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## ARTICLE III.

## THE CHURCH-MEMBERSHIP OF BAPTIZED CHILDREN.

BY REV. LEWIS GROUT, FORMERLY MISSIONARY OF THE A. D. C. F. M.

It is a common remark that our duties are modified and determined by our relations. Taking this to be true, how important it is that the church of Christ should carefully consider that relation which is instituted between herself and those children whom she brings to the baptismal font. Nor would this seem to be either common or easy; else we might suppose the opinions of many of our clergy and laity would be less vague and diversified. Inquiring of one and another as to their thoughts on this subject — what they believe to be the proper ecclesiastical standing of baptized children; whether they belong to the church, are in it and of it, or out of it, or where they are — the writer has been somewhat surprised at the variety of views that prevail, even among those who are supposed to be of the same general faith in respect to the duty and import of infant baptism.

All agree that such children must be related to the church somehow, and that this relation must be of such a nature that something good ought to be expected to come of it. Yet some seem to look upon it as wholly an external one, and so deny that they are either in the church or members of it at all, in any sense. Some will admit that they belong to the church, yet seem to doubt or deny that the church belongs at all to them; that is, the church has a claim upon the children, and an interest in them, but the children have as yet no interest or place in the church. Some hold that they are in the church, yet not of it; as though to be in it, in any sense deserving the name, is not to be of it. Not a few seem to regard them as neither in it nor out of it, but as occupying some sort of middle ground; as though this were either

scriptural or tenable. Our own conviction is that these views fall, all sadly, though not all equally, short of the truth; that on this point our Congregational churches, many of them, at least many members in most of them, have departed from the teaching of the divine word, from the faith and practice of the primitive church, from the faith and practice of the Puritan Fathers, and from the faith, at least, of other branches of the catholic church of the present age, the Baptists alone excepted.

Nor can we rid ourselves of the conviction that much of the neglect into which infant baptism is alleged to have fallen within the memory of the living, and much of the neglect of that nurture, too, which the church owes her baptized children, are among the sad consequences of the doubts, errors, and haziness of sentiment that prevail among us on this subject. Nor, again, do we think it among the least hopeful signs of the times, pertaining to this point, that so many are coming to be dissatisfied with the present state of the question. If we mistake not, the opinion is beginning to prevail that we, as Congregationalists, must take up this subject anew; that both the clergy and the laity must think it through, from end to end, and come to some conclusion less crude, more positive, definite, and consistent; that we must go either backward or forward, if we would ever hope to set our feet on solid ground.

Some, indeed, are all ready to go forward, and take the ground — which a few, in fact, have never yielded — that baptized children are truly members of the church. And such is the belief of the writer. Not that he is one of those who have always held this view. Indeed few are likely to be further from it than he was when first led, not long since, to take up the subject, and give it more than ordinary attention. But every step in the investigation served only to lead him to the conviction here avowed, that the children of whom we speak are really and truly in the church and members of it.

We may call them children of the church, if we will, as indeed we often do; and for certain occasions and purposes

the term is a good one. But it has its defects, and its dangers too. The fact is, the words we use, the names we apply, often have in time, a strange, powerful, though silent influence in moulding and determining our ideas of the things they are used to represent. John Foster somewhere tells us of a ship that was turned out of its proper course and carried into the port of an enemy by a magnet concealed near the compass. So the mind may be quietly deflected and drift off into error by the hidden influence of a misapplied name. And how is it, in fact, with the language, the name in question? What really ought to be the natural effect of an indiscriminate or exclusive use of it, but a gentle and easy letting down of the mind, a gradual but sure turning off of the thought, from the true idea of that relation to the church into which the child is brought when he is set apart and sealed as the Lord's in the ordinance of baptism? Were the term "children of the church" always understood and employed, when used in the connection of which we speak, to signify even as much as it does when applied to the children of a household, that such persons are, of course, members thereof, we should have less objection to it. And yet there would be another difficulty in confining ourselves to this mode of designating them. For, others than those who have been baptized, being born in the church, that is, of parents belonging to the church, as the children of parents in the Baptist church, not to mention any in our own who have been neglected, and never brought to the font, may be called the children of the church. But probably very few of those who believe in infant baptism would be ready to admit that the two classes, the baptized and the unbaptized, sustain equal relations to the church, though both are born alike of parents in the church, and so, for that reason, may be called her children.

We may call them infant members, minor members, or members in minority, if we will; only say not that a membership of this kind is imaginary, absurd, or worthless, but rather *bona fide*, most real, and of blessed import. The

citizen in minority has rights, privileges, prospects, of which the alien might well be proud. The infant king is heir to royal prerogatives; as yet in appearance but "a servant," he is in truth "lord of all." Or take another illustration: On some trees, as on the lemon, for instance, we may often find fruit both green and ripe; fruit in all stages of growth, from the lily-white blossom of the opening bud, to the full grown, the yellow, and the mellow, that waits only to be plucked. The green, though unripe, is not unreal. Doctor Bushnell puts the thought before us in this form: "While horses and sheep are not all to be classed as colts and lambs, all colts and lambs may be classed as horses and sheep. And just so children are all men and women; and, if there is any law of futurition in them to justify it, may be fitly classed as believing men and women. And all the sharp arguments that go to cover their membership, as such, in the church with absurdity, or turn it into derision, are just such arguments as the inventors could raise with equal point, to ridicule the horselhood and sheephlood of the young animals just referred to. The propriety of this membership does not lie in what those infants can or cannot believe, or do or do not believe, at some given time, as, for example, on the day of their baptism; but lies in the covenant of promise which makes their parents, parents in the Lord; their nurture, a nurture of the Lord; and so constitutes a force of futurition by which they are to grow up, imperceptibly, into 'faithfuls among faithfuls,' in Christ Jesus."<sup>1</sup>

We may speak of the church-membership of baptized children as incipient, inchoate, prospective, or potential, if we will,—having reference to that perfected connection or completeness of standing and fulness of communion which come from a public profession of their own personal faith in Christ, and a consequent voluntary assumption of all the obligations of the covenant under which they were placed by their parents; yet guard, on the one hand, against the idea that such primary membership is really no membership

<sup>1</sup> Christian Nurture, pp. 166, 167.

at all ; and, on the other, against the idea that the child can be properly advanced from this real, though primary, incipient membership to that which is full and complete by any process which does not involve and evince all that radical change of heart which is expected of those who come into the church direct from the ranks of the world.

Say, if you will, that the class of persons to whom we refer are hereditary members of the church ; that they are in it, in a sense, by reason of their having been born therein ; that they can claim membership to a certain extent, if they will, as a kind of birthright ; just as we regard a child as a member of the family into which he is born, or count him a citizen of the state where he first sees the sun and spends his infant years ; or just as the infant children of priests, under the Mosaic economy, were members of the priesthood ; yet stop not here. The membership which we claim for those of whom we speak, is more than hereditary, nominal, or honorary. The baptized child is brought into the church, and made and sealed a member of it, in a higher sense, for other purposes, and in other mode, than can find a parallel or perfect illustration in any natural birth, civil code, or ceremonial law ; brought in, made, and sealed a member, through divine direction, by virtue of having the initiatory ordinance, the rite of baptism, administered to him on the ground of the parents' faith and covenant, and to the end that he may be guarded from evil, be nurtured in holiness, be trained for service, and be prepared for heaven. Just as a young man may be entered into college, be enrolled a member of one of her classes, be made at once partaker of all the privileges and honors of which he is capable and for which he is prepared, yet kept under watch and care, in training and on probation, for still higher privileges and honors ; or just as an infant citizen may be a *bona fide* member of a civil community, so far as his capacity and qualifications can allow and make him one ; especially and at once entitled to all the protection which either the civil or military power of the state can furnish, though, as yet, himself not able to

bear arms, or cast a vote, or hold an office, nor even old enough to know that such rights and duties may ever be within his reach ; so— not indeed by natural birth, nor by a civil code, but by a divine appointment and ordinance, and for all worthy ends, for protection, for nurture, for service, and for salvation—the children of God’s believing people may be so matriculated, so enrolled and incorporated into his church, as to be “ no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God,” even before they are able and qualified in all respects to have part in those higher duties and privileges of which adult believers are prepared to partake.

