaching of the Confession, no more can be required in order to prove how utterly false is the statement that the doctrines, of universal love and of universal atonement are not inconsistent with the teaching of the Confession.

As a basis for the first of these propositions it is sufficient to refer to chap. iii. 3-5 of the Confession. The Scripture proofs appended sufficiently show what the Westminster divines intended to teach in these words, "By the decree of God, for the manifestation of His glory, some men and angels are predestinated unto everlasting life, and others fore-ordained to everlasting death." But it is unnecessary to dwell on this proposition by itself, because all that it implies flows into those which follow.

To trace election to love is to make it impossible to conceive of a relation of love between God and those not elected. To trace the purpose of salvation to love is to make it impossible to conceive of those as loved on whom that purpose does not bear. To trace to love the provision made for the fulfilment of that purpose is to make it impossible to conceive of those as loved on whom the purpose does not take effect. But election is traced to love in chap iii. 5. And so in chap. iii. 6 is the provision for the fulfilment of the purpose bearing on the elect. Love, according to the Confession, accounts for the election; election defines the bearing of the purpose, and the purpose requires, and determines the destination of, the provision. The following extracts from the Confession make this abundantly plain. "Those of mankind that are predestinated unto life, God, before the foundation of the world was laid according to His eternal and immutable purpose, and the secret counsel and good pleasure of His will hath chosen in Christ unto everlasting glory, and of His mere free grace and love." And "as God hath appointed the elect unto glory, so hath He, by the eternal and most free purpose of His will, foreordained all the means thereunto. Wherefore, they who are elected being fallen in Adam, are redeemed by Christ; are effectually called unto faith in Christ by His Spirit working in due season; are justified, adopted, sanctified, and kept by His power through faith unto salvation. Neither are any other redeemed by Christ, effectually called, justified, adopted, sanctified, and saved, but the elect only." III.

Election, the purpose, and the provision of salvation, are, according to the Confession, the only immanent exercises of Divine love which have been revealed to us, and the only outcome of that love is in redemption and salvation. Only in such an outflow did Divine love ever bear on men. How, then, apart from these expressions of it, can the existence of Divine love be known? And the Confession expressly says that "the rest of mankind, God was pleased, according to the unsearchable counsel of His own will, whereby he extendeth or withholdeth mercy as He pleaseth, for the glory of His sovereign power over His creatures, to pass by, and to ordain them to dishonour and wrath for their sin, to the praise of His glorious justice." IV.

To electing love the Confession, in chap viii. 1, traces the gift of the Son to be mediator. "It pleased God," it says, "in His eternal purpose to choose and ordain the Lord Jesus, His only begotten Son, to be the Mediator between God and man; the Prophet, Priest, and King; the Head and Saviour of His Church; the Heir of all things; and Judge of the world; unto whom He did from all eternity give a people to be His seed, and to be by Him in time redeemed, called, justified, sanctified, and glorified." V.

That the designed result of the Son's mediation and death was the fulfilment of the purpose of God's electing love, is expressly stated in the closing words of the passage which has just been quoted (chap. viii. 1). VI.

That the atonement procured the redemption of all for whom it was offered, is plainly stated in chap. viii 5. "The Lord Jesus, by His perfect obedience and sacrifice of Himself, which He through the Eternal Spirit once offered up unto God, hath fully satisfied the justice of the Father, and purchased not only reconciliation, but an everlasting inheritance in the kingdom of heaven for all those whom the Father hath given unto Him." VII.

That, to all for whom redemption was purchased by Christ, redemption shall be applied by the Holy Ghost, is expressly stated in chap. viii. 8. "To all those for whom Christ hath purchased redemption He doth certainly and effectually apply and communicate the same." VIII.

