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I.

SOME OBJECTIONS TO THE FEDERAL THEORY OF IMMEDIATE IMPUTATION.

WE will notice the most radical objection first. A distinguished theologian, who teaches immediate imputation, and who would be classed as a Calvinist, objects to the federal theory on the ground that "it is extra-scriptural, there being no mention of such a covenant with Adam in the account of man's trial." What he thinks of the covenant of grace may be gathered from the fact that he makes election logically subsequent, in God's decree, to the purpose to redeem. "The true order of the decrees," he holds, "is therefore as follows: 1, The decree to create; 2, the decree to permit the fall; 3, the decree to provide a salvation in Christ sufficient for the needs of all; 4, the decree to secure the actual acceptance of this salvation on the part of some—or, in other words, the decree of election." Such an order of the decrees is obviously inconsistent with a federal relation on the part of the Redeemer to any particular class of fallen men. It implies that his work had equal reference to all. Election is simply an expedient to save the scheme from ignominious failure. We understand this author to make a square issue. The natural relation is the only one we sustain to Adam: our union with Christ begins when we exercise saving faith. The theory of the covenant being extra-scriptural, he does not employ the terms which belong to it. To use Bishop Butler's distinction, he objects to the evidence rather than to the contents of revelation. We agree with him entirely that the question is one of fact. If the doctrine of the covenants is not a matter of divine revelation, then any

II.

THEORIES AND PRACTICE OF CONFIRMATION.

ALTHOUGH confirmation is nowhere commanded in the Scriptures, and is not even mentioned in the Bible, it is nevertheless practiced, in one form or another, in all Christian churches, where pædo-baptism prevails, as a necessary consequence of the latter. At one time the baptized children must be admitted to the Lord's Supper. It is generally admitted that a step of such importance, marking, as it does, a period in the spiritual life of the believer, should not be taken without due preparation, and an examination by the officers of the church as to whether the young believer possesses the necessary qualifications for this step.

In the Roman Catholic Church, confirmation is one of its seven sacraments. Its visible sign is the "chrism," a mixture of olive oil and balsam, prepared and consecrated once a year by the bishop, who alone administers the sacrament, or a representative appointed by him. The person to be confirmed usually has one sponsor, and receives a confirmation name. It is deemed advisable to delay this sacrament until the children have arrived at the years of discretion. If any are unwilling to await the twelfth year of age, then the *Catechismus Romanus* recommends that they postpone it at least until the seventh year. Confirmation proper consists of the bishop's making a cross with the chrism upon the forehead of the person, saying, "I sign thee with the sign of the cross, and I confirm thee with the chrism of salvation, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." Then follows a slight blow upon the cheek and the salutation of peace. The import of this act is the alleged imparting of the Holy Spirit for confirmation in righteousness, and strengthening for the battle of life. For this reason, only a bishop may administer this sacrament, because only he is supposed to be able to impart the Holy Spirit in his fulness. It is considered a

necessary complement of baptism, but, in reality, is placed above baptism, because the latter may be administered by any priest, eventually even by a layman. As scriptural proof for its confirmation, the Roman Catholic Church claims those passages chiefly in which the Vulgate has the word *confirmare*; thus especially Acts viii. 17, xiv. 22, xv. 32. The first mentioned passage is also considered as proof that only a bishop may confirm. But already the reformers contended that the Apostles Peter and John there imparted special spiritual gifts, as prophesying and working miracles; such gifts as the unregenerate Simon coveted, and which, as a superior magic, he offered to buy of the apostles.

In the Anglican Church, the persons confirmed renew the baptismal vow made by their godparents, who are then released from their responsibility. In this church, also, it is only the bishop who performs the rite, while in the Lutheran and Reformed Churches the pastor does it. According to the Protestant conception, this rite is in no wise regarded as a divine ordinance, but merely as a human institution. "The English Church," says Alford, "in retaining the rite of confirmation, has not grounded it on any institution by the apostles, but merely declared the laying on of hands on the candidates, to certify them (by this sign) of God's favor and goodness towards them, to be 'after the example of the holy apostles.' Nor is there any trace in the office of the conferring of the Holy Ghost by confirmation, but a distinct recognition of the former reception of the Holy Spirit (at baptism), and a prayer for the increase of his influence, proportioned to the maturer life now opening on the newly confirmed."

