

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

ART. II.—THE NEW EDUCATIONAL TEST.

THOSE among us who are old enough to remember the Gorham controversy, as it originated and was gradually developed to the great peril of our Church, will recall, as its most conspicuous and most menacing incident, the so-called Synod of Exeter, and the new test it proposed—viz., the rigid definition of the article of the Creed of Constantinople, in which we confess our belief in the “one baptism for the remission of sins,” on the interpretation of which the mind of the Church had been long divided. While giving clear expression to her doctrines in her public formularies, our Church has ever been cautious to avoid any definition of the terms in which they are conceived which might limit the just rights of her separate members, and to preserve such a latitude to their meaning as to give scope to the exercise of a wise and enlightened discrimination. In this she follows the example of spiritual wisdom set by the sacred writers, who do not unnecessarily define the meanings of the terms which they employ in expressing or illustrating the doctrines of Christianity. They rather teach the meaning of them by describing their results upon the life of the disciple than by defining their critical interpretation; for their object, and the very “object of our religion” (as Leibnitz justly affirms) “is rather to inspire holiness into the will than to pour into the understanding draughts of hidden truth.” No reasonable man can doubt that this should be also our object, not only in our pastoral work, but also, and specially, in the education of the young.

The Bishop of Exeter in his controversy with Mr. Gorham lost sight of this great aim. Both held with equal firmness of conviction and confession the articles of the Creed; but the Bishop was not satisfied with this unity of belief, but required Mr. Gorham to accept his definition of the terms in which it was conceived, imposing by this means a new test. In exact imitation of this fatal precedent, the advocates of the new educational test, unsatisfied with their acceptance of the Scriptures would force upon the teachers a commentary of their own upon the sacred text, breaking up the compact whose establishment had been so beneficial as fully and effectually as the Bishop broke up the pact which the Church had formed with the individual disciple, on the faith of which he entered the sacred society. The Synod of Exeter proclaimed the necessity of “declaring its firm adherence to the Nicene Creed,” meaning hereby its own definition of the terms used in the Creed. In the same manner the movement party in the religious educa-

tion question deem it necessary that the teachers should declare their belief in the Scriptures, meaning thereby their own deductions from the Scriptures; for they had already accepted the Scriptures as fully, and we may trust as honestly, as Mr. Gorham had accepted the Creed.

In an unpublished letter I addressed to the late venerable Dr. Lushington, of which he expressed his entire approval, I asked, Whence can arise the necessity which the Bishop and his Synod plead? Against those who receive not the Creed there might arise such a necessity, but as against those who receive it, their meaning can only be this: "We deem it necessary to declare our adherence to the Creed in some sense which the Creed does not sufficiently or naturally express." In the same manner the agitators on the present occasion declare it necessary to explain the Scriptures in a certain sense and in certain terms which they would impose upon the teachers, although they have accepted the Scriptures as unreservedly as Mr. Gorham accepted the Creed. The Synod proceeded to explain their sense of the Creed by an elaborate definition, which, as I observed further, "was as virtual an addition to the Creed as an explanatory schedule would be to an Act of Parliament." This equivalence of a definition to a creed was pointed out with great pertinence by the Bishop of Forli in the Council of Florence, "for," as he urged, "it touches the subject-matter of the Creed." From this conviction the Council of Chalcedon declared, when urged to add to the Creed a word then deemed actually necessary to the orthodox explanation of it, "We will make no exposition in writing. There is a canon (*i.e.*, of Ephesus) which declares that which is already set forth to be sufficient." A canon of a far higher authority has fixed the limits of our belief—the canon of Scripture itself.

