

**AREPLY TO THE REWIEW OF  
WHITMAN'S LETTERS TO  
PROFESSOR STUART IN THE  
"SPIRIT OF THE PILGRIMS," , PP. 3-  
81**

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**BERNARD WHITMAN**

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*just*

*Vol. 3*

**R E P L Y**

TO THE

REVIEW OF WHITMAN'S LETTERS

TO PROFESSOR STUART,

IN THE

"SPIRIT OF THE PILGRIMS,"

FOR MARCH, 1831.

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By BERNARD WHITMAN.

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## LETTER I.

REVEREND SIR,

I HAVE read your Review of my Letters to Professor Stuart. You have noticed several verbal and unimportant errors, denied the truth of some of my statements, and advanced very little argument and evidence in support of your positions. In the estimation of candid and intelligent Christians, your Review only serves to confirm the accuracy of my descriptions, the correctness of my reasoning, and the soundness of my conclusions. But your pamphlet was probably designed to make the more ignorant portion of your own denomination believe, that my Letters are largely disfigured with inaccuracies and misrepresentations. As I originally wrote for the more special benefit of this class of the community, I am constrained by a sense of duty to appear again in their behalf. I wish now to convince them, *that all the essential statements in my Letters to Professor Stuart are substantially correct.* This is the principal object of the present publication.

In your Review, you have observed no order, connexion, or method. You have jumbled together the various topics of discussion, brought forward the same inaccuracies in several different parts of your book, and then, like a child, counted up your fingers to see how many apparent falsehoods you had discovered. I shall not attempt to follow your rambling course. I shall proceed in the same order in which the subjects are arranged in my Letters. Under each division, I shall inquire what you have done to weaken or destroy my conclusions. I shall cheerfully correct all mistakes and retract all misstatements; for I am anxious to defend nothing but the simple, unvarnished truth. I shall also advance evidence in support of those assertions, the truth of which you have denied; so that you may know what testimony has appeared satisfactory to my own mind. I shall likewise endeavour to answer your reasoning. This I shall do, to a considerable degree, in the words of distinguished orthodox divines; and more especially, in the words of the pious, venerated, and orthodox Richard Baxter.

M. B. L.

I appeal to him more particularly at this time, because we are informed that he has of late become a great favorite with your party; and the Editor of the Recorder assures us, that his writings are read "*with affection and pleasure by orthodox Christians.*" I now ask you and the public to accompany me in my examination of your Review.

I. USE MADE OF HUMAN CREEDS.

You have contradicted several of my statements under this division. Some of your assertions are made in direct opposition to satisfactory evidence; others relate to verbal and unimportant mistakes, which I cheerfully correct; others again are mere quibbles about words, and but three are deserving the least notice.

1. Speaking of the Andover creed, I made this declaration: "Scarcely an article of the whole can be expressed in Scriptural language." In proof of my assertion, I presented the creed to my readers, and left them to decide for themselves concerning the truth of my position. Your whole answer to this statement is contained in the following sentence. "The *sense* of many of these articles, not to say the most of them, *can* be expressed in Scriptural language." Let me entreat you to peruse the following extract from the pious Baxter.

"Some must have confessions in words of their own, to which all that will be accounted Christians must subscribe; or at least all that would have communion with them. Though we would subscribe to the *whole Scripture*, or any confession drawn up in its phrase and matter, yet this will not serve for union and communion. They tell us, heretics will subscribe to the Scripture; and I tell them, that heretics may subscribe also to their confessions, and force a sense of their own upon them; and that God never left them to make better confessions, and fitter to discover heresies, than Scripture doth afford. — And thus men lose themselves, and abuse the church, because God's word will not serve their turn as a rule for us to unite upon. This is the *One Rule* that God hath left, and men must needs blame this as insufficient, and mend God's word by the devices of their addle brains, and then complain of divisions when they have made them. The rule that all must agree in, must be made by *One* that is above *all*, and whose authority is acknowledged by all. Never will the church have full unity till the Scripture sufficiency be acknowledged. You complain of many opinions and ways, and many you will still have, till the *One Rule*, the Scripture, be the standard of our religion. Stick to this one Bible, and let nothing come into your faith or religion but what comes thence, and when controversies arise, try them by this; and if you cannot do it yourselves, then take up the help of ministers or synods, and use them not as masters, but as helpers of your faith; not to make you *another rule*, but to help you understand this *One Rule*, and thus you may come to be of one religion, and never otherwise." — *Practical Works*. fol. Vol. IV. p. 673. *Letters*, p. 6. *Review*, p. 45.



