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THE RADICAL DIFFERENCE : IN THE LAST ANALYSIS
OF THE CHURCH QUESTION.

It is not pretended, by that portion of the Presbyterian church which holds most tenaciously to the supernatural Element in Religion—and therefore most exactly to the ancient landmarks ; and which, on these accounts rejoiced the most in the deliverance of the church ; that she had been completely restored from her great defection—or completely delivered from all danger, by the wonderful events of 1831–9, and the signal interposition of God at that period.

It is earnestly contended by them, that the great truths which were revived, after a long eclipse, at that era, were found effectual, precisely to the extent to which the church applied them ; that they delivered her from stupor and defection—as well as from oppression and danger, precisely as far as she had courage to follow them ; and that they have marked her extraordinary career of peace, success, and revival in its best sense, from that day to this, precisely as far as that career has been fortunate. Nor would there be the least difficulty, in demonstrating from the writings and speeches of the leading actors in those scenes—and from the most formal conclusions of the highest tribunals of the church : In the *first* place, that this result was foreseen and confidently relied on : In the *second* place, that the corresponding career, in the opposite direction, of the New School branch of the church, was distinctly pointed out, as inevitable : In the *third* place, that it was clearly understood, and repeatedly bewailed in the most conspicuous manner, that the entanglements of the church, by reason of her previous defections,—rendered her incapable *at once*, of the *complete* application of the grand principles and truths which, by God's blessing, saved her : And in the *fourth* place, that the exhortations of the very persons, who were raised up by God, to give shape to all that was done—were most earnest and repeated unto the church, that she should faithfully and to the end, follow out the principles of her vital reformation, as Providence, and time, and opportunity, and the faith and piety of her members would permit.

elsewhere to be found. And history testifies upon this point very wonderfully.

The truth of the matter is, that there is now by far too much thought given to the temporalities of the Church; and this is far worse than the opposite extreme. But we are not dealing with a question of *policy*, but of *principle*.

A reference to the most standard expounders of the Presbyterian system, both in Scotland and in America, will satisfy any one that the principle advocated in this article is the principle of old-fashioned, uncontaminated Presbyterianism. (See Hetherington, McCrie, Melville, Stuart, Miller, &c.)

WHOSE CHILDREN HAVE A RIGHT TO BAPTISM?

THIS is a question which our Pastors are often called upon to decide in the regular course of their ministrations, and the decision must generally be made under circumstances involving a sacrifice of personal feeling on their part, and the risk of offending those to whom they are anxious to do good. The impulses of kindness or considerations of expediency are sometimes too strong, even in wise and good men, to be resisted by a simple conviction of right; and this is particularly liable to occur, when, as is the case with nearly all Pastors, such impulses and considerations are fortified by the recollection that they have been generously treated by the very persons to whom they ought to deny the privileges of the church. We need, therefore, to have our convictions of truth and duty confirmed: that, while we hold ourselves ready to become all things to all men, if by any means we may save some, we may yet firmly refuse, even for an hour, to resign one principle of the gospel, or prostitute any, the very least of the ordinances of Christ. We ought to feel continually that the pastoral office is a *trust*, and, consequently, that our only concern is to be found faithful. We have no right to preach our own Gospel, or administer our own ordinances, or administer God's ordinances in our own way. We are not ministers plenipotentiary, but ambassadors with definite instructions which we dare not transcend. If we are abused by foolish men for doing our duty, and refusing to yield to their humours, let them look to it. We serve the Lord Christ, and to Him alone must we finally render our account. The smiles of such a Master will be an ample compensation for the frowns and curses of a world.

Although the doctrine of our Church in reference to the baptism of children, is perfectly explicit, as explicit as words can make it, our practice has not been entirely uniform, and, we have reason to fear, there is not an entire unanimity of opinion amongst us. The General Assembly of 1811 appointed a Committee to prepare a Report

on the Duty of the Church in the Instruction and Discipline of her Baptized Children. This Report was presented to the Assembly of the following year, but was not adopted by that Assembly or by any other. It is reprinted in the Presbyterian Educational Repository. Why it was not adopted, we suppose, will be plain enough to any man who will read it. We refer to it now, merely for the following enumeration of errors against which it was, among other things, designed to bear testimony. They are errors against which, we rejoice to believe, the great body of our church would bear testimony now.

