

ARTICLE V.

THE WESTMINSTER CONFESSION OF FAITH.

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THERE is an old legend to the effect that a giant of herculean strength, visiting Odin, the god of the North, noticed, lying on the floor of the palace, a cat. "You can't lift that cat," said the god. The giant with a smile of incredulity made the attempt, and found the cat the outcropping of a serpent that encompassed the globe.

This old legend not inaptly illustrates the difficulty one meets in antagonizing the Westminster Confession of Faith. That venerable creed, which summarizes the Calvinistic system of theology, is a compact, logical, symmetrical, self-consistent unit, thought out and formulated by some of the profoundest thinkers of the Christian church. It covers the whole field of what is termed metaphysical theology: and so interwoven and linked together are its several doctrines, that it is not easy to root out one without eradicating all. It is on all hands conceded that the system must be received or rejected as a whole. "The most cursory perusal," says Professor Shedd, "will show that a revision of the Westminster Confession will amount to a recasting the whole creed." Dr. De Witt expresses the fear that "A revision once begun, the desire for logical unity will require not so much a revision as a *revolution* of the standards of the church." Changes other than doctrinal have been and may be made; but it seems to me that an attempt at doctrinal revision will not be wise until the church is prepared to eliminate whatever is dis-

tinctively Calvinistic, and leave the acceptance or rejection of these unessential and controverted points to the discretion of its individual members.

The Westminster system of theology roots itself in the doctrine of divine sovereignty, and is the outgrowth of a profound and overshadowing sense of the power and perfections of God. It commences (chap. i.) with an able statement of the divine authority of the Sacred Scriptures. Chap. ii. gives us this admirable definition of God: "There is but one only living and true God, who is infinite in being and perfection, a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions, immutable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty; most wise, most holy, most free, most absolute, working all things according to the counsel of his own immutable and most righteous will, for his own glory; most loving, gracious, merciful, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin; the rewarder of them that diligently seek him; and withal most just and terrible in his judgments, hating all sin, and who will by no means clear the guilty. God hath all life, glory, goodness, blessedness, in and of himself; and is alone in and unto himself all-sufficient, not standing in need of any creature which he hath made. . . . He is the alone fountain of all being, of whom, through whom, and to whom, are all things; and hath most sovereign dominion over them, to do by them, for them, and upon them, whatsoever himself pleaseth."

The Creed throughout breathes the same spirit of devout adoration and the same overwhelming sense of the power and supremacy of God.

In this exalted view of the divine perfections, all Christian

truth. Still, a majority of the Christian world are not able to accept all their conclusions. They dissent from an interpretation of the doctrine of divine sovereignty which makes God the absolute arbiter of all events, and concedes to him the same unlimited control over the conduct of men that he has over the motions of matter. They regard the theory, that the choices and destiny of men were unalterably determined before the world was, incompatible with the sovereignty of the human will over its own choices, or what is termed free-agency. They complain that chap. iii. 1, "God from all eternity did, by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass;" chap. v. 1, "God . . . doth uphold, direct, dispose, and govern all creatures, actions, and things, from the greatest even unto the least;" Larger Catechism, Q. 18, which represents God as "powerfully preserving and governing all his creatures, [and] ordering them, and all their actions, to his own glory," and similar declarations, involve the theory of a necessitated will, or the doctrine of *fatalism*, and set aside all possibility of a moral government, and of good and ill desert.

This interpretation of these passages is corroborated by the concurrent views of all Calvinistic writers. "Augustine," says Calvin, "contends, very largely, that sin proceeds not only from the permission and prescience, but from the power of God." "All things," Calvin assures us, "come to pass by the ordinance and decrees of God."¹ "The decrees of God," says Edwards, "are none other than his eternal doing that which is done." "It is metaphysically proper," says President Dwight, "to say that God wills all things into ex-

part of God, over the spirits of men, as has the potter over the clay he fashions. If anything happens, not because the Creator hath so appointed, but because of some power or liberty in the creature, that thing is beyond the scope and sovereignty of God. . . . If man is not a necessary agent, God is a degraded sovereign."¹ Passages of similar import could be cited to almost any extent from Calvinistic authors.