2. Speaking of the Lord's Supper, I asked, by what authority you made subscription to human creeds the condition of church membership? You answer my inquiry with some weak and sophistical reasoning. Sir, this is not a question for "carnal reason" to decide. I admit that you have a perfect right to make as many creeds as you please for your own use. You may fill your house with them, and every morning and evening swear fidelity to their misty terms, and thus proclaim to the world that you have determined to be no wiser on religious subjects to-morrow than you have been to-day. But you have no right to make a creed for another person, or a Christian church. One of two things must be true; either Jesus Christ is the head of the church, or he is not. If you say he is not the head, please to inform me whom he has commissioned to execute this office. If you say he is the head, please to show me the passages in which he has given you liberty to place a human creed before his Table, and exclude from his feast all who will not bow to your idol. I boldly assert, that you can produce no such text from the Scriptures, and consequently I must believe that your authority is usurped. I shall not notice your attempt to show that it is proper to excommunicate from your churches those who renounce their belief in your human confessions; for until you can show your commission from Christ to make your interpretations of Scripture terms of Christian communion, you certainly cannot prove that you have any right to exclude those who renounce those human conditions of church membership. But since you incline to reason on this question, I present you the following arguments from the orthodox Baxter.

"*Addition to Christ's terms are very perilous, as well as diminution, when men will deny either church entrance or communion to any that Christ would have received, because they come not up to certain terms which they, or such as they, desire. And though they think that Christ giveth them power to do this, or that reason or necessity justifieth them, their error will not make them guiltless. Imputing their error unto Christ untruly, is no small aggravation of the sin. — Nor is it a small fault to usurp a power proper to Christ; to make themselves lawgivers to his church without any authority given by him; their ministry is another work. — And it is dangerous pride to think themselves great enough, wise enough, and good enough, to come after Christ, and to amend his work, and do it better than he hath done. — Much less when they hereby imply an accusation against him and his institutions, as if he had not done it well, but they must amend it, or all will be intolerable. — And the merciful Lord and Saviour of the church, that came to take off heavy burdens and intolerable yokes, will not take it well to have men come after him, and as by his authority, to make his easy yoke more strict, and his light burden more heavy, and to cast or keep out those that he hath redeemed, and doth re-*

ceive, and to deal cruelly with those that he hath so dearly bought, and tenderly loveth. — And indeed it is oftener for men's own interest and dominion, to keep up their power and honor of superiority, than men thus use the servants of Christ, than truly to keep clear the church, and keep out the polluters." Vol. IV. p. 653.

3. Speaking of creeds, I asserted that the leaders of the orthodox denomination made a human confession, and not the Bible, their standard of religious truth. In proof of this assertion, I presented a great mass of evidence, a multitude of undeniable facts. You deny the truth of my charge, and offer a few words of explanation. All you say on the subject amounts to nothing more than this; that no orthodox Christian *means* to make the human creed the infallible standard. So it might be said, that the persecuting, conscientious Paul did not *mean* to do any thing contrary to the will of God. I shall not, therefore, reason about your motives. I will merely present you some extracts from the orthodox Dr. Stiles, former President of Yale College, which are peculiarly applicable to this question. These are his precious words.