“The errors to which we refer,” say the Committee,—are “that the right and power of handing down baptism to our children, are derived from the baptism of the parent; “that the original guilt of baptized infants, is so covered by the blood of atonement, symbolized in baptism, that its condemning power, at least with respect to baptized infants dying in infancy, is destroyed by the grace of the new covenant;” “that a profession of saving faith in adults, is not requisite to entitle them to baptism;” “that a mere owning of the covenant, without a credible profession of a person’s being in the covenant, entitles him to the baptism, of his children;” “that a child ought not to be punished, by refusing baptism, for the fault of its parent;” “that a parent’s profession is to be considered credible, if his life be moral, without inquiring into his religious practice, or exacting from him a promise of obedience to all the commandments of Christ;” “that a person may lawfully be admitted to the Lord’s Supper, who neglects religious duties, though he may be moral in his deportment;” and that the sacraments are converting ordinances, intended to regenerate sinners, or to procure the pardon of sins.”

Such errors betray deplorable ignorance of the very nature of a sacrament. They spring from the tendency in our fallen nature to lose sight of the spirituality of religion, and the sovereignty of the Holy Ghost in the great business of salvation; that tendency which has worked itself out in the apostate communion of Rome, and made it the cage of unclean birds, the hold of every foul spirit. The consequence of this tendency, aggravated by the long and dismal reign of Papal darkness, is, that with unconverted men, the sacraments are a sort of charm, and the verbal forms, used in celebrating them, a species of magical incantation. A horse-shoe, nailed over the door, has much the same meaning for some grossly superstitious people, that the precious seals of the covenant of God have for some educated and enlightened men. And perhaps it is not going too far to say, that many intelligent christians in our own church, regard the sacraments with a sort of awe nearly allied to superstition. Why that slavish fear in approaching the feast of heavenly charity, spread by a Father’s hand? Why that anxiety to have a dying child baptized, when no such anxiety is felt for the child in health?

It cannot, therefore, be out of place in a journal like this, devoted to the exposition and defence of Scriptural Christianity, to attempt an answer to the question, “whose children have the right to Baptism?”

The doctrine of our own church, upon this point, is very clearly

expressed in the answer to the 166th Question of the Larger Westminster Catechism, which is in these words: "Baptism is not to be administered to any that are out of the visible church, and so strangers from the covenant of promise, till they profess their faith in Christ, and obedience to him; but infants descending from parents, either both or but one of them, professing faith in Christ, and obedience to him, are in that respect, within the covenant, and are to be baptized." See also Conf. of Faith, c. 28. s. 4. The only difficulty that can arise in the interpretation of this statement, is, as to the meaning of "faith in Christ, and obedience to Him." In some branches of the great Presbyterian family, a credible profession of *saving* faith, is not required in order to full communion in the church. It is well known, how earnestly Dr. Mason of New York protested against the right of church-sessions, to demand evidence of a change of heart from candidates applying for admission to the Lord's Table: and the same views are held, we believe, in the churches of Scotland and Ireland. But that branch of the church to which we belong, so far as we know, has always acted upon a different view of the case, and held that the faith which qualifies for communion is that faith in Christ, which is defined in the 86th answer of the Shorter Catechism, to be "a saving grace, whereby we receive and rest upon Him alone for salvation, as He is offered to us in the Gospel." It ought to be noted that the Question is not, "what is *saving* faith?" but simply, "what is faith in Christ?" The title of the XIV chapter of the Confession is, of "Saving Faith;" and the description of it is only an expansion of the answer in the Shorter Catechism. It is plain from the Larger Catechism above cited, that the qualifications which are required for full communion of adults by their own baptism, are required also to give them the right to have their children baptized: and these qualifications are "faith in Christ (as elsewhere defined) and obedience to him." Jonathan Edwards has, we think, clearly demonstrated in his *Treatise on the Qualifications for Full Communion*, that the views we are defending, are the Scriptural views of the matter, and we doubt not that the sympathies of our whole communion, with rare exceptions, are with him. We cannot regret the controversy which compelled him to write that able *Treatise*: and, although for reasons which he states, he abstains from the discussion of the question before us, it is not difficult to determine what his conclusions, in regard to it, would have been.

It may be said that the General Assembly (*Digest of 1820*) refused in 1816, to decide that "those parents who live in the constant neglect of the Lord's Supper, are not entitled to the right of having their children baptized." But in answer to this, it may be observed. 1. That they did not decide the contrary. 2. That the proposition (*Digest*, p. 330) submitted to them, has very little to do with the main point, and they may have rejected it on account of its irrelevancy. 3. The proposition seems to have referred to the case only of a regular member of the church, absenting himself, of his own accord, from the Lord's Table; and not to baptized, or unbaptized

men of the world. We can conceive of cases even of actual suspension from the communion of the church, in which serious doubts might arise whether the children of such suspended persons ought to be debarred the privilege of baptism : but such cases rarely, if ever, actually occur, and when they do, they are to be judged upon principles differing very materially from those which control the question, as it relates to parents who have never professed "faith in Christ and obedience to Him."