But another very important question here arises, to which we may briefly allude. The Apostles' Creed constitutes the foundation of the great compact made between the Church and her individual members, the breach of which on either side would dissolve it altogether. The baptized person, whether infant or adult, is received into the Church on the profession of the grand and simple truths and facts on which his salvation depends. The same compact is entered into between the Church and the individual even in the Roman Church, and the great Western Creed comprises all its conditions. It cannot but appear that the attempt to force upon the young who have been thus freely admitted into the Catholic Church any articles of faith or points of religious instruction beyond these, is disturbing the most sacred bond which can exist between the Church and her children. In my work on Romanism (p. 47), referring to the baptismal formula of the Roman Church, I

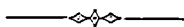
observe: "We recognise here a mutual compact on the part of the child received into the Church and the Church herself, which is incapable of alteration or addition without a breach of the covenant by either of the contracting parties. Such a violation of the compact, by a new condition or a new test, would be held by every legal tribunal in the world to release the party against whom it was enforced from every obligation imposed upon him by the original agreement. The compact between the parties clearly marks out the limits of necessary faith on the one side and of stipulated obedience on the other."

The creed has the unique and inimitable merit that it presents every necessary truth of Christianity in the simplest and most persuasive form to the least instructed and the narrowest intellects, and that it preserves the order and course of the Divine revelation, and of the great events of the life of Christ. To the minds of the young the Divinity of our Lord is better proved by the works of His power than by the most elaborate of the definitions of orthodoxy, while the Personality of the Holy Ghost is best taught in the language in which the first promise of His advent was given, and in the narrative of the manner in which that promise was first fulfilled.

But if the compact should be broken and the confidence of the Nonconformists in our Church seriously shaken, more fatal consequences than those which more immediately present themselves would very soon appear. The child who is prematurely taught the deepest mysteries of our faith will be prematurely led to the knowledge of the painful and humiliating controversies which arose out of them. We shall but stir up the ashes of these fires, which we believe too rashly to be entirely spent, by substituting an artificial and technical dogmatism for a natural and practical demonstration. It would seem that the necessity for this reticence led the Western Church in her baptismal office to make the simpler creed the foundation of it, and not to invite the young and unprepared mind to enter into the deeper mysteries of the union of the two natures in Christ, or of the Procession of the Holy Ghost. These they left to grow up out of the simpler teachings of the Evangelists, as they grew up from the first. It was an evil day which rendered philosophical definitions and Aristotelic distinctions a necessity. It will be a more fatal day for the Church when human definitions are substituted for Divine teachings, and religion begins to be taught *aristotelicé non piscatorie*. The sufficiency of the Scriptures is not only the doctrine of the Scriptures themselves, but also of our own Article. We shall not easily err if we "give ourselves up to be taught by the pure and living precept of God's Word, which, without more additions, nay, with a

forbidding of them, hath within itself the promise of eternal life, the end of all our wearisome labours and all our sustaining hopes."¹

ROBERT C. JENKINS.



ART. III.—THE VALIDITY OF THE PRESBYTERIAN SUCCESSION.

THERE are two separate and distinct questions connected with the problem of the Reunion of the Churches which are capable of being discussed quite independently of one another. The one is that of the Reunion of the members of the several Churches—the Reunion of the *laity*; the other is that of the recognition of the *officers* of those Churches by the separate organizations, in the matter of the interchange of pulpits, the administration of Sacraments, and the official status that is conveyed by the fact of such ministers being qualified and regularly constituted officers of any particular Church. It would be quite possible for either of these two separate aspects of the question to be brought within the sphere of practical politics without the other being considered at all. There might be a real Reunion of the laity of the churches without any discussion of the question of Orders, and there might be a recognition (or otherwise) of the Orders of the various classes of ministers without furthering the Reunion of the laity of the Churches in any way whatever. So since most people, when they speak or write of the problem of Reunion, confine their purview to the latter question, and think that, when it is settled, the whole matter has come to a definite and satisfactory conclusion, it is, perhaps, worth while to point out that the two sides of the question are separable. Tempting as this phase of the problem is, I only mention it to pass it by and to proceed to the more immediate special topic of my paper, namely, the Validity of the Presbyterian Succession.

And let me say very clearly at the outset that the task that I have set before myself is a limited one. I am only going to state what the lawyers call an A B C case. I am not going to advocate a cause. My own view of the question is rather different from the view that I shall now present; but since my own view does not matter, and the view that I shall state is that held by a large body of men within the limits of the Church of England, in essence by the Church of Rome, and in principle by many of the prominent ministers of the Church of Scotland, it is one that is worth while considering, because it

¹ Milton: Prose Works.