Such is the view given us in the Confession of the love of God, and of the reference of the atonement of Christ. It refers to no other love of God bearing on men than that which is expressed in redemption and salvation. To the Westminster divines a love that was not an unfailling fountain of salvation, was something quite outside the range of their thinking. But the men who propose to retain the Confession of Faith as a standard, and to append to it the Declaratory Statement, must conceive of two loves - the only love of which the Confession speaks, and another which is called "the love of God to all mankind." What that other love is impossible to tell. It is not, at any rate, a love that moved God either to purpose, or to provide for, the salvation of its objects. It cannot, therefore, be called saving love. But surely no one can look with a single eye over the Word of God and profess to find there any Divine love, to sinful men, but that which is expressed in the salvation of those who are its objects. It is no other love which is revealed in the words - "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." In this passage the love is no more universal as the love of the Father, than is the love of the Holy Ghost as expressed in convincing the world of sin, righteousness, and judgement (John 16:8). The objects of Divine love are everywhere, and are, therefore, representatively called "the world." Among them are specimens of all nations and classes of men. God's love to them, therefore, is called love to the world. And because this love is not confined, as the Jews were accustomed to think, within the fence that defines the position of the nation of Israel, therefore the Gospel is to be preached to all nations, that all believing in the Son, of whom the Gospel testifies, may have everlasting life. The love of God, expressed in the gift of His Son to be an atoning sacrifice, was not confined to Israel, therefore the Gospel must be preached to the Gentiles. There is nothing, therefore, in this passage that is not applicable to the only love of which the Confession speaks, and which is described as electing, redeeming, saving. What, then, is this other love which it is alleged God bears to all mankind? The framers of the Declaratory Statement must hold that it is not that love of which the Confession speaks, for they do not intend to say, as says the Confession, that it is electing, redeeming, saving. What then is it? Is it the goodness of God, expressed to all, in the dealings of His providence? If so, and no more, why call it love? Or, do they

mean that God must not be regarded as having pleasure in the death of the wicked, or as awarding death to any except on account of sins justly chargeable against them? If so, there is nothing there but a commonplace in all Calvinistic systems of theology. If this be all they intend, why demand for it so outstanding a position? But is it the doctrine of reprobation they are anxious to repudiate? If so, they have taken a way of doing so that is successful only in being a virtual denial of the doctrine of election. Or, do they mean that, as "God is love" there can be no relation between Him and any of His creatures, that is not marked by that aspect of His character? It cannot be this which they intend, for this would be to say that all judicial action, expressive of His awful wrath, is utterly impossible. What, then, can they mean by a universal love that is distinct from, and inconsistent with, electing love, while holding the latter, as they must hold, to be the only source of salvation? We cannot conceive, nor can they tell, what they point to. And what purpose can their new doctrine serve that can be ought else than a deception of sinners; and as dishonouring to the grace, as it is to the glorious holiness, of Jehovah. It is a mere figment, a flimsy thing of dreamland, a mirage that can only draw the eyes of sinners away from the love which is the only fountain of salvation.

To what practical use is such a doctrine intended to be applied? Is it devised with a view to the removal of hard thoughts of God? If so, it is just the very way to suggest them. If the Almighty loves all, and yet leaves such multitudes to perish, what desperate thoughts the view of God, which this presents to our minds, is fitted to suggest. If even the love of God is such that it will leave its objects to perish, oh, what then? We can conceive of such a doctrine, as that of universal love, being very effectual in removing all healthful fear of God's righteous judgment from a heart that knows no earnestness. We can conceive of its being effectual in persuading careless sinners that it is safe to remain far off from God. But we cannot conceive of its affording any relief to a penitent sinner. What is it to him that God loves him in common with all mankind? That is not what he cares to know.

What he desires to be assured of is -

- That God so loved as to provide a sure salvation, and, self-condemned as he is, he knows, that if He has done so it was only because it so seemed good in His sight.
- That the love of God, commended in the death of His Son, in order to the redemption of a people who deserved to die, can be expressed in the actual salvation of a sinner, in consistency with His holiness, and truth, and righteousness. And,
- That he may approach, through the Mediator, towards the proffered embrace of that love, as one who, because of sin, is a child of wrath.