Confirmation as a sacrament was from the beginning strongly opposed by the reformers. Melancthon calls it "an idle ceremony"; Luther "an apish trick," "a human invention," "a lying jugglery of the bishops." Although they sought to substitute for the rejected sacrament a confirmation according to evangelical principles, even this was accepted at first only by a minority, which may be accounted for by the powerful aversion against the Romish "sacrament," and anything that resembled it. Luther's

Order of Divine Service contains as yet no mention of confirmation. The earlier Books of Church Order only affirm "that quite ignorant children and stupid persons, who neither know nor are willing to learn the ten commandments, the creed and the Lord's prayer, should not be admitted to the sacrament; that otherwise parents present their children, some days prior, to the minister, that he examine them, and see how they are established in the articles of faith, and whether they are worthy and qualified for the Lord's Supper."

According to the Reformed order, too, no one is to be admitted to the communion who had not made a profession of faith and walked piously, or brought certificates to that effect. The "Declaration of Thorn," in 1645, the oldest Reformed symbol taking cognizance of confirmation as an already established institution, says, "To call this prayer for, and commendation of, adolescent believers to God, after the prescribed examination, 'confirmation,' we willingly consent, as also this custom is regularly observed in our churches."

As a separate act of worship, however, confirmation was not generally introduced in the Lutheran and Reformed Churches until the end of the eighteenth century, and it is only since then that it is practiced throughout evangelical Germany, and naturally also with the emigrated Germans in foreign parts. But while it is now a standing institution everywhere in these churches, there are heard complaints on every hand about the evils connected with it. Many people have lost the conception of its true meaning. The opinion prevails generally that to be confirmed is identical with "to quit school." When children have attained a certain age and are about to leave home to earn their bread, it is considered a matter of course that they must first be confirmed. What their inward state is, whether they really mean to be the Lord's, is usually not inquired into; and thus the first step from the parental roof is often sullied with a lie, solemnly uttered before God and the church. As a result of this vicious conception of confirmation, we face the sad fact that many of those confirmed soon afterwards again forsake the church. They are confirmed out of it, instead of into it. Their first communion

is, in not a few cases, also their last. Confirmation is only regarded as a custom which must be observed for decency's sake, or as an act which lends a certain churchly or Christian varnish. With this, they think, they have satisfied their obligations to God and the church.

With such a conception of confirmation, it is no surprise that it is degraded, in many cases, to a mere outward show, and the day of confirmation into a day of worldly feasting and pleasure. It is bad enough that the children usually appear for confirmation showily dressed. In some places, especially where Catholics are numerous, the girls are dressed in white, with wreaths and veils upon their heads, after the Catholic custom. But worse than this is the transformation of the day of confirmation into a day of worldly revelry. Even in better families it happens that on this day receptions are held in honor of the children, at which, by singing and playing, or even by music and dancing, any impression possibly made upon them by the solemn rite is at once thoroughly dispelled.

On account of these lamentable abuses many conscientious ministers entertain strong scruples about the propriety of this institution, and its usefulness is now a burning question both in this and the old country. Of course, it is the church's duty sharply to reprove the evils which have developed in connection with this solemn rite, and to place in the true light its real significance.

WHAT, THEN, IS THE MEANING OF CONFIRMATION ?

It is not a strengthening of baptismal grace, in the Roman Catholic sense, nor a necessary complement of holy baptism, though it is its logical outcome. It is utterly unscriptural to hold that the divine ordinance of baptism needs any perfection or addition by a fictitious sacrament. Neither is it scriptural to say that the Holy Spirit is imparted by the laying on of hands, though this practice is generally retained in connection with evangelical confirmation—not, however, as a means of conferring the Holy Spirit, but because it was a very ancient ceremony, used both before and after Christ. Most of the Lutheran Church

Orders prescribe it. The earlier ones permitted it only with prayer.

