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My Denominational Creed

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By J. F. Love, Corresponding Secretary,
Foreign Mission Board

I use the word creed although I do not like it. Certainly it is allowable for a man to state his own religious faith and affirm it. There is good example and authority for this in the *Scriptures*.

Imagine a circle and that circle as compassing the life, faith, and work of the Baptist denomination. I define my denominational creed as lying within that circle.

I

Within the circle are held the fundamental doctrines of my religious faith.

There are slight variations in emphasis upon certain articles of faith here and there throughout our brotherhood, but the Baptist faith is my creed when it comes to stating theological views.

With the Baptist people I believe in such evangelical truths as the divine and supernatural inspiration of the Scriptures, the deity of Jesus Christ, His death as an atonement for sin, in His bodily resurrection and the promises of His second coming.

I believe in such distinctive denominational views as church membership for the responsible and regenerate only, the baptism of believers only, the Scriptural restriction of the Lord's Supper to those only who have personal belief and have been individually baptized in the faith and form of the New Testament.

I believe in the democratic principle and its full-length application to the whole of religious life, which gives every man equal right within the denomination and liberty outside the denomination if Baptist ways do not suit him.

So much for my theology and ecclesiology.

II

My denominational creed includes my commitment to all the work which Southern Baptists are doing within that circle.

I am a secretary of a general mission board and I am devoted to its interests, and desire to be a faithful steward of the trust which my brethren have imposed in me. But I am, first of all, a servant of Jesus Christ, and next I am a servant of my denomination, then I am at their bidding, a secretary of a mission board, and a secretary as a means and opportunity for serving God and my denomination.

All that Southern Baptists are doing for the glory of my Lord and the good of my fellow men concerns me and commands my support. I champion it all and consider myself a co-worker with my brethren to make not only my task but their tasks succeed.

I am, for instance, a willing and cordial friend of Christian education, of state and home missions, and all else we are doing in the South as well as in the uttermost parts, to bring spiritual freedom and blessing to men and create a loyal citizenship for the Kingdom of Christ.

I am glad that my gifts Sunday by Sunday are divided—a part for the minister who feeds my hungry soul on the Bread of Life, a part to make comfortable the house where I and my fellow wor-

shippers sit in heavenly places, a part for benevolent and missionary objects at home, and a part for all the world and every creature.

I find satisfaction in complete identification with the denomination on plans which are adopted in conference by the majority for helping the denomination toward its goal, and in having part in a varied and vast Christian service. I am for intra-denominational co-operation; find it sufficient to satisfy me and that it effects larger actual practical results than inter-denominationalism.

III

I have definitely dedicated my life to be an integrating and not a disintegrating force within this denominational circle.

That is part of my creed. My passion is to promote love and unity among the Baptists of the South, to make these secure in the bonds of peace; and further, to see their united strength expended upon a great and worthy world program. I abominate factions and would promote harmony, and compose differences in the interest of our Christian enterprises. I do not want a personal following; I should be afraid of such. It has never entered my head that I am sufficiently wise or good to set up an independent program, assume a personal leadership and enjoy individual following. All the probabilities seem to me to be in favor of greater wisdom, higher motive, more unselfishness and better results in the concurrent judgment and concerted action of the denomination, rather than in individual plans and methods.

The present life of the denomination is built upon its experience and history. The co-operative work and plans of the brotherhood are shaped in prayer

and conference in which the best suggestions of all are made available for the work. Therefore, the organized work of the denomination benefits by the accumulated and the combined wisdom of the denomination, whereas a personal, leadership gives to the cause thus led the benefit of individual wisdom only. I am not wise enough for such leadership. "In the multitude of counsellors there is safety," says the good Book, and this fact lies at the heart of denominational co-operation.

The activities, agencies, and methods of the denomination are the outgrowth of prayer, study, conference, experience, and demonstration. It would be arrant egotism in me to set up my judgment against decisions thus arrived at and to seek to discredit the work of the denomination or divide my brethren in their support of it. It is by standing "fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel" that we shall most honor Christ to be our best work.

Again, I can, by hearty co-operation and cordial fellowship in what the denomination is doing, contribute whatever I may be able to the sum total of denominational counsel and effort, and by so doing have my gifts and abilities so supplemented as to multiply my usefulness by all that others contribute in wisdom and labor.

Working together with my brethren on a denominational program, things are realized which are impossible of accomplishment by me alone, and building thus upon denominational foundations and into denominational life, my work is made more permanent than would be possible if I should attempt to conduct an independent enterprise.

The denomination conserves and perpetuates the things into which I, with others, put prayer and effort, while independent movements, institutions and enterprises rarely survive their leaders, and if they do, they tend more and more away from the denomination and become less and less a part of denominational achievement and monument.

IV

I find within the circle of denominational faith and activity all the liberty I want, ample room for the exercise of private judgment and Christian activity.

I have never been conscious of being cramped or having in any way my personal liberties or my intellectual independence restricted by such commitment as I have recited. I do not aspire to greater freedom nor chafe under denominational limitations. It has seemed plain to me that the largest service, in thought or action, any one can render a needy world can be rendered as a Baptist.

I have, of course, my ambitions that a generous overflow of my life may fall without the walls of my denomination and bless those who are not within that circle. I feel, however, that there is room within the circle for all the religious truth any man holds, and for all legitimate intellectual freedom, and I can within this enclosure of the denominational fellowship create a more bountiful and beneficent reservoir of Christian influence than I could as a sort of denominational free-lance who capers within and without the denomination at will or sets himself up as a critic of his brethren.

I find my brethren congenial to work with, and that they have for me more inspiration to high endeavor than any other people in the world. There

is for me a feeling of genuine comradeship in the service of Christ with those who bear the denominational name.

This does not mean, of course, as those for whom I am writing especially will be quick to understand, that I do not feel warm attachment for Christian men of every name and that I do not respond to the spirit of Christ which manifests itself in them. I am not indifferent to their work nor antagonistic to it, but I find all the liberty of thought and action I crave within the Baptist fold and Baptist program.

I am ready at all times to avow without hesitation, by word or pen, the faith of my people and to contribute the last ounce of my strength to the things in which they have agreed to co-operate.

There is no sense of intellectual stultification, or embarrassment, no feeling of shame or humiliation in thus circumscribing the sphere of intellectual, spiritual and physical activity. I have no ambition for larger liberty, or longing for other alliances. There is, to be frank, an occasional crabbed advocacy of denominationalism with which I have no sympathy, but even in such cases I have found it possible to discover beneath an ugly spirit a devotion to the faith which I hold and a desire to promote it which are admirable.

There is, too, within the denominational group some who loiter while others are bearing the burdens of the day. Some are conservative and some are progressive. I believe in orthodoxy at work; in a sound message and a big program. But to me it seems a holy calling and a high privilege to have a part in harmonizing, enlisting, combining, and inspiring these members of a great brotherhood for common and worthy service. •

I reach forth my hand to those who are more intrepid than I in their progressiveness, and reach back my hand to those who are more conservative than I.

I do not believe there is a holier, higher privilege given the greatest man among us than to be a unifying, constructive, heartening factor among his brethren for those objects to which the denomination, in its organized capacity, is committed. My daily prayer is that, to the limit of my feeble powers, God will help me to do at least some small part of this task which is possible in larger degree to other men.

I have stated my denominational creed for myself and not another's for him.