"It is indeed a little unhappy, that like others in the Christian world, *some of us* are fond of substituting human interpretations given by authority of councils and learned men, exacting that the sacred Scriptures be understood according to senses fitted and defined in human tests, which all acknowledge to be fallible. But it is to be hoped, that we shall stand fast in the liberty wherewith the gospel has made us free. There ought to be no restrictions on the conscience of an honest and sober believer of revelation. The right of conscience and private judgment is unalienable. And it is truly the interest of all mankind to unite themselves into one body, for the liberty, free exercise, and unmolested enjoyment of this right, especially in religion. Not all the difference of *sentiment*, not all the erroneous opinions that have yet been started, afford just umbrage for its extinction, abridgment, or embarrassment. Have the Protestant formularies subserved the defence of the truth as it is in Jesus? Rather, have they not in event proved new sources of religious dispute and undeterminable controversy? The churches of Geneva have long since had the wisdom to drop this article of *consensus*, as the great disturbance of the Christian harmony. And the clergy have found themselves obliged to interpret the Helvetic, and all other Protestant confessions, in the Scripture sense, with a *Divinis veritatibus in hoc libro contentis subscribo*. I am satisfied we shall err less if we make the Scriptures the only rule of faith, than if we depart from this, and substitute another; or as many do, who say they believe the Scriptures the *only* rule, and yet in all their judgments on Scripture, measure that *only* rule by *another* rule. Nor do substituted rules answer the purpose of detecting heretics at all better than the primary rule, since on ex-

perience it is found none more freely subscribe and swear to human tests than deists, skeptics, and the most debauched. If God's inclosure will not keep out the erroneous, can it be expected that ours will? The universal pretext is a preservation against heresy. But it is to be remarked, that human tests make more heretics than the word of God; all that one determines to be heresy, is not heresy by the Scriptures. A man may be a very great heretic according to the one, and an excellent Christian according to the other, at the same time. St. Paul was one of the greatest heretics, and even gloried in his heresy, and yet was one of the best of Christians."—*Convention Sermon*, pp. 35, 36.

And now, Sir, what have you done under this section to weaken or destroy my logical conclusions? I will conclude my remarks under this head, with some extracts in relation to the origin and injury of human creeds from the pious and orthodox Richard Baxter. He probably understood this subject as well, or better than any other man. He assures us that creeds originated with the Devil, that they are his engine for the destruction of religion, and have made all the divisions in the church. I hope the following most important sentiments will be read not only with *satisfaction* and *pleasure*, but with such *practical self-improvement*, as to induce all to renounce the devil and *all* his works. Here you have his most valuable thoughts.

"The Lord Jesus, in wisdom and tender mercy, established a law of grace, and rule of life, pure and perfect, but simple and plain; laying the condition of man's salvation more in the honesty of the believing heart, than in the strength of wit, and subtilty of a knowing head. He comprised the truths which were of necessity to salvation in a narrow room; so that the Christian faith was a matter of great plainness and simplicity. As long as Christians were such and held to this, the gospel rode in triumph through the world, and an omnipotency of the Spirit accompanied it, bearing down all before it. The SERPENT, envying this happiness of the church, hath no way to undo us, but by drawing us from our Christian simplicity. By the occasion of heretics' quarrels and errors, the Serpent steps in, and will needs be a Spirit of zeal in the church; and he will so overdo against heretics, that he persuades them they must enlarge their *creed*, and add this clause against one, and that against another, and all was but for the perfecting and preserving of the Christian faith. And so he brings it to be a matter of so much wit to be a Christian, as Erasmus complains, that ordinary heads were not able to reach it. He hath got them, with a religious zealous cruelty to their own and others' souls, to lay all their salvation, and the peace of the church, upon some unsearchable mysteries about the Trinity, which God either never revealed, or never clearly revealed, or never laid so great stress upon; yet he persuades them, that there was Scripture proof enough for these; only