They complain, also, that this theory of a necessitated and divinely determined will is not only a single tenet of the Westminster Creed, but its basal feature, giving character to, and rendering logically necessary, its whole system of doctrines. Is this complaint against this venerable instrument just? President Edwards says: "The decision of most of the points between Calvinists and Arminians depends upon the determination of the question, Wherein consists that freedom of the will requisite to moral action?" The Calvinistic school account a man a free-agent. The vital question is, Is the freedom they account him, that which is "requisite to moral action"?

Chap. ix. of the Confession, entitled, "Of Free Will," declares:—

Sect. 1. "God hath endued the will of man with that natural liberty that it is neither forced, nor by any absolute necessity of nature determined to good or evil." The whole meaning of this section, as shown by the connection, is that man's will cannot be forced, by anything out of himself, to either good or evil.

Sect. 2. "Man, in his state of innocency, has freedom and power to will and to do that which is good and well-pleasing to God; but yet mutably, so that he might fall from it." The exception here is that man, before the fall, could will in

Sect. 3. "Man, by his fall into a state of sin, hath wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual good accompanying salvation."

Sect. 4. "When God converts a sinner, . . . he freeth him from his natural bondage under sin, and by his grace alone, enables him freely to will and to do that which is spiritually good; yet so as that, by reason of his remaining corruption, he doth not perfectly, nor only, will that which is good, but doth also will that which is evil." That is, he wills and, by implication, can but will, according to his prevailing state of mind.

Sect. 5. "The will of man is perfectly and immutably free to do good alone, in the state of glory only."

This view of freedom is plainly summarized in two statements: 1. Moral beings always will in accordance with their conditions, natures, states of mind; 2. They cannot will otherwise. This interpretation is corroborated by the "Exposition of the Confession of Faith," by Rev. Robert Shaw; revised by the Committee of Publication, and published by the Presbyterian Board of Publication, Philadelphia.

Commenting upon this chapter, the author asserts that "The necessity of a man's acting and willing in conformity with his apprehensions and disposition is, in their [Calvinists] opinion, fully consistent with all the liberty which can belong to a rational nature. The Infinite Being *necessarily* wills and acts according to the absolute perfection of his nature, yet with the highest liberty. Angels necessarily will and act according to the perfection of their natures, yet with full liberty; for this sort of necessity is so far from interfering with liberty of will, that the perfection of the will's liberty lies in such a necessity. The very essence of its

will, and *he cannot do otherwise*, being under the bondage of sin. In the state of grace he has free will, partly to good and partly to evil. In this state there is a mixture of two opposite moral dispositions, and as sometimes the one, and sometimes the other, prevails, so the will sometimes chooses that which is good and sometimes that which evil. In a state of glory, the blessed freely choose what is good; and being confirmed in a state of perfect holiness, they *can only will what is good*" (page 136):

Evidently this expositor, with the sanction of the Presbyterian Committee of Publication, interprets the Confession as teaching that moral beings cannot act otherwise than in accord with their dispositions and states of mind.

Another expositor,¹ in his work, entitled, "What is Calvinism?" issued by the Presbyterian Board of Publication, earnestly declares that the will yields to the strongest desire and inclination as necessarily as the scales to the heaviest weight. His language is: "Scales will turn in an opposite direction if there be a preponderance of weight,—a cause adequate to the effect,—but without it they will not. No more will the will act in opposition to its strongest inclinations and motives. The cause in the one case is just as adequate to the production of the effect, as in the other" (page 132). Dr. Charles Hodge, in still stronger language, avers, "We cannot conceive that a man may be conscious that, with his principles, inclinations, feelings, being one way, his will may be another."² "The will," he says, "is not independent, self-determined, but is always determined by one's previous

liberty he allows moral beings, and concedes that "the self-determining power of the will, as requisite to moral action," is incompatible with Calvinism.¹