But of the nature and design of this membership, or the extent and end to which and for which it is appointed, we hope to speak, if possible, somewhat further, after we notice some of the reasons which go to justify the belief already propounded : That baptized children are, in fact, truly members of the church of Christ.

Among the grounds we have for holding this opinion, we find some in what may be called nature and reason ; some in divine revelation, and some in the views of eminent divines and in the standards of the catholic church from apostolic times onward to the present age.

In the first place, from what we know of the general character of God’s gracious economy, and from the peculiar interest he has ever evinced in the offspring of his people, it is but natural and most reasonable to suppose he would have that offspring come at once within the pale of the most hallowed influences. In the keen and graphic language of Dr. Bushnell : “ It would be most remarkable if Christianity, organizing a fold of grace and love in the world and for it, had yet no place in the fold for children. It spreads its arms to say ‘ For God so loved the world,’ and even declares that publicans and harlots shall flock in before the captious priests and princes of the day, and yet it has no place, we are told, for children ; children are out of the category of grace ! Jesus himself was a child, and went through all the

phases and conditions of childhood, not to show anything but that fact, as the Christian Fathers fondly supposed; he said, too, 'Suffer little children,' but this was only his human feeling; he had no official relationship to such, and no particular grace for them. They are all outside the salvation-fold, hardening there in the storm, till their choosing, refusing, desiring, sinning, power is sufficiently unfolded to have a place assigned them within! Is this Christianity? Is it a preparation so clumsy, so little human, so imperfectly graduated to man as he is, that it has no place for a full sixth part of the human race; a part also to which the other five sixths are bound, in the dearest ties of love and care, and all but compulsory expectation? It would seem that any Christian heart, meeting Christianity at this point, and surveying it with only a little natural feeling, would even be oppressed by the sense of some strange defect in it, as a grace for the world. In this view it gives to little children the heritage only of Cain, requiring them to be driven out from the presence of the Lord, and grow up there among the outside crew of aliens and enemies."<sup>1</sup> But on a question of this kind, nature and reason are not our only or chief guide. So turn we, then, from these "to the law and to the testimony," and remark:

A second reason for regarding and treating the children of whom we speak as, with their believing parents, within the fold of Christ, is to be found in the fact that the scriptures set it forth as among the ways of God to deal with men as families, and to take care, especially, that all the covenant relations into which he is pleased to enter with the one be carried over so as to cover the other. This thought once had a larger place in the minds of God's people than it seems to have at the present time. "So familiar is the idea, to all Jewish minds, of a religious oneness in parents and their offspring, that a church institution of any kind, arranged to include parents and not their offspring, would even have been a shocking offence to the nation. Children were as

<sup>1</sup> Christian Nurture, pp. 169, 170.



much expected to be with their parents in their religion, as they were to be in their sustentation." So says the able writer just quoted.<sup>1</sup> But the prevailing sentiment of the present age is hardly such as to give this argument all the force to which it is entitled. Independency, individualism, segregation, are among the strong religious tendencies of the times in which we live. Nevertheless, taking the divine word for our guide, we shall find almost no element in the economy of God's dealing with men more prominent than his purpose and method to "set the solitary in families," and then hold, visit, and treat the race as associated in family relations and groups. So it was in the beginning. The covenant with Adam included his posterity. And ever since that early day, in the progress of the divine administration, from the law thereof, whether as written out and read in the second commandment of the decalogue, or as seen enforced in the providence of God, we find that the iniquities of the fathers are visited upon the children unto the third and fourth generations of them that hate him, while his mercy is shown unto many generations of those that love him and keep his commandments. When Esau sold his birthright he surrendered the blessings it embodied for himself and his posterity. When Korah and others in the wilderness brought swift destruction upon themselves, because of their rebellion against Moses, it seems to have been so ordered that their families should perish with them. On the other hand, we have in the scriptures marked instances in which the favor of God to parents is carried over to the children. The children, we are told, are "beloved for the fathers' sakes." So when the waters of the deluge were to come upon the earth, God made a covenant with his servant Noah, and took care that all its blessed provisions should be extended to his children. When the earth was to be divided and distributed again among its remaining inhabitants, the divisions and allotments were made unto them "after their families," "their tongues," and "their generations," in their

<sup>1</sup> Christian Nurture, p. 178.

countries and in their nations. When the angels were sent to deliver Lot from the coming conflagration, they inquired carefully after his children, "sons-in-law, sons, and daughters," and took with them all of this class who could be prevailed upon to go. When God would enter into covenant with his servant David, he makes mention of his "house for a great while to come" (2 Sam. vii. 19).

Such then is God's method of dealing with men, especially in all his more solemn and formal covenant engagements with them. Nor is there any instance in which this principle is laid down more distinctly, or declared to be of a more extended and enduring character, than in the case of his promise to Abraham: "I will establish my covenant between me and thee, and thy seed after thee, in their generations, for an everlasting covenant; to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee" (Gen. xvii. 7). Now this covenant, as we are told, is an everlasting covenant; it lies at the foundation of the Christian church not less than it did at the foundation of the Jewish; for the church of God is one throughout all ages. By this covenant the blessings promised to Abraham and his seed are secured to all Gentile believers not less than to Abraham and his immediate posterity. So, at least, are we taught in the writings of Paul, as in his Epistle to the Galatians (iii. 29), and in other places. "For," says the apostle, "if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." This covenant, then, which not only indicates a most intimate moral and religious relation between believing parents and their children, but extends its benefits to all the spiritual posterity of Abraham, we accept and claim as the grand basis of the visible church at the present time, and as the *magna charta* of our spiritual privileges to the remotest age. If, then, this covenant itself is made to include the children of believing parents, why should not the church also include the same? If God can afford to embrace them in the terms of the one, why should men refuse them a place in the arms of the other? Why should man attempt to be more righteous, rigid, or exclusive than God himself?

Another reason for the opinion we entertain regarding the children of whom we speak, is the very simple, yet significant fact that in being baptized they have applied to them that only rite by which any are ever brought into the visible church of Christ ; so that, if they are not made members of the church by virtue of their having been baptized, they are never made so at all. The argument here is briefly this : The church of God is essentially one and the same in all ages ; the church of Christ is virtually no other, in principle and design, than that of God under the older dispensation. Under that older dispensation the only way of admission into the visible church was by the rite of circumcision — from the day a person was circumcised, whether infant or adult, he was a member of that body. Under the present dispensation, the place and use of circumcision are supplied by baptism ; and as circumcision was the initiatory ordinance — that, and that only — by which entrance into the visible church was effected under the former dispensation, so now, baptism, taking the place of circumcision, is the initiatory ordinance — that, and that only — by which an entrance into the visible church is effected under the Christian dispensation.