In 1794, the following reference from the Synod of Philadelphia was laid before the Assembly : (see minutes for that year :) "As Baptism is to be administered to the infants of those who are members of the visible church, but our Directory leaves the description of the visible and credible profession of christianity vague and indefinite, it is humbly proposed to the Assembly to give some precise direction and definition of such a profession for the information of its ministers." In answer to this reference, the Assembly judged it unnecessary, and perhaps impracticable, to deliver rules more explicit than those contained in the Standards of our Church ; but should cases of difficulty arise, they must be decided, respectively, according to their own merits, before the proper judicatories. Here, again, the meagreness of our ecclesiastical records leaves us in doubt, as to the views really held by the Assembly. But this much is clear, that, in their judgment, whatever might be the ambiguity of the Directory (which is not, in the full sense, a part of the Standards of the Presbyterian Church,) the Standards are explicit enough. And so we think.

Seeing then that these Standards teach, that the children *only* of parents, one or both, professing "faith in Christ and obedience to Him," have a right to be baptized ; let us inquire whether this is the teaching of Scripture. In doing so, we take the liberty of saying, that, in addressing the officers of our church, the argument from Scripture is *ex abundanti*, as they have solemnly acknowledged the Standards to be Scriptural. If any man thinks that they are not in accordance with God's word, he ought to be something else than an officer in the church which holds them.

In the New Testament, baptism is no where recorded as having been administered without profession of "faith in Christ," or repentance from sin. These two things go together, and are, in some sort the same act of the soul—contemplated, in the one, in its relation to the *terminus ad quem*, in the other, in its relation to the *t. a. quo*. It is a turning away *from* sin, and turning *to* Christ. Hence Philip says to the Eunuch, asking if he might be baptized: "If thou *believest with all thine heart*, thou mayest : " and Peter says to the multitude on the day of Pentecost, "*Repent* and be baptized." (Acts 8 : 36, 37 ; 2 : 38.) "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." "For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation, not to be repented of," (Rom. 10 : 9 ; 2. Cor. 7 : 10.) This is the faith and the repentance required, in order to give the right, as before God, to baptism : and a credible profession of such

faith and repentance is necessary, as before the church, to warrant the administration of it. "He that *believeth* and is baptized," said the Saviour, "shall be saved." "*Repent*," said John the Baptist to the multitude, "for the kingdom of heaven is at hand;" and "they were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins." In a word, as Baptism sets forth the union of the believer with Christ, by the in-dwelling Spirit of holiness, that union from which faith, repentance, and all the other manifestations of spiritual life, proceed: it should seem to be the emptiest ceremony in the world, without the reality or the credible profession of such an union. If this be so, then in the baptism of children, who shall make the profession? The children themselves cannot do it. Nobody has a right to make it, in such a case, and children ought not to be baptized at all, say some. Any body may do it, god-fathers and god-mothers, say others. Parents may do it, say the Scriptures and our Confession, if they can do it honestly. And, accordingly, we have examples of household baptisms on the profession of faith of the head of the household, (see Acts 16: 15, 33; 18: 8.) the profession of *saving* faith. Paul and Silas said to the Jailer, "*Believe* on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be *saved*, and *thy house*;" and it was on the profession of such faith, that "he and all his were baptized straight-way." The Jailer "*rejoiced, believing* in God with *all his house*." "And Crispus the chief ruler of the synagogue, *believed* on the Lord with *all his house*." We are not disputing now with Anti-Pedo-baptists, and therefore, shall not stop to vindicate our view of these household baptisms, as implying the baptism of children. What we insist upon is, that a profession of faith on the part of parents, either one or both, must go before the baptism of children, if such baptism is to be administered at all.

This may be argued further, from the very nature and design of the sacraments. There can be but two theories essentially, as to the nature of a sacrament, the one confounding in some form or other, the sign and the thing signified: the other asserting their distinction and separation. In the Lord's Supper, for example, there is no middle ground between Popery, in some form, or Zwinglianism in some form. There can be in like manner, but two theories essentially, as to the efficacy of the sacraments. The one making it to depend upon the fact of administration, *ex opere operato*: the other making it to depend on the sovereign power of the Spirit, accompanying the *truth* of which the sacrament is the sign and seal. Take away the truth signified and sealed in the sacraments, and they become unreasonable ceremonies, and our worship becomes the sacrifice of fools. Hence our Assembly decided ten years ago, that Romish Baptism was no baptism; not upon the ground only, that the element of water was materially corrupted by the admixture of loathsome foreign ingredients, but that the *truth* constituting the form of the sacrament was utterly denied, and trampled under foot by that mother and mistress of abominations. Hence her Eucharist has ceased to be "that feast of free grace and adoption to which Christ invited His disciples to sit as brethren, and co-heirs of the happy