If by any admissible exegesis these words "*inclinations*," "feelings," "states of mind," can be construed to mean *ultimate choices*, we should concede the truth of this assertion. But such a construction is not admissible. The words evidently describe *involuntary* states of mind, and make the definition of freedom precisely Dr. Reid's definition of necessity. "If," he says, "the determination of the will is the necessary consequence of something involuntary in one's state of mind, or in his external circumstances, he is not free, but the subject of necessity." "An exercise," says Professor Cochran, "is free when at the time, and in the circumstances, the agent can do otherwise; necessary, when at the time, and in the circumstances, he cannot do otherwise." If, then, the agent cannot act otherwise than he feels, or do other than he feels, or do other than the most agreeable, his conduct falls into the category of necessity.

Choice is *selection*, and in its very nature implies an alternative. If one can will only as he feels, he has no alternative, and the words "freedom" and "free-agency" properly apply neither to him nor his actions. The lower animals are as truly free-agents as he: they follow their own instincts, act as they feel, unless restrained, and cannot do otherwise. So is the stream, which flows and must flow according to its own nature and laws, just as free as man. If the Calvinistic theory be true, there is no distinction between freedom and necessity. Everything is within the chain of cause and effect, and there is no difference, in this respect, between the conduct of a man and the motion of a wheel. But this theory lacks the first semblance of freedom. It differs in

Calvinists themselves concede that their views of divine sovereignty are apparently incompatible with human free-agency; but, as both are, in their view, revealed truths, they hold that the two are reconcilable, and that the fact will sometime be made to appear. They compare the two theories to two columns standing side by side, and rising to a stupendous height, and somewhere uniting in a monolith, but too far up for mortal vision to reach. But how can two propositions mutually contradictory be reconciled? Evidently the assertion that in every instance of choice there are two possibilities, and the assertion that in no instance can there be more than one, never are, and never can be, both true.

But the Westminster theory of divine sovereignty, we are assured, is a revealed truth, occupying a prominent place in the Sacred Scriptures; that it is taught in many places by implication, and directly asserted in Eph. i. 1, "Who worketh all things after the counsel of his will;" and in Dan. iv. 35, "And he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of earth."

My limits will allow me only to say: 1. A majority of Bible readers do not so construe these texts, nor do they find the distinctive principle of Calvinism even by implication in the sacred volume; 2. A construction which supports the Calvinistic view antagonizes the whole trend of the Bible; 3. All that these passages necessarily mean, is, that God acts, in reference to all things, according to the counsel of his own will. Distinctive Calvinism, I am persuaded, so far from being, *par excellence*, biblical theology, is not only not con-

heart. But is not this precisely what the Bible, from its commencement to its close, charges against men? And what is there in all this derogatory to a single divine attribute? Let us suppose that beings of such awful capabilities are a higher type of creation, more like God who made them,—capable of knowing him, becoming partakers of his nature, and coming into closer, deeper companionship with the infinite mind; and that songs and homage from intelligences capable of withholding them, are sweeter to the divine ear than songs and homage from those who have no such power; and let us suppose that a universe of such beings, influenced only by moral considerations, augment immeasurably the glory of God, the grandeur of his empire, and the ocean of bliss which shall ebb and flow within it forever, would such a universe and government, even should they involve some self-limitation to the field of his power, be derogatory to his character?

Which is the more honorable to a human father, a government of mere force and physical strength, or one of love and motive and moral influence? I can think of nothing more illogical than this attempt to exalt the great Father by reducing his government to a system of mechanical forces, and his subjects to machinery.

But does the sovereignty of the human will, or the divine inability to control its choices by *force*, involve a limitation of the power of God? No more, I answer, than does his inability to control clouds and stars by *motive*. To do either is precluded by the nature of things, and really all the limitation ascribed to God is the impossibility of doing what he has made it impossible to do.