But let us look at some of these points a little more carefully. We have said the visible church of God is essentially the same throughout all ages. That of to-day, the church of Christ, is the Zion of God of which we read in the Old Testament. Changes, indeed, may have occurred, and may occur again. Dispensations may change, have changed. Organizations may be modified,—they have been. From time to time the outer life, form, and garb of the church have been modified, to meet the changing circumstances in which she has been placed. But the body, the spirit, all the fundamental principles, have continued on, from age to age the same. As God himself hath said : “ My dove, my undefiled is but one.” She has now the same covenant that she had in the days of Moses, and even before his days ; namely, that which was made with the father of the faithful, wherein God promises to be the God of Abraham and of his seed

after him, in their generations, forever. The manner of signing and sealing the document has changed ; but the document itself remains as it was, and continues to form a most radical and enduring element in the constitution of the church ; having been laid, indeed, so early and so deep, and so confirmed of God in Christ withal, that no subsequent law or anything else, as Paul has said, could “ disannul ” or change it. Indeed, this continued oneness of the church was taught by the Saviour himself, when he declared that the kingdom out of which should be cast disloyal Jewish members, was the same into which many should come from the east and the west, and there sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob. And so the apostle teaches in his Epistle to the Romans, where he represents the Gentile believers as grafted into the same olive tree from which the Jews, for their unbelief, were broken off ; and into which, moreover, even these excised Jews themselves, returning in penitence and faith, should yet again be grafted.

And hence it was that Peter, on the day of Pentecost, spoke to believers, under the new dispensation, as “ children of the prophets and of the covenant,” and heirs of “ the promise,” they and their “ children.” The covenant held over, strong as ever ; the promise was still valid, good as new. The stream of the church kept running on in one continuous flow, unbroken, uninterrupted at either the coming or the going of Christ. The dispensation changed ; but in essence, principle, and design the church remains the same as before. To be sure she was purified. Some of the Jews believed not, and withdrew or were excised ; others stood the refiner’s fire and the fuller’s soap, and so came, indeed, to constitute the church of the new dispensation. Of this class were those five hundred brethren and sisters, more or less, who never received Christian baptism, and were never formally admitted to membership in the Christian church. They had no need to be admitted — they were members of the church already. Belonging to the church under the old dispensation, and standing by faith,

while others for their unbelief were cut off, they belonged to the church under the new. Having received the seal of the covenant under the old dispensation, they had no need to be sealed again, though the form of the seal had changed, under the new. Never out of the church, at least never since the days of their earliest infancy, they had no need to be taken in. But when the Gentiles and the unbelieving, excinded Jews began to repent, and be converted, being now out of the church, they must be received into it, and have the rite of baptism administered to them. And so it was that we find the apostles baptizing all who were admitted at the Pentecost and afterwards.

And here we come to the next step, the other part of the line of thought now before us: the fact that on the coming in of a new dispensation the initiatory rite was changed from circumcision to baptism, so that baptism now takes the place and answers the end that was formerly answered by circumcision. Both have precisely the same import, both are a sign "of the circumcision of the heart," both a seal "of the righteousness of faith." Under the former dispensation, circumcision was a token of God's gracious covenant with his people; under the present, baptism is a token of the same covenant. Circumcision was once a mark or badge of solemn dedication; baptism is now a mark or badge of the same. In his Epistle to the Colossians (ii. 11, 12), Paul distinctly recognizes the truth of which we speak, that baptism is substituted in place of circumcision, when he speaks of those who have been baptized as "circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ." Holding, as we must, that the circumcision and baptism here spoken of are both spiritual, the sum of the passage, on the point before us, is simply this, that in being baptized we are virtually circumcised. If, then, baptism is of the same use and import in the church under the new dispensation as circumcision was under the old, the one being instituted in the church directly upon the removal of the other, how can we avoid the conclusion that

one is a substitute for the other. And if the child of a believing parent, being circumcised, was thus and thereby admitted into the visible church of God and made a member under the old dispensation, as we believe none will deny, then who can deny that the child of a believing parent, being baptized, under the new dispensation, is thus and thereby admitted into the same and made thereof a member ?

It should be remarked, perhaps, in passing, that the mode and conditions of entrance into the Jewish church, of which we have been speaking, have respect, of course to the offspring, of God's chosen people, and not to those who came in from the Gentile races. For, in case of an ethnic or proselyte, under the Jewish economy, it would seem that baptism was superadded to the rite of circumcision, and extended to females as well. Thus, according to Maimonides: "In all ages, when an ethnic is willing to enter into the covenant, and gather himself under the wings of the Majesty of God, and take upon him the yoke of the law, he must be circumcised and baptized and bring a sacrifice, or if it be a woman, be baptized and bring a sacrifice."<sup>1</sup> Again: Lightfoot, referring to the Babylonian Talmud for his authority, says: "The first use of baptism was not exhibited at that time," of John the Baptist; "for baptism very many centuries of years backward had been known and received in most frequent use among the Jews, and for the very same end as it now obtains among Christians, namely, that by it proselytes might be admitted into the church; and hence it was called baptism for proselytism."<sup>2</sup> Facts like these help to show how natural and easy was the change from circumcision to baptism, even to the exclusive use of the latter rite, under the milder and more extended economy of the gospel, where there was to be neither Jew nor Greek, bond nor free, male nor female, but all one in Christ Jesus.

<sup>1</sup> Wall's History of Infant Baptism (Cotton's ed., Oxford, 1844), Vol. i. p. 5; cited in Congregational Review, Vol. vii. p. 506.

<sup>2</sup> Lightfoot's Works (London, 1684), Vol. ii. p. 117; cited in Congregational Review, Vol. vii. pp. 505, 506.

Other reasons for the view we hold in respect to the church-membership of the children to whom we refer, may be found, as we think, in the teachings of Christ and his apostles.

Take, in the first place, that beautiful and precious command and promise, "Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not; for of such is the kingdom of God" (Mark x. 14). By "the kingdom of God," as here used, or "the kingdom of heaven," as another evangelist has it, we understand the Saviour to mean his church here on earth. Certainly it cannot be taken to signify less than this. Admit that it means more, to wit, the church in heaven, and still it follows that if such children as the Saviour was speaking of may be members of that above, much more of that here below. In the language of Dr. Dwight in reference alike to this passage and the point now before us: "The kingdom of God denotes either the church on earth or the church in heaven. Whether one, or the other, or both are here intended, is of little importance to the question in debate. It is, however, in the highest degree probable that the church on earth is intended; as, very plainly, children can come to Christ in the present world, so as to constitute a part of his kingdom, in no other manner than by becoming members of the visible church. It is plain, also, that they cannot be forbidden by his ministers to come to him in any other manner, besides being excluded from the church. Christ blessed these children after he had made this declaration. Those whom Christ has blessed and whom he has directed ministers to permit to come to him, ministers ought not to forbid to come to him in the only manner in which they can either forbid or permit this to be done. The interpretation which makes our Saviour say, 'Suffer little children to come unto me, because the kingdom of God is composed of Christians;' that is, of such as have a childlike spirit, sometimes alleged, is undeserving of a refutation."<sup>1</sup>

Analyze the passage, take the very phrase "of such" —

<sup>1</sup> Dwight's Works, Vol. v. p. 316.

*τοιούτων*—who can doubt that it includes the children themselves as truly as those whom any may suppose to be compared to them? Look at the use of this word “such” in other instances, as in the passage: “With many such parables spake he the word unto them,” which evidently means that he spoke as really and truly with those parables now uttered as with many that were like them. So again, the language “to be able to do such miracles” evidently means as well those now witnessed as others like them. How, then, can we fail to conclude from the very form and use of the phrase “of such,” that the Saviour recognized the children before him as among the number of those who make up the membership of his church here on earth? Nor is it the mere form and use of this phrase alone, but the spirit, the logic of the whole passage; for if those who resemble such children are entitled to membership, and all because of that resemblance, then why should the children themselves, who are made the standard, be excluded?