But this figment of universal love can only exercise a baneful influence on any mind that receives it. For -

It offers encouragement to keep away from God, rather than an inducement to draw near to Him. "Don't be afraid of God, for He loves you," is its counsel. This is the salve it administers to an anxious soul - to a soul that should be afraid of God, when viewed along the line of the only relation then subsisting between him and the Most High. It helps him to cast off the fear, without inducing any anxiety to be delivered from the danger, of God's awful wrath.

It tends to supersede the Cross of Christ. If we believe in God's love to us, irrespective of our interest in Christ crucified, and if we are encouraged to hope for salvation because of that love, then we feel as if we could quite dispense with an atonement. It helps to take off the terror which shuts us up to Christ as our only resource. We learned about Divine love without going as sinners in faith to the Cross, and the hopeful feeling thus engendered makes us feel independent of the blood which "cleanseth from all sin."

To a great extent this doctrine brings the name of God into disrespect in the heart of him who entertains it. We are led by it to think that God loves us while we are yet in our sins, and away from Christ. And can we think of that love as holy love, or as a love whose exercise can consist with righteousness? We use it only to hide from our view the holiness and justice of God. As we do so, we cease to be afraid of God, but it is because we cease to respect Him. How much more is the Confession doctrine fitted to exalt Jehovah in the view of a penitent sinner, and in that very measure to encourage him, as a sinner, to have hope in God? He has looked on the aspect of God's character presented to him in the light which shines from Sinai, and on his relation to Him as his Lawgiver and Judge, and he has found himself to be a child of wrath and an heir of hell. As such he feels himself to be quite shut up to the hope set before him in the gospel as his only resource. And when he looks to the grace therein revealed, he sees it so associated with Christ Jesus, that it appears to be unapproachable except through Him as crucified. The love commended in His death seems as holy as it is rich, as righteous as it is free. It is manifestly Divine love - it is such that one need not shrink from ascribing it to God. And he is called as a hateful sinner with all his guilt and corruption and helplessness to Christ; and he is assured, not that he is loved before he comes, but that if he comes, the love of God will embrace him, and that the provision it hath made, in order to salvation, shall be his in Him in Whom all fullness dwelleth. We ask any unprejudiced mind to decide whether this mode of representing the love of God is, or is not, that which is more fitted to yield encouragement to one who knows that he is a sinner and that God loveth righteousness, and whether it be not the only one which conserves the honour of God's name, and that is consistent with all portions of the scheme of truth.

This figment of universal love has been devised with a view to meet an objection commonly urged against Calvinism. Calvinists, it is alleged, make too much of God's secret purpose in their presentations of the gospel. But these universalists are really the parties against whom a charge of that kind may be preferred. They, quite apart from God's

only revealed way of expressing love to men, tell sinners that they know the heart of God, and that He loves them. The Calvinist does not profess to base the gospel call on ought else than the revealed command of God, which requires that the gospel should be preached to every creature. This is enough for him. He goes no further back. He stands where the light of revelation ceases to shine. He believes that there is a peculiar love to a chosen people, and he believes in no love besides. He knows that God can reconcile the speciality of that love with the universality of the call in relation to all who hear it, though he cannot, and must not attempt to do so, as he has no guiding light from God. But because God commands the Gospel to be preached to every creature, and promises that every believer shall be saved, his faith in God preserves him from all embarrassment. He is content to keep his own place, and to receive and to preach as God commands him.

Any Church that gives a place in her creed to the doctrine of universal love, after having once stood upon Confession ground, must be carried greatly further by the momentum acquired during the descent already made. It will become utterly impossible to continue to have any hold of the doctrine of the Cross; and the power of godliness can no longer be sustained by the pap which will then be the food served out from her pulpits. The Church that is content with such fare as this has passed into her dotage. It is the second childhood, soon to be followed by death, which alone can be content with this kind of sustenance. A Church occupying the same position, but not after a descent, may be looking up, and, seeing a brighter region beyond, may move upwards to reach it. But a Church going down the decline from the Calvinistic position, has her back turned on the truth, and who can tell how far her departure from "the good way" may be extended.

...to be continued.

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