But this whole matter of the will's sovereignty is laid to rest, and its independence of all antecedent conditions established forever, by the fall of our first parents. Two holy human beings in the garden of Eden, and how many apostate angels we have no means of knowing, willed, not

according, but in exact opposition, to their existing dispositions and states of mind. This simple admitted fact establishes, beyond all rational dispute, the self-determining power of the will, and is utterly subversive of the whole system of Calvinism.

It also pretty clearly establishes two other anti-calvinistic facts: 1. If holy beings, without any antecedent change, can *renounce* allegiance to the divine government, sinful beings, certainly, under the illumination and pressure of divine influence, can, without any change preparatory thereunto, *resume* such allegiance. In other words, if it was not necessary for holy beings to become sinful before they could sin, it seems hardly necessary for sinful beings to become regenerated before they can bow in submission to the divine will; 2. If the change, in the one case, was the subject's *own act*, it may primarily be the sinner's own act in the other, and the assertion may be untrue, "Man by the fall lost all ability of will to anything spiritually good accompanying salvation."

Having shown, I think, the basal assumption of the Westminster theology to be untenable, it remains to glance, for a moment, at some of its distinctive doctrines.

1. As it makes involuntary dispositions and states of mind the *source* whence moral action proceeds, with perfect logical consistency, it makes these dispositions, or what is termed the "sensibility," the residence of the moral element, and consequently it makes sin and holiness consist not primarily in actual transgression and obedience, but in states and feelings whence obedience and disobedience proceed, and man's emotional nature it recognizes as properly his *moral nature*, or his heart.

may be created, transferred, and transmitted. Hence we are assured that our first parents were "created endowed with *true holiness*;" that in consequence of the fall they lost "their original righteousness" and "became wholly defiled in all the faculties and parts of soul and body; and that this defilement, with all the motions thereof, is *truly and properly sin*."

It is not perfectly apparent what the *sin* of our first parents consisted in. It could not have been in any corruption of nature whence it proceeded, as their natures were far enough from being sinful: nor did it consist in actual transgression, inasmuch as *all* actual transgression, we are assured, proceeds from original corruption. It must have consisted in the consequences which followed their transgression.

3. The Westminster Creed contains another terrible disclosure, to wit: This corrupt nature, which "is truly and properly sin," was "conveyed" from our first parents "to all their posterity, descending from them by ordinary generation, in consequence of which every child of Adam's race is born a sinner, and all sin," we are told, "both *original* and actual, . . . doth, in its own nature, bring guilt upon the sinner, whereby he is bound over to the wrath of God, and curse of the law, and so made subject to death, with all miseries, spiritual, temporal, and eternal."

4. Sadder yet is the disclosure that the guilt of this sin of our first parents is *imputed* [charged over] to all their posterity. This is a terrible indictment of our poor race. Hard, indeed, is the lot to which man is born! According to this Creed, he is held responsible and is punished (1) for the sin of our first parents, committed ages before he existed; (2) for a corrupt inherited nature in which he had no more vol-

spite of himself, proceed forever, unless rescued by a power over which he has no control or influence. For this melancholy inheritance, which he would gladly have avoided, he is doomed to "a separation from the comfortable presence of God, and to most grievous torments of soul and body, without intermission, in hell fire forever."

We cannot avoid the inquiry, Why was not one of the holy acts of our first parents imputed to their posterity rather than that one sinful act? and Why was not the holy nature with which they were created, conveyed, rather than their sinful one? and Why do not parents now, with *renewed* hearts, convey their renewed natures to their children, rather than the old nature which they have "put off"? How mysterious, if moral character is transmitted, that the children of the righteous come into the world apparently just as sinful as the children of the wicked!

But is there any evidence that men inherit natures morally corrupt, and that every child is born, in the proper sense of the word, a sinner? I, for one, do not believe the Bible anywhere, either directly or by implication, teaches that a child is born a sinner, or is born with a sinful nature. Nor do I believe any such theory is supported either by reason or by facts. To my mind no two things can be more incongruous than infancy and guilt. The idea that the little one, such as the Saviour took so lovingly to his arms, coming like an angel, bearing the benedictions, exhaling the perfumes, and breathing the melodies of the same far-away and better clime, deserves punishment, is simply odious; and doubly odious would be that parent who should treat the little stranger in accordance with such an idea. Indeed, this whole theory of created holiness, imputed guilt, and propagated sin, seems to me not only an absurdity, but a travesty upon the whole teaching and spirit of the Sacred Word.