Neither is the assurance of the Saviour to be limited to those only in his presence when he spoke the words under consideration, but extended and applied to all children of like age and circumstances. So teach the words: “of such is the kingdom.” Now, the children in the immediate presence of Christ when he uttered the words before us, were doubtless the offspring of believing parents, for they were brought to Christ in faith for a blessing; and being the children of such parents, it is but a fair presumption to suppose that they had been consecrated to God, marked and sealed as children of the covenant and of the church, “after the custom of the law” at that time. It would seem, also, that some of the children were quite young, for Luke speaks of them as “infants.” We conclude, then, from these words of Christ, that all such children, all who are brought to him in faith and in the way of his appointment, however young they may be, are to be recognized and treated as in and of his church, members of his kingdom here on earth.

Notice, now, the import of the final commission and the



baptismal formula which Christ left his servants for their guidance: "Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in [into] the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" (Matt. xxviii. 19). The commission enjoins two things — to baptize, and to teach or disciple all people; not only every nation, but every individual — "every creature," as Mark has it. Children are of course included. So, at least, the apostles, being Jews, must have understood it. To see the initiatory rite administered to children, even the youngest, and to find them consequently enrolled as members of the church, were usages with which those to whom this divine commission was first delivered were perfectly familiar. Nor can we suppose them ignorant of the fact that when Gentile proselytes were admitted to the church, the family was wont to come in as a whole, children with the parents; the initiatory rite being administered to all alike. And, if we mistake not, all such converts were not only circumcised, but also baptized, both parents and children, for a ceremonial cleansing. So that the baptizing of infants, as well as adults, was no new thing to the apostles. As Lightfoot says: "For so was the custom of the Jewish nation in their use of baptism. When a proselyte came in, his children were baptized with him; and all upon this ground, that all that were related to the parent might come into covenant."<sup>1</sup> And again: "Baptism was well enough known to the Jews, and both John and Jesus Christ took it up as they found it. . . . Christ took up baptism as he found it in the Jewish church; and they baptized infants, as well as grown persons. . . . Think not that baptism was never used till John Baptist came and baptized. It was used in the church of the Jews many generations before he was born. . . . Baptism of men, women, and children was no new thing among them when John Baptist came baptizing, but a thing as well known as with us now. . . . Christ took baptism into his hands, and into evangelical use, as he found it; this only added, that he might promote it to a worthier end and to a larger use.

<sup>1</sup> Works, Vol. ii. p. 1128; Congregational Review, p. 506, 507.

The whole nation knew well enough that little children used to be baptized. . . . . Nor do I believe the people that flocked to John's baptism were so forgetful of the manner and custom of the nation that they brought not their little children also with them to be baptized." "We suppose, therefore, that men, women, and children came to John's baptism, according to the manner of the nation in the reception of proselytes." <sup>1</sup>

If, then, we put ourselves in place of the apostles at the time of which we speak, we see not how they could have failed to regard children as included in the terms of their commission; nor, again, do we see how, with their ideas of ecclesiastical usage, they could have failed to regard such children, the baptized, as members of the church. And in this view of their understanding of the commission we are confirmed by what we find to have been their subsequent practice. Immediately, upon the day of Pentecost, when they have three thousand to admit to the church, they do it by this rite of baptism — by nothing else — in no other way (Acts ii. 41). And the accounts we have of their practice and teaching in the case of the jailor and his household, of Cornelius and all his house, and of the household of Stephanus, all serve, as we think, to elucidate and confirm the views here presented in respect to the baptism and membership of children as involved in the great apostolic commission.

Look, now, at the very language of the baptismal formula which the Saviour instituted at this time, and to what conclusion can we come other than this — that baptism is the initiatory ordinance of the gospel, and that baptized children are thus and thereby made members of the visible church of Christ? According to this formula, we are to "baptize into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." We say "*into* the name," this being a more literal and correct interpretation than *in*, as the English version has it; and we take "the name" of God, as here used, to be but a Hebraistic pleonasm for God himself. So that

<sup>1</sup> Works, Vol. ii. pp. 1133, 1129, 1040, 119, 122; Cong. Review, pp. 508, 509.

to be baptized into this name can mean no less than to be visibly introduced into the presence, the favor, and the fold of God. The proper bearing of the phrase now before us, on this point, can hardly be put in a truer, better light than in the words of Dr. Dwight, who, speaking of baptized infants, says: "That they are members of the Christian church, if lawfully baptized, I fully believe. All persons are baptized not *in*, but *into* the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, that is, they are in this ordinance publicly and solemnly introduced into the family, and entitled in a peculiar manner to the name of God. Accordingly they are called 'godly,' 'Christians,' 'spiritual,' 'sons and daughters of God,' and 'children of God,' throughout the scriptures. That this is the true construction of the passage just quoted is, I think, obvious, from the Greek phraseology: *εἰς τὸ ὄνομα*, the proper English of which is: 'into the name.' Accordingly, it is customarily rendered in this manner, by the translators of our Bible, in those passages where the subject is mentioned. Thus, Rom. vi. 3, Paul asks: 'Know ye not that so many of us as were baptized *into* Jesus Christ were baptized *into* his death?' 1 Cor. xii. 13: 'For by one Spirit we were all baptized *into* one body.' Gal. iii. 27: 'As many of you as have been baptized *into* Christ have put on Christ.' In all these instances the phraseology is the same with that first quoted, and, from analogy, teaches us that it ought there also to have been rendered in the same manner; *into* being the original and proper meaning of the preposition, and *in* being a meaning so uncommon as heretofore to have been resolved into a Hebraism. Several of these passages, also, directly declare that those who are baptized are baptized into Christ, that is, into the body or church of Christ. At the same time, there is no other account given of this subject. Nor is there anything in the ordinance of baptism which in any manner indicates that adults when baptized are members of the church, and that baptized infants are not members." <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Works, Vol. v. pp. 294, 295.

Still further proof of the general thought we are now considering may be drawn, as we believe, from the writings of Paul. Take, for instance, that passage in which the apostle teaches that the believing wife sanctifies the unbelieving husband, and the believing husband the unbelieving wife. "Else," says he, "were your children unclean, but now are they holy" (1 Cor. vii. 14). And how can we doubt that the language implies as much as this, at least, that the child of the believing parent was recognized by him as a member of the visible church? Surely, the sacred writer could not have meant that such children are holy in the sense of being free from sin, regenerated and sanctified in heart and life. The holiness and defilement he had in mind must have had reference to those federal and covenanted and ecclesiastical relations with which the mind of the apostle was so familiar, and by which men were divided into two classes, according as these relations covered or excluded them—the child of a believing parent being so far holy or clean as to be counted a "fellow-citizen with the saints and of the household of God."

And in this view are we confirmed by other passages in the writings of the same apostle. For instance, in his Epistle to the Colossians, and so in that to the Ephesians, he uses and applies language which makes it clear that he regarded the children of believing parents at Colosse and Ephesus as included with their parents among the members of the church in those cities. These letters were addressed to what he calls "the saints and faithful brethren in Christ Jesus"; and yet in each case, when he comes to specify the several classes of persons who compose this body in each place, we find a distinct recognition of children, as not less a part thereof than the adult husbands and wives, fathers and mothers, servants and masters.

Over and above these proofs from religious reason and divine revelation, that baptized children should be regarded and treated as members of the Christian church, there is another kind of evidence, which we can hardly afford either

to slight or ignore. This we find in the opinions of many eminent divines, and in the standards of several different branches of the Christian church, from the apostolic age onward to the present. Of course, our citations from opinions of this kind must be in the briefest terms.

Take, in the first place, the language of Justin Martyr, who was born near the close of the first century, probably before the death of the apostle John. Speaking of those who were members of the church, he says: "A part of these were sixty or seventy years old, who were made disciples to Christ from their infancy."<sup>1</sup> And, so far as we can learn and judge, nearly all those writers of that early age, as Irenaeus, Tertullian, Origen, the Shepherd of Hermas, Gregory Nazianzen, and others who are often cited in support of infant baptism, generally speak of the subject in such a manner as to imply that they regarded children thus given to God as made thereby members of his visible church.