Melanchthon says in his reply to the Regensburg propositions of union, with Luther's consent, "This, however, we desire, that the catechism be faithfully used in the church, and that prayer be had over the children, after they have been examined, and have professed their faith and promised obedience to the church. And this prayer, we believe, would not be in vain, nor does it displease us, if the laying on of hands be used with it, as is also the custom in some churches."

Calvin also says, "It was anciently customary for the children of Christians . . . who had been initiated by baptism, not having then given a confession of faith to the church, to be again, toward the end of their boyhood or on adolescence, brought forward by their parents and examined by the pastor in terms of the catechism. . . . In order that this act, which otherwise justly required to be grave and holy, might have more reverence and dignity, the ceremony of laying on of hands was used." (*Institutes*, Book IV., Chap. XIX., Par. 4.) And in another place he says, "I wish we could retain the custom." (*Ibid.*, 12, 13.)

It cannot be denied that an intercessory prayer, with laying on of hands on each individual, must make a deep impression. But it is liable to misinterpretation. There is no scriptural ground for it. The apostles imposed hands on some (but not by any means all) believers, for the purpose of imparting to them special spiritual gifts (*e. g.*, Acts xix. 6). For this they had the Lord's command and promise. It is required to be used in connection with the ordination of ministers and church officers (Acts vi. 6; xiii. 3; 1 Tim. iv. 14; 2 Tim. i. 6), and was so used even in the old dispensation (Num. viii. 10; xxvii. 18, 23; Deut. xxxiv. 9). But nowhere in the Scriptures is there a passage indicating that the general gift of the Holy Spirit is associated with it. For this there remain only the ordinary means of grace—the word, sacraments and prayer. Jesus himself makes the reception of the Holy Spirit dependent on prayer (Luke xi. 13).

Does confirmation, then, confirm? If so, in what sense? We have seen that it is not a "strengthening" in the Roman Catholic

sense. For this reason, the Presbyterians and Methodists have discarded the term entirely, though they retain its substance. However, there can be no objection to the name, if it is taken in the sense of ratification or approval, viz., of the children's full membership in the church, and their right to all its blessings. Confirmation, in other words, is a solemn act whereby those recognized in their infancy as members of the church, on the faith of their parents, are now ratified and confirmed in their church standing, on the profession of their own faith. In this sense confirmation is retained in form or in substance in all Protestant churches. (See Charles Hodge, *Princeton Review*, 1855, page 445; *Church Polity*, pages 157, 158.)

The Presbyterian Directory for Worship says, "Children, born within the pale of the visible church, and dedicated to God in baptism, . . . when they come to years of discretion, . . . ought to be urgently reminded that . . . it is their duty and privilege personally to accept Christ, confess him before men, and seek admission to the Lord's Supper."

Baptized children are members, but not yet full members, of the church, not being entitled to all her privileges. Our children are also citizens of the state by birthright, but minor citizens. As such, they are not yet entitled to conclude business transactions in their own name, or to vote in civil elections, or to hold civil offices. Their citizenship is, therefore, limited. In the same way, children of believers are already members of the church, but minor members, not being entitled to come to the Lord's table, or to participate in the government of the church. But their membership was recognized in their baptism. They were baptized, not that they might become members, but because they were members. Under the old covenant, too, the children were circumcised, not that they might become Israelites, but because they were Israelites. Children are members of the kingdom of heaven for the sake of their believing parents. As soon as these become citizens of the kingdom, their children also obtain citizenship in it; yea, if but one of the parents is a believer, "for the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband: else were

your children unclean, but now are they holy." (1 Corinthians vii. 14.)

Our children are precious in the sight of God, and this fact should be brought to their consciousness when they come to years of discretion, and are to be received into the full communion of the church as members of full age and majority, entitled to come to the Lord's table and to all other privileges of full members; not, however, because they have attained a certain age, but only on their voluntary profession of love to the Saviour, and promise of obedience to him: for here there is a difference between the minors in the state and those in the church. The former become of age and obtain all rights of full citizens as soon as they have attained the requisite age; the latter, when they personally receive Christ and his salvation. This leads to the main question, viz.:

WHAT ARE THE PROPER QUALIFICATIONS OF CHILDREN TO BE ADMITTED TO THE COMMUNION?