To relieve a theory so unsavory, it is said the word

"guilt," when applied to inherited corruption, means "liability to suffer." But such a definition is inconsistent with the declaration, "this corruption of our nature is truly and properly sin," and "the source of all actual transgression." The Westminster divines could not have used it in such a sense.

5. The Westminster view of *regeneration*, or effectual calling, is another logical necessity of the theory of a necessitated will. It holds (1) that regeneration is change wrought by the Spirit of God, in which the subject is "altogether passive;" (2) that it is wrought in the hearts of "those whom God hath predestinated unto life, and those only;" (3) that it is effected in God's own "appointed and accepted time;" (4) that the change "is of God's free and special grace alone, not from anything at all foreseen" in the creature; (5) that it consists in "taking away the heart of stone, and giving a heart of flesh," giving a literal sense to a text highly figurative. It gives no direction as to how this change may be secured. It rather discourages all efforts to find pardon through the Crucified. Its stern teachings are that it inevitably comes "in God's own accepted and appointed time" to all for whom the boon was purchased, and, by implication, teaches that no others need apply.

How the minister of Christ can proclaim its hard, Christless doctrines, and in the same breath, or on the same day, invite the sinner to accept a pardon offered to all, I am not able to comprehend. The logical mind of John Calvin allowed no such inconsistency. He denounced the man who "pretends that grace is offered promiscuously and freely to all."

But this heart of flesh, when obtained, does not quite displace the old heart of stone. "There abideth," this Creed assures us, "still some remnants of corruption in every part. Whence ariseth a continual and irreconcilable war, in which war, although the remaining corruption doth much prevail for a time, yet through the continual supply of grace the regenerate part doth prevail."

6. The *doctrine of election*, the most prominent in the Confession, is but a corollary of the theory of a necessitated will. It is thus presented, chap. iii. 3-7, "By the decree of God, . . . some men and angels are predestinated unto everlasting life, and others foreordained to everlasting death. These angels and men, thus predestinated and foreordained, are particularly and unchangeably designed; and their number . . . cannot be either increased or diminished. Those of mankind that are predestinated unto life, God, before the foundation of the world was laid, . . . hath chosen, in Christ, unto everlasting glory, out his mere free grace and love, without any foresight of faith or good works, or perseverance in either of them, or any other thing in the creature, as conditions, or causes moving him thereunto; and all to the praise of his glorious grace. . . . The rest of mankind, God was pleased, according to the unsearchable counsel of his own will, . . . to pass by, and to ordain them to dishonor and wrath for their sin, to the praise of his glorious justice."

The stinging satire of Robert Burns is not a very unfair presentation of the same view:—

"O thou, wha in the heavens dost dwell,
Wha, as it pleases best thysel',
Sends ane to heaven, and ten to hell,
A' for thy glory,
And no for onie guid or ill
The've done afore thee."

The doctrine, as will be seen, places the ground of this discrimination implied—the ultimate reason one is holy and another sinful—one is saved and another lost—in the *divine will*, and denies the subjects themselves the slightest influence in determining their own characters or destinies. It

no prayer she can offer, no efforts or struggles she can make, but simply upon the question, Is she one of the elect? All this is intensely logical. Election could not be conditioned upon foreseen conduct, inasmuch as foreseen conduct is determined by the divine will, as fully as was the election itself. I cannot conceive of a doctrine which more fully relieves a sinner of all responsibility for his impenitence and rejection of Christ.