The ground which the primitive church took respecting the education and discipline of all baptized children shows clearly enough that she regarded them as members of her body. Thus Bingham, referring to St. Austin,<sup>2</sup> informs us how she required those parents or others who presented children in baptism to stand "responsible not only for the instruction, but for the admonition and rebuke, if necessary, of the children baptized."<sup>3</sup> The same writer further observes, in respect to the discipline of this class of members in those early times, that "the censures of the church seldom or never touched them while minors, or children under age; there being more proper punishment thought fit for them, such as fatherly rebukes and corporeal correction; and to inflict the highest censures upon such was rather thought a lessening of authority, and bringing contempt upon the discipline of the church."<sup>4</sup> And it is said to have been one of the rules of Isidore of Seville, in the sixth century, "that they who were in their minority should not be

<sup>1</sup> First Apology, chap. xv.

<sup>2</sup> Aug. Serm. de Tempore.

<sup>3</sup> Eccl. Ant. Book xi. chap. 8, sec. 5.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. Book xvi. chap. 3, sec. 11.

punished by excommunication, but, according to the quality of their negligence or offence, be corrected with congruous stripes.”<sup>1</sup>

Coming down nearer to our own time, we take, next, the teaching of John Calvin, whose opinion will have, perhaps, as much weight with our churches as that of any man since the apostles. Defining baptism, he says: “It is the initiatory sign by which we are admitted to the fellowship of the church, that, being engrafted into Christ, we may be accounted children of God. Moreover, the end for which God has given it is, first, that it may be conducive to our faith in him, and secondly, that it may serve the purpose of a confession among men.”<sup>2</sup> Again, speaking of infant baptism, he says: “If we attend to the peculiar nature of baptism, it is, in sooth, an entrance, and, as it were, an initiation into the church, by which we are ranked among the people of God, or a sign of spiritual regeneration, by which we are born to be children of God.”<sup>3</sup>

Take now the views of the Westminster divines, in the Book of Common Prayer and Administration of the Sacraments, as amended by that body at the Savoy Conference, 1661, among whom we find the names of such men as Baxter, Bates, Lightfoot, and others of “eminent learning and godliness.” In their directions for the public baptism of infants, they lay it down as a proper rule and remark for the minister to say: “We receive this child into the congregation of Christ’s flock, among his chosen followers. . . . Seeing now that these children are grafted into the body of Christ’s church. . . . It hath pleased thee to receive these infants into the visible church as children in the family and heirs of thy kingdom.” Those who are acquainted with the standards of the Episcopal church, need not be informed that the church-membership of the baptized child is there

<sup>1</sup> Duty of the Church to her Baptized Children, being Report of Committee, — Richards, Miller, and Romeyn, — to the General Assembly, Presb. Church, in 1812; as edited by Dr. De Witt, p. 25.

<sup>2</sup> Inst. Book 4, chap. 15, sec. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Inst. Book 4, chap. xvi. sec. 29.

put in a still stronger form, such a child being spoken of in their Book of Common Prayer as "incorporated" into the church. If we look into the larger Westminster Catechism, we there find the same doctrine in another form, as in the definition of a church, which they declare to be "a society made up of all such as, in all ages and places of the world, do profess the true religion (1 Cor. i. 2), and of their children" (Acts ii. 39).<sup>1</sup>

That the principle under consideration, the real church-membership of all baptized children, is held by the Lutheran and the Presbyterian churches in England and Scotland, and on the Continent, none, we presume, will deny. That the same doctrine was regarded as a fundamental principle in the polity of our own branch of the Christian church, the Congregationalists, in former years, and is still adhered to, nominally at least, in most other denominations on this side of the Atlantic, the Baptists of course excepted, is, we believe, equally true.

In an account of the organization of the First church in Salem, 1629, as given in Morton's *New England Memorial* (p. 101), we are told: "The two ministers there being seriously studious of reformation, they considered the state of their children, together with their parents, concerning which letters did pass between Mr. Higginson (of Salem) and Mr. Brewster, the reverend elder of the church of Plymouth, and they did agree in their judgments, namely, concerning the church-membership of the children with the parents, and that baptism was a seal of this membership; only when they were adult, they being not scandalous, they were to be examined by the church officers, and upon their approbation of their fitness, and upon the children's public and personally owning of the covenant, they were to be received unto the Lord's supper."

In 1649, the Rev. Thomas Shepherd, for some years pastor of the church in Cambridge, Mass., wrote a treatise on the subject before us, "The Church-membership of Children,"

<sup>1</sup> Answer to Question 62.

in which he says: "If the substance of that covenant [the Abrahamic] was, I will be a God to thee and to thy seed, then this very covenant remains still under the gospel, it being one and the same with that; if, by virtue of that covenant, the children were made members of the church, and hence had a church privilege and a seal administered, then the same covenant remaining the same, and in the same force and benefit, our children also are taken into the like membership."<sup>1</sup> And, again, he says: "There is the same inward cause moving God to take in the children of believing church-members into the church and covenant now, to be of the number of his people, as there was for taking the Jews and their children; for the only cause why the Lord took in the Jews and their children thus, was his love and free grace and mercy (Deut. iv. 37): 'Because he loved thy fathers, therefore he chose their seed.' So that I do from hence fully believe that either God's love is in these days of his gospel less unto his people and servants than in the days of the Old Testament; or if it be as great, then the same love respects the seed of his people now, as then it did. And therefore, if then because he loved them he chose their seed to be of his church, so in these days, because he loveth us, he chooseth our seed to be of his church also."<sup>2</sup>

The same doctrine is set forth in the Cambridge Platform, which teaches that "the matter of a visible church are saints by calling," and then goes on to specify who are such saints, and divides them into two classes: 1. Adult professors; and 2. "The children of such, who are also holy."<sup>3</sup> Speaking of this latter class, and of the way in which they are to be admitted to full communion, it says: "The like trial is to be required from such members of the church as were born in the same, or received their membership and were baptized in their infancy or minority, by virtue of the covenant of their parents, when being grown up unto years of discretion, they shall desire to be made partakers of the Lord's supper;

<sup>1</sup> Works of Thomas Shepherd, Vol. iii. p. 522.      <sup>2</sup> Ibid. Vol. iii. pp. 525, 526.

<sup>3</sup> Cambridge Platform, chap. iii. sec. 1, 2.



unto which, because holy things must not be given unto the unworthy, therefore it is requisite that these, as well as others, should come to their trial and examination, and manifest their faith and repentance by an open profession thereof, before they are received to the Lord's supper, and otherwise not be admitted thereunto. Yet these church-members that were so born, or received in their childhood, before they are capable of being made partakers of full communion, have many privileges which others, not church-members, have not; they are in covenant with God, have the seal thereof upon them, viz. baptism; and so if not regenerated, yet are in a more hopeful way of attaining regenerating grace, and all the spiritual blessings both of the covenant and seal; they are also under church watch, and consequently subject to the reprehensions, admonitions, and censures thereof, for their healing and amendment, as need shall require." <sup>1</sup>

In the results of a synod held in Boston, in 1662, to consider the proper extent of baptism, etc., we find several questions summed up and answered in a series of propositions; in the second of which they give us their judgment on the point before us, in these words: "The members of the visible church, according to scripture, are confederate, visible believers in particular churches, and their infant seed, i.e. children in minority, whose next parents are one or both of them in covenant." <sup>2</sup>

In the Savoy confession of 1658, as modified and adopted by the synod held in Boston in 1680, <sup>3</sup> we have the following: "The whole body of men throughout the world, professing the faith of the gospel, and obedience unto God by Christ, not destroying their own profession by any errors everting the foundation, or unholiness of conversation, they and their children with them are, and may be, called the visible catholic church of Christ." <sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cambridge Platform, chap. xii. sec. 7.