covenant, that feast of love and heavenly-admitted fellowship, the seal of filial grace ;” and has become “the subject of horror and glouting adoration, pageanted about like a dreadful idol.” These ordinances are monuments without an inscription, and it depends upon what we write on them, whether they be true and precious memorials of God’s love to us, or, like the tower of Babel, the memorials of our rebellion against God. The truth is the grand instrument of our sanctification, the *mould* into which the soul of the believer is to run, and take its shape (John 17 : 17, 19 ; Rom. 6 : 17, in the Greek.) And whether that truth reaches the mind through the avenue of the ear, in the preaching of the word : or, through the avenue of the eye, in the symbolical elements and actions of the sacraments, it conduces not to our sanctification, unless the Spirit melts our hearts, by an immediate influence of His own. The shapeless piece of metal will lie by the side of the mould and in contact with it, shapeless for ever, if nothing more be done. How then can the sacraments profit us, or our children, if we believe not? They cannot, any more than the eternal springs and fountains of the hills can assuage the burning thirst of the dying travellers in the desert. Why then should an unconverted man ask for baptism, either for himself, or for his child? Are the signs of that ordinance any signs to him? Of what is the word trumpet the sign, to a man born deaf? Is the seal of the covenant any seal to him, when he has not yet set to his own seal, that God is true? In a word, is baptism, in the case of such a man, any thing more than weak superstition, or wanton mockery of God? If the man knows not what he is doing, it is the first ; if he does know, it is the last. In either case, it is the duty of the minister not to allow, if he can help it, the ordinance of God to be profaned. Men should be taught that they are bound to believe in Christ and to confess Him, in order that they and their children may enjoy the privileges of the church : that they alone are to blame, if their children are deprived of any : and that the same law holds in the visible church, as in nature and Providence ; the children suffer for their parents’ delinquencies. *Believe* and be baptized : *believe* and have thy house baptized.

We might argue, still further, from the nature of the church as an association of men established for the purpose of accomplishing a certain end, and enjoying certain privileges. Is it not a universal rule that members only are to enjoy these privileges? What would a lodge of Free Masons say to a man, who should demand any of the rights thereto pertaining, when he was not only not a member, but was habitually using his influence, silently or openly, against the whole Order? What would a Railway Corporation say to a man, who should demand the payment of a dividend, or a free passage always over the road, when the man was no stockholder? And shall the church of Christ not protect her privileges from invasion on the side of the world, in league with the prince of darkness against her? She is not purely a voluntary association : she has no power to make or alter her charter : her charter is given her of God, and in it, there is no provision made for *honorary* members, entitled to enjoy the

privilege of baptism and no other. If the officers of the church were firmer in maintaining her dignity and independence, in this respect, her privileges would be felt to be worth having, and she would not be the poor pitiful slave and laughing-stock of men that she often is.

But a parent may say, the constitution makes baptized children members of the church: I have been baptized in infancy, I have never been excommunicated, and therefore, am a member now, and entitled to the right of having my child baptized. A great deal might be said in reply, but this is enough for our present purpose, that children who have been baptized are members of the church, in a sense somewhat analogous to the sense, in which they are members of the State: they are subject to law, and enjoy the fostering care of both, but they are not entitled to all the privileges of either, until they become adults. Adulthood in the State is defined by law, and consists in the attainment of a certain age: adulthood in the Church is also defined by law, and consists in the possession of faith, or credible evidence thereof. This view of the matter, therefore, will not help the non-professing parent who has been baptized in infancy: it is enough, however, to alarm him, about his own salvation, if he will look at it. If he is a member of the church, he has an awful account to meet, for broken vows.

We had intended to say something in regard to the recklessness—to use no harsher term—of unconverted men, in taking the sort of vows upon them, which they are compelled to take, in offering their children for baptism in our church: and in regard to the cruelty of ministers in allowing them to do it. But, we conclude by exhorting our brethren, to remember, that corruption has generally come into the church, through changes in the worship of God, and, that of all the parts of worship, none ought to be more strictly guarded, than the seals of the covenant, designed, as they are, to be the discriminating badges of the friends and followers of Christ.

THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY AND THE GERMAN REFORMED CHURCH.

AMONG several subjects, of more or less urgent importance, which claim the careful attention of our Church through her highest judicatory, that of correspondence with other branches of our Protestant kindred is not among the least urgent. This necessity arises from several quarters. Our correspondence with the various ecclesiastical bodies of New England, has been more or less disturbed for some years,—the disturbance always coming from them—and our last Assembly took the initiation in agitating the quiet of our intercourse with the General Synod of the German Reformed Church. This, together with what has transpired in some of the New England As-