There is here a slight discrepancy among Calvinists. The Edwardean school hold that God ordained a part of our race "to dishonor and wrath," "as the necessary means to the greatest good." But, as this view involves limitations of divine power, the very rock of offence the Westminster system was devised to escape, it is not generally received. The Westminster view, that the reason is wholly inscrutable, is the more popular. "God could," says Calvin, "convert to good the will of the wicked, because he is omnipotent. It is evident he could. Why then did he not? Because he would not; and why he would not, remains with himself." And he denounces any one who has the temerity to push the inquiry. God, it seems, according to this doctrine, dooms moral beings to endless sufferings, without affording them the poor satisfaction of knowing why.

It would, I think, be a relief to one, involved in the meshes of such a theology, to accept the scriptural and rational truth, that sinners are in possession of plenary ability to accept or reject the offer of pardon made to all, and that God has elected to eternal life all whom he knew, by the wisest possible use of means, he could persuade to accept the proffered boon: others, with grief that only the infinite heart can feel, he passes by as an inevitable necessity, growing out of the mechanism of mind and the nature of things. In other words, election is "according to the *foreknowledge* of God." "Whom he *foreknew*, them did he predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son."

After all, it is more than possible that "with God," as Dr. Hodge asserts, "there is no distinction between past, present, and future, but all time is equally present;" and that the words "foreknowledge," "foreordination," "decrees," etc., are mere accommodations to our limited capacities. It is very certain that the divine relation to time is to us an unfathomable mystery. It is not wise to be too positive about theories which may have but an imaginary foundation.

7. The Westminster Creed denies that God is the *author of sin*, yet it makes him the Creator, in every child, of a corrupt nature, which it declares to be not only "truly and properly sin," but the source whence all actual transgressions proceed. Worse, infinitely, it charges that all the vices, crimes, and cruelties of our race are ordained by him, and accord with his will. If all this can be sustained, the verdict of all competent tribunals would convict him of being, not only the author of sin, but himself a sinner, and the only sinner in his domain.

8. Its fundamental idea, that man is a passive subject rather than an active responsible agent, with perfect logical consistency, it carries out in its definitions of regeneration, repentance, conversion, justification, and faith: also in its doctrine of the necessary perseverance of saints and irresistible grace, making them gifts conferred and effects produced by the Holy Spirit, rather than primarily choices and states of the will.

9. But perhaps the most objectionable feature of this Creed is its theory of *the Atonement*. With its characteristic logical consistency, it puts the necessity of this great transaction into the *divine mind*, and makes the satisfaction of

will appease but punishment to its full deserts. Professor A. A. Hodge holds, that to punish sin up to its full deserts is obligatory upon God; that he would be derelict in duty, to let off a single sinner without extorting from him, or someone in his stead, a degree of suffering fully equivalent to his guilt.¹

If it is *rectoral*² justice which makes this demand, and the theory is that God punishes sinners to satisfy the claims of benevolence, and that the degree of punishment is in every case determined by these claims, we fully acquiesce in it. But this is not the justice referred to in the Westminster Confession. It adopts not the *governmental*, but the *penal* system of atonement, and claims that punishment is inflicted to satisfy the vindictive or retributive justice of God, and, strictly interpreted, means that God punishes moral beings in hell forever, not for any good which will accrue to them, or to his universe, but simply for the satisfaction it affords him to see them suffer. It is but a slight modification of this system, which is adopted by the author of "The Moral System and the Atonement," who holds that the whole "Social System" also demand that their sense of justice shall also be satisfied by the punishment of sinners up to their full desert, making all other moral beings just as wicked as God.

10. As it is not possible that the same sin is twice punished, once adequately on the person of Christ, and again on the person of the sinner himself, it follows that all for whom Christ has suffered the penalty of the law will be saved. Hence either the doctrine of limited atonement or that of universal salvation becomes a logical necessity. The Westminster divines accept the former alternative, and make *limited atonement* a distinct article of their Creed. Chap. viii. 8 asserts, "To all those for whom Christ hath purchased redemption, he doth certainly and effectually apply and com-

¹ Atonement, pp. 40-45.