<sup>2</sup> Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society, Vol. vi. series 2, p. 588.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. Vol. vi. p. 623.

<sup>4</sup> Savoy Confession, chap. xxvi. 2. As some editions of the Savoy Confession do not contain the clause "and their children with them," in the above quota-

If we come down now still nearer to our own times, and ask the opinions of some of the leading divines of our branch of the Christian church, a century since, we shall find them holding views similar to those already cited. Among these divines we may mention, first, the famous name of President Edwards. Holding, as he did, what we suppose none of our churches at this day would think of attempting to gainsay, that unregenerate persons, or those who make no profession of faith in Christ, should be excluded from the Lord's supper, and writing a treatise, his *Essay on the Qualifications requisite for full Communion*, in support of these views, he nevertheless often admits, even in this essay, that baptized children are, in a certain sense, entitled to membership. Thus, in the second paragraph of his essay, he says: "All that acknowledge infant baptism, allow infants, who are the proper subjects of baptism, and are baptized, to be in some sort members of the Christian church; yet none suppose them to be members in such standing as to be proper immediate subjects of ecclesiastical ordinances and privileges. But that some further qualifications are requisite in order to this, to be obtained, either in a course of nature, or by education, or by divine grace. And some who are baptized in infancy, even after they come to be adults, may yet remain for a season short of such a standing as has been spoken of; being destitute of sufficient knowledge, and perhaps some other qualifications, through the neglect of parents, or their own negligence, or otherwise; or because they carelessly

tion, a word of explanation may not be amiss. The Westminster Confession defines the visible church as consisting of "all those throughout the world that profess the true religion, together with their children." This last clause was omitted in the original Savoy Confession, which was one of the points of difference between this and the Westminster. But at the Boston Synod of 1680 the Savoy Confession was adopted with some "little variation," "in compliance with the other," i.e. the Westminster; and a part of this variation was the insertion of the clause "together with their children" (or "they and their children with them"), in the Savoy definition of the church. In the editions of the Savoy Confession, therefore, printed out of New England and prior to 1680, the clause in question will not be found. The Saybrook Platform (1708) adopted the Savoy as altered at Boston in 1680.

neglect to qualify themselves for ecclesiastical privileges by making a public profession of the Christian faith, or owning the Christian covenant, or forbear to offer themselves as candidates for these privileges; and yet not be cast out of the church, or cease to be in any respect its members.”<sup>1</sup>

So, too, the eminent Dr. Hopkins, who studied theology with Edwards, and lived for a time in his family. Speaking of the church of Christ on earth, he says: “It consists of those who are united together as professed friends to Christ and believers in him, . . . . including both parents and children.”<sup>2</sup> Speaking of the baptism of children, he says: “By ‘the kingdom of God,’ or ‘the kingdom of heaven,’ which is the same, is meant the visible kingdom of Christ in this world, or his church, in which sense this phrase is most commonly used by Christ. What he declares, therefore, is that such children as these, that is, the children of his friends who believe in him, belong to his kingdom, and are to be members of his visible church, and to be with their parents numbered among the redeemed.”<sup>3</sup> Again, he says: “No one is to be considered and treated as a member of the church and kingdom of Christ, unless he be baptized with water, as this is the only door by which persons can be introduced into the visible kingdom of Christ according to his appointment; and all who are baptized according to his direction are visible members of his church.”<sup>4</sup>

From the writings of Dr. Dwight enough has been already quoted, to show what were his views on the question before us. We give but a word here. Referring to that class of children of whom we speak, he says: “That they are members of the Christian church, if lawfully baptized, I fully believe.”<sup>5</sup>

To the same effect are all the standards of the Presbyterian church. Their Confession of Faith says: “The visible church . . . . consists of all those throughout the world that

<sup>1</sup> President Edwards, Works, Vol. i. p. 89.

<sup>2</sup> Dr. Hopkins, Works, Vol. ii. pt. 2, chap. 5.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. Vol. ii. p. 111.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. Vol. ii. p. 97.

<sup>5</sup> Dwight, Works, Vol. v. p. 294.

profess the true religion, together with their children.”<sup>1</sup> Their Book of Discipline says: “All baptized persons are members of the church, are under its care, and subject to its government and discipline; and when they have arrived at the years of discretion they are bound to perform all the duties of church-members.”<sup>2</sup> To which the revised Book of Discipline subjoined: “It is the office of the church, therefore, to use the proper means, in dependence on divine grace, for bringing them to repentance and faith, that they may rightly perform their duty.” Their Directory for Worship makes also a difference as to the manner in which the baptized and the unbaptized, arriving at years of discretion, and giving evidence of regeneration, shall be admitted to the table of our Lord—simply saying that the former “ought to be informed it is their duty and privilege to come to the Lord’s supper”<sup>3</sup>; while it requires of the latter that they “make a public profession of their faith in the presence of the congregation.”<sup>4</sup> So that, so far as their standards go, it is plain that Presbyterians look upon those who have been baptized in infancy as made, thus and thereby, members of the church of Christ.

But we must hasten to redeem our promise, and speak, though briefly, of the nature and extent of that relation of which we have been treating, or some of the modifications which pertain to that church-membership into which the child is brought when he is presented and sealed as the Lord’s in a covenant of love at the baptismal font.

The first remark we would here make—a thought, indeed, which has already been brought to notice in some of the extracts made from the writings of others—is, that those of whom we speak, though really members of the church of Christ, are not, of course, entitled to an admission to the table of the Lord till they give evidence of a suitable preparation for that privilege. In the case of infants, there would be wanting, for a time at least, the physical develop-

<sup>1</sup> Confessions, chap. xxv. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Book of Discipline, chap. i. 6.

<sup>3</sup> Directory, chap. ix. 1.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. chap. ix. 4.

ment requisite for partaking of the elements offered in the eucharist. So, indeed, we should suppose. And yet, if we mistake not, there have been found an age so superstitious, and men so lost to the proprieties of the Christian religion, and to the common sense of the gospel of Christ, as to bring even infants to the Lord's supper.<sup>1</sup> But such a practice is hardly likely to obtain in the Protestant church of the present day. Nor is a proper unfolding of the physical powers all that is requisite for the privilege to which we refer. A proper fitness involves, also, an intellectual maturity and apprehension such as no one can suppose infants and young children to have attained. Without a certain amount of mental development, there could be no such "discerning of the Lord's body" and "remembrance" of him as the scriptures require. Nor is this all. Those who would come acceptably to the table of communion must have that divine illumination and spiritual discernment which shall not only enable a man to "examine himself, and so eat of that bread and drink of that cup," but prepare and move him also to appreciate and appropriate to himself something of the fulness of peace there is for him in the ordinance to which he comes. The child is baptized and brought into the church on the ground of the parents' faith, and in pursuance of the covenant God is pleased to make with them in his behalf; but to eat of that bread and drink that blood is a personal act, and demands the prerequisite of a personal faith. In no other way than by this personal faith and that renewal of the heart which faith involves can we hope to come into such an intimacy of fellowship and sympathy with Christ as shall exempt us from the condemnation of eating and drinking unworthily.