Ordinarily, no child is, or should be, so admitted, unless it has a fair acquaintance with sacred history and the catechism. The reformers laid the greatest stress upon catechetical instruction. With the Reformation began a new era of catechisms for the instruction of the young. The smaller catechism of Luther made the beginning in 1529. Then followed a great number of others. The Geneva Catechism of Calvin appeared in 1536, the Heidelberg Catechism in 1563, the Larger and Shorter Westminster in 1647. To this day, with German Protestants, confirmation is everywhere preceded by a special preparatory course of catechetical instruction. In other churches this instruction is left almost exclusively to the Sabbath-school and the home, and the results are frequently quite unsatisfactory. All pastors would do well to emulate the example of their Lutheran and Reformed brethren in teaching classes of children with a view to their admittance to the Lord's table. This brings the pastor into closer touch with them than any other method. A faithful pastor would not confine himself merely to instruct the children, but seek their spiritual awakening. It is important that children learn the

Word of God clearly and correctly, but it is more important that they receive it with their heart.

The influence of the Christian home is also an important factor in the religious training of the child. Because they lack the nurture and protection of family religion, so many young Christians turn aside soon after their confirmation. Those who remain faithful, with few exceptions, are sons and daughters of pious parents. As a rule, religion is transmitted from the father upon the son, like a precious family heirloom. If the parents neglect to set a pious example for their children, all the instruction, entreaty and admonition by pastor and teachers are often in vain, and if, nevertheless, the children seek admission to the Lord's table, urged perhaps by their worldly parents, it is only out of regard for the custom, and often an empty form.

The examination to which children are submitted before their admittance to the communion should not be confined, therefore, to ascertain their knowledge of Christian truth. Of much greater importance is the examination of their faith and experience. How far such an examination should go must be left to the discretion of the minister and officers of the church, only that those who are entire strangers to the life from God be not admitted to the Lord's table, but debarred for the time being. The children should at least have renounced all forms of gross sin, manifest a love for the Saviour and his house, and simple prayer should be not merely a habit and a duty, but a matter of heart with them. It is truly appalling to notice that prayer is wholly neglected by many children. A "conversion," definitely fixed as to time, cannot always be expected on the part of those who have prayed from their heart and loved Jesus from infancy; much less is it to be exacted by artificial questioning and pressure. In most cases, they grow gradually into the conscious grace and love of Christ, as they do into the conscious love of their parents.

The holy Scriptures everywhere require repentance and faith as the condition of salvation. Nothing more and nothing less must, therefore, be required of the children admitted to the communion. Either of these may yet be very imperfect. Still, there must be a beginning. The young Christians may not yet have a

very pronounced conviction of sin; it suffices also if the child knows that "there must be a change in me." Its faith may still be very undeveloped or even weak, but it must clearly understand that its hope of pardon is based alone upon the grace of God in Christ; and it must promise that, in humble reliance on the Holy Spirit, it will endeavor to walk as becometh the follower of Christ, forsaking all sin and conforming its life to his teaching and example.

Let no one say that the children are too young and immature for this. If so, then they are also too young and immature to "distinguish the Lord's body" and partake of his sacrament. At what time the children are mature for admittance into the full communion of the church cannot be fixed by any definite rule, but must be left to the prudence of the officers of the church. Not their age, however, but their spiritual qualification alone must decide this. If more stress were laid on this, there would not be so many backsliders. A healthier spiritual life would pervade our churches; the younger members would be more willing and better qualified to engage in church work; more young men would consecrate themselves to the ministry, and for the offices in the church there would more easily be found suitable Christian men, if upon their admission into the full communion of the church the young souls had received a wholesome impulse from above, if they had been spiritually awakened to a healthy life in Christ, to their own lasting benefit.

LOUIS VOSS.

New Orleans, La.