² See Rational Theology, p. 193.

municate the same;" chap. iii. 6, "Neither are any other redeemed by Christ, effectually called, justified, adopted, sanctified and saved, but the elect only;" Larger Catechism, Q. 59, "Redemption is certainly applied, and effectually communicated, to all those for whom Christ hath purchased it." These assertions clearly contradict the repeated declaration of the Bible; and their practical acceptance, it seems to me, *bars effectually* the exercise of faith in the atoning sacrifice.

11. The basal error of the Westminster Confession, as has been already intimated, is an interpretation of divine sovereignty inconsistent with human free-agency. The instrument seems to labor to magnify and exalt God at the expense of other moral beings. It assumes that the latter have no interests worthy of the divine regard, no rights worthy of respect, and no destiny, in the divine estimate, of immeasurable importance. It assumes that they were created, not as in themselves an *end*, or primarily for their own sakes, but as a *means* to promote the glory of God and augment his felicity. "Men," says a late Calvinistic writer, "were created to subserve the divine pleasure as fully as was any other part of creation." "God hath most sovereign dominion over them, to do by them, for them, and upon them, whatsoever himself pleaseth," says the Confession,¹ carrying the implication that there is no such thing as doing them injustice.

No sentiment can be in more perfect dissonance to all the ways of God, and all the revelations he has made of himself. The true position is that—

"The soul of man, Jehovah's breath,
That keeps two worlds at strife,"

crowned with intelligence and immortality, was created for companionship with God, in his own similitude, and is as dear to him as the apple of his eye; and sooner than do injustice to the least one, he would see these material heavens

¹ Chap. ii. 2.

pass away; that man was created primarily *for his own sake*, is the product of divine love, and of the infinite desire of God to share with other beings the bliss that swells eternal in his own bosom, and to widen the aggregate of blessedness in his domain.

With profound respect for the great and good men who accept the Westminster theology, I cannot but regard it as a system of unsupported human philosophy, and as a mournful illustration of the danger of trusting to mere speculation. I cannot accept it as a system of *Christian* theology, for the sufficient reason, were there no other, that the central facts of the Christian religion are not in it.* It is a Christianity largely without Christ. It discourses learnedly of decrees, foreordination, and foreknowledge, but leaves out the greatest fact of revelation and of history, "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life." It utterly misinterprets the nature of man, and the plan God has revealed to save him. The infinite compassion of God, and his infinite desire that all should come to a knowledge of the truth; the love of Christ, and his offers of rest to all the weary and heavy laden; the privilege and duty of all men to bow in submission to the divine will, it fails to reflect. It divides our race, by some inscrutable line, into two classes. To the one it makes salvation a necessity, to the other it bequeathes an inheritance of unavoidable and unutterable despair. It is the doctrines of the Bible shaped and interpreted into conformity to the fatalistic philosophy of the old heathen world—a compound of Christianity and paganism.

While I say these hard things, I confess to a kindly feeling toward this venerable Confession. It contains many valuable truths. For two and a half centuries it has been the accepted creed of some of the largest and most influential churches of the Christian world,—churches which, in the great battles for truth and righteousness, have stood in the van,—churches

we love to honor. Among its adherents have been many of the great leaders of theological thought, whose names we revere, and over whose graves we drop the tear. Yet I believe the success of these churches has been achieved in spite, rather than in consequence, of their creed. Had the decision of the Council of Dort been reversed, I feel assured, our world to-day would stand much nearer its millennial morning. The creed which there gained the victory has proved, I believe, a corpse in the closet of the Reformed churches, which, though largely kept out of sight, has poisoned the atmosphere, paralyzed the activities, and retarded the growth of these churches, and is largely responsible for the prevalent fatalism of our times. I am glad to believe the Calvinist theology long ago passed its zenith, and will soon be a thing that was. Like some huge iceberg from arctic climes, it has floated down into the tropics, and is gradually disappearing from view. Our children's children will regard it as a relic of by-gone years, and deem the fact that it was once the accepted creed of intelligent churches, the marvel of history.