Nor do we know of any writer of acknowledged ability in whom all these views—the different classes of church-members, infant and adult, those in complete standing and full communion, and those who are not, together with the conditions here specified as essential to our coming acceptably

<sup>1</sup> Bing. Ecc. Ant. Book xii. chap. 1, sec. 2.

to the Lord's supper—are more clearly recognized and forcibly presented than in Edwards's Essay on the "Qualifications for Full Communion," as two or three brief extracts will show. Thus: "If it be so that explicit open covenanting with God be a great duty required of all, as has been represented, then it ought to be expected of persons before they are admitted to the privileges of the adult in the church of Christ. Surely it is proper, if this explicit covenanting take place at all, that it should take place before persons come to those ordinances wherein they, by their own act, publicly confirm and seal this covenant."<sup>1</sup> Again: "None ought to be admitted to the privileges of adult persons in the church of Christ, but such as make a profession of real piety. For the covenant to be owned or professed is God's covenant, which he has revealed as the method of our spiritual union with him, and our acceptance as the objects of his eternal favor, which is no other than the covenant of grace; at least, it is so, without dispute, in these days of the gospel. To own this covenant is to profess the consent of our hearts to it; and that is the sum and substance of true piety."<sup>2</sup>

The different manner in which those of whom we speak should be introduced to the rank and privileges of full communion, as distinguished from the admission of those who come from without the pale of the church, is worthy of consideration; though the discussion of it to any considerable extent does not lie in the line of our present purpose. The views of the Presbyterian church, as given in the Directory of Worship, have been already cited, for substance, in another connection. Somewhat different from them, and better, as we think, are the views of Dr. Bushnell, in his "Christian Nurture," where he says; "Baptized children ought to be enrolled by name in the catalogue of each church, as composing a distinct class of candidate or catechumen members, and to see that they are held in expectancy, thus, by the church, as presumptively one with them in the faith they

<sup>1</sup> Edwards, Works, Vol. i. p. 109.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. Vol. i. pp. 109, 110.

profess. Then, when they come forward to acknowledge their baptism, and assume the covenant in their own choice, they ought not to be received as converts from the world, — as if they were heathens coming into the fold; but there should be a distinction preserved such as makes due account of their previous qualified membership — a *form of assumption* tendered in place of a *confession* — something answering to the Lutheran confirmation, passed without a bishop's hands." <sup>1</sup>

As bearing closely upon this point, we quote a paragraph from the "Report of Committee" — Romeyn and others, already referred to. Speaking of the maternal character of the primitive church, how she "considered herself as the common mother of all baptized children, and exercised a corresponding care over them, that they might be trained up as a generation to serve the Lord," they mention some of the practices of that church, and among them that of confirmation; thus "It appears that a rite called confirmation was administered by the imposition of the hands of the minister or bishop or elder, together with prayer, on baptized children, at a certain age. Both Calvin,<sup>2</sup> and Owen<sup>3</sup> acknowledge that this practice existed at a very early period in the church. The latter thus states its design: 'When they [that is, the children of believers, baptized in their infancy], were established in the knowledge of these necessary truths [of which he makes mention before], and had resolved on personal obedience unto the gospel, they were offered unto the fellowship of the faithful; and here, on giving the same account of their faith and repentance which others had done before they were baptized, they were admitted into the communion of the church, the elders thereof laying their hands on them, in token of their acceptance, and praying for their confirmation in the faith. This rite, which originally was confined to those who were baptized in their infancy, was afterward administered to adults, immediately upon

<sup>1</sup> Christian Nurture, p. 192.

<sup>2</sup> Institutions, Book iv. chap. 19, sec. 4.

<sup>3</sup> Commentary on the Hebrews, chap. vi. v. 19, Vol. iii. p. 33.

their baptism.<sup>1</sup> In process of time, when the church became grossly corrupted in her practice as well as doctrine, it was administered to infants immediately after baptism, that they might receive the Lord's supper.<sup>2</sup> This historical fact, while it exhibits a most deplorable superstition, strikingly illustrates the design of confirmation, as already stated from Dr. Owen. By this rite, "it came to pass," saith the judicious Hooker, 'that children, in expectation thereof, were seasoned with the principles of true religion, before malice and corrupt examples depraved their minds; a good foundation was laid betimes for the direction of the course of their whole lives; the seed of the church of God was preserved sincere and sound; the prelates and fathers of God's family, to whom the care of their souls belonged, saw by trial and examination of them, a part of their own heavy burden discharged; reaped comfort by beholding the first beginnings of true godliness in tender years; glorified him whose praise they found in the mouth of infants; and neglected not so fit an opportunity of giving every one fatherly encouragement and exhortation; whereunto imposition of hands and prayer being added, our warrant for the great good effect thereof is the same which patriarchs, prophets, priests, apostles, fathers, and men of God have had for such their particular invocations and benedictions, as no man, I suppose, professing truth and religion, will easily think to have been without fruit.'<sup>3</sup> This rite of confirmation, thus administered to baptized children, when arrived to competent years, and previously instructed and prepared for it, with the express view of their admission to the Lord's supper, shows clearly that the primitive church in her purest days exercised the authority of a mother over her baptized children."<sup>4</sup>

Another thing from which infant and non-professing church-

<sup>1</sup> King's Primitive Church, Part ii. chap. 5. Bing., Ecc. Ant., Book xii. chap. 1, sec. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Bing., Ecc. Ant., Book xii. chap. 1, sec. 2.

<sup>3</sup> Hooker, Works, Ecc. Polity (London folio ed. 1723), Book v. sec. 66, p. 236.

<sup>4</sup> Duty of the Church, etc. pp. 21, 22.



members must be debarred is the privilege of having the same voice which members of adult years in full communion may have, in managing the spiritual affairs of the church. Affairs of this kind are too precious and sacred to be entrusted to juvenile years, or to the direction of those who are not ready for an avowal of personal devotion to all the higher ends for which the church is established. Until such members come to years of maturity, and voluntarily assume the obligations involved in the covenant made by their parents with God in their behalf, they are not prepared to come forward as guides and guardians of those great religious interests which constitute the glory and the strength of the kingdom of Christ. Just as in any well-regulated civil society, any one of its members wishing to have access to the polls, or to be advanced to responsible positions, must attain to years of discretion and give assurance of his loyalty to the interests of the commonwealth to which he belongs as a citizen, so in the commonwealth of Israel, those who would exercise authority in her affairs, should be duly qualified for the right and privilege by an open avowal of their allegiance to him who is "Head over all things to the church." As Edwards says: "The eldest sons of noblemen in great Britain are born heirs to the honors and estate of their fathers; yet this no way hinders but they may be obliged when they come to ripeness of age, in order to a being invested in the actual possession, to take the oath of allegiance; though in order to their lawfully doing it, it may be necessary they should believe in their hearts that king George is the lawful prince, and that they should not be enemies to him, and friends to the Pretender in their hearts."<sup>1</sup> So those who would come into actual possession of the highest honors and privileges to be enjoyed in the kingdom of Christ, must openly avow their loyalty and attachment to him as the rightful and only Sovereign.

Another thing of which those of whom we speak must be denied, until they take upon themselves the obligations of

<sup>1</sup> Edwards, Works, Vol. i. pp. 282, 283.

the covenant which their parents made with God for them, by a regular profession of personal faith in Christ, is the privilege of bringing their own offspring to the baptismal font. The blessings of the covenant are conditioned upon faith. So it was in the case of Abraham. So it is now, in the Christian church. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thine house," is the command and the promise (Acts xvi. 31). It is "the generation of the upright" that "shall be blessed" (Ps. cxii. 2). "For God will save Zion; . . . . the seed also of his servants shall inherit it" (Ps. lxxix. 35, 36), is the language of the psalmist. And the same economy still holds. "For the promise is to you and to your children," saith the apostle. Here, then, in the parent's own personal piety, is the condition of a promise to his offspring. Here, in his own obedience, that "righteousness of faith," of which baptism, like circumcision, is the seal, is his authority and divine warrant for asking that this ordinance of baptism may be administered to his child. Until the parent comes into the exercise of this righteousness of faith, and makes it manifest by openly professing the religion of the gospel, he fails to honor even his own baptismal vows. How, then, can he hope to enter acceptably into covenant with God in the behalf of another?

The importance of that restriction of which we are now speaking can hardly be too forcibly pressed, as the evil of the opposite view, that "the right and power of handing down baptism to our children are derived from the baptism of the parent," or 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," and such like erroneous notions, have not only brought a fearful train of evils into some of the New England churches, in time past, but have been, no doubt, among the most potent of causes why not a few have departed from the faith of the Fathers, not to say the teachings of the gospel, in respect to the real church-membership of baptized children. "For," as an able writer on the subject before us, Rev. W. A.

Stearns, has said, "if an unbelieving, but baptized parent, refusing to assume his own baptismal vows, giving no evidence of any personal qualifications for the ordinance, might superstitiously, or to promote personal estimation, claim and receive baptism for his children, and these again for their children, and so on from generation to generation, not only would a most powerful incitement to personal religion be taken away, and a holy sacrament be thus profaned, but the church would lose its spirituality, and might become, in the end, but little different in its distinguishing characteristics from a community of baptized heathen."<sup>1</sup>

It was against this error and evil that Edwards lifted a voice of warning that still continues to ring in the ears of New England churches, if not in the churches of other lands as well. And yet, as we have already seen, Edwards himself teaches that the children of believing parents, being baptized, are, "in some sort, members of the Christian church." Nor would he have them hastily expelled, even though in adult age they are slow to make a public profession of faith in Christ. "Because," says he, "it is a matter held in suspense, whether they do cordially consent to the covenant or not, or whether their making no such profession does not arise from some other cause."<sup>2</sup>

Respecting the point now before us,—limiting the privilege of bringing their own offspring to the baptismal font to those members of the church who voluntarily assume covenant vows by professing their personal faith in Christ,—if we mistake not, the views we have urged are in harmony not only with the teachings of the gospel, but, as ought to be expected, in harmony also with the opinions of some of the principal Reformers, and with the standards of most of the Reformed churches. In support of this thought, in a condensed form, we refer to the able Report of the Committee, Romeyn and others, already named. Attempting "to show the nature of that relation which the children by birth or adoption of such adults as make the above profession [of

<sup>1</sup> Infant Church-membership, p. 72.

<sup>2</sup> Edwards, Works, Vol. i. p. 285.

faith in Christ] sustain to the church as members thereof," and having quoted the assurance given to Abraham: "I will be a God unto thee, and unto thy seed after thee," and the words of Peter: "The promise is to you and your children," etc., the Report proceeds: "On the ground of the promise, therefore, the children of those who profess faith in Christ and obedience to his commandments are considered as members of the church. As the promise is made only to the members of the church, and as we cannot acknowledge any one to be a member [in full communion] who does not profess faith in Jesus Christ and obedience to his commandments, it follows that none but the children by birth or adoption of parents one or both of whom do thus profess faith and obedience can be considered as the subjects of promise, and thus within the church. We have added children by adoption to those by birth, because there is nothing in the word of God and in the standards of our church to forbid such adoption.

"To these, and no other children, the sacrament of baptism may be lawfully administered. Thus, in the answer to the 166th question of the Larger Catechism, it is said: '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.'

"In agreement with this, the latter Confession of Helvetia restricts the privilege to 'young infants born of faithful parents'; the former, to 'such as are born of the people of God'; the French Confession, to infants born of 'holy parents'; the Belgic, to the infants of believers, 'the children of the faithful'; the Confession of Saxony, 'to those only which are engrafted into the church'; the Confession adopted at Boston, and afterwards at Saybrook, to 'the infants of one or both believing parents, and to those only.'

"To these authorities may be added the forms for baptizing infants used by the French, Genevan, and Dutch churches, which are founded upon the fact that the infants are presented by persons professing faith in and obedience

to Christ. The language used in the form of the Reformed Dutch church for baptizing infants is remarkably precise on this point. 'Baptism, it is said, is a seal and undoubted testimony that we have an eternal covenant of grace with God.' 'Further, in the exhortation to the parents, we have these words: 'Beloved in the Lord Christ, you have heard that baptism is an ordinance of God, to seal unto us and to our seed his covenant. Therefore it must be used to that end,' i.e. as a seal to us and to our seed, of his covenant with us and our seed. Can a person, then, use baptism as such a seal, if that person does not profess faith in Christ and obedience to him?

"In addition to these public testimonies, the opinions of Calvin, the elder Turretine, Beza, Witsius, and others, might be adduced. We only quote Frith, one of the English martyrs, whose words are a proper conclusion on this subject: 'Baptism is given before the congregation unto him which before he receiveth it hath either professed the religion of Christ, or else hath the word of promise, by the which promise he is known to be of the sensible congregation of Christ.' In these words the two grounds on which membership rests are distinctly noticed — first, in adults, the ground is their profession; secondly, in infants, the word of promise."<sup>1</sup>

Another point of much interest, and of some difficulty and diversity of opinion, in relation to that class of church-members of which we speak, has respect to discipline. Doubtless the difficulties attending this question are among the causes which have led some to deny that baptized children are members of the church in any respect, until they make the same public profession of faith in Christ that is required of those who are entire strangers to the covenants of promise, and come, it may be, even from a heathen circle and training. Nor is this a matter of so great wonder, when we consider what mistaken notions have found here and there a place, sometimes on the real nature and design of discipline, sometimes on the nature and extent of that membership to which

<sup>1</sup> De Witt's Duty of the Church, pp. 15-17.

we refer, and sometimes on both together. No doubt the spirit of an age, or the general state of culture and refinement in a given community, has something to do with the question before us. Hence, as we have seen, in some of the earlier ages of the church, "corporeal correction" and "congruous stripes" were sometimes reckoned among the "proper punishments" for this class of church-members, so long as they were "minors or children under age."

Nor are we sure that the present age, even the Christian portion of it, has quite outgrown the idea that church-discipline must necessarily mean something severe—the infliction of punishment, a suspension or excommunication, or an avenger of evil in some other awful form. From all such discipline, we would say, let minor and non-professing members be forever exempt. They have not yet come to such an advanced standing, by voluntarily assuming the obligations of the covenant made with God by their parents for them, as to make this method of procedure possible, even if it were proper.

As Dr. Adams has said: "It is clear that one cannot be dispossessed of that which he never possessed, except as in the case of a minor, who may have his claim to a future possession wrested from him. Of what is a child of the covenant, allowing him to be, while a child, a member of the church—of what is he in possession? Not of full communion, not of access to the Lord's table, not of the right to a voice in the call and settlement of a pastor, nor in any other church act. From what, then, is he turned out by being cut off? He has never arrived at anything from which he can be separated, except the covenant of God with him through his parents, and its attendant privileges of watch and care. If, then, we excommunicate an unconverted child, we can only declare the covenant of God with him henceforth to be null and void—an assumption from which, probably, Christian parents and ministers would shrink. The same long-suffering God who bears and forbears with ourselves, we shall be disposed to feel, is the God

of this recreant child, and no good man would dare to pronounce the child to be separated from the mercies of 'the God of patience and hope.' One who, being in a church, breaks a covenant to which he assented, may be a just subject of discipline, even to excommunication; but, all the promises of God to the child being wholly free, conditioned at first upon his parents' relation to God, all the disability which the child seems capable of receiving is, that the promises made to him he must fail by his own fault to receive. Who will declare even his prospect of their fulfilment to be terminated at any given time?"<sup>1</sup>

But if by discipline be meant discipling—careful and prayerful instruction, advice, remonstrance, a kind parental teaching and training in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, then such discipline is not only the great duty of the church, but the highest privilege of all her youthful members. And it was, as we conceive, with this specially in view—the rearing of "a godly seed"—that the Most High was ever pleased to enter into covenant with believing parents in behalf of their children, and to ordain that these children should be brought into the fold of his people, the school of Christ, and counted as members thereof from the day the seal of his covenant is set upon them.

On this point, the difficult question of discipline as here presented, we know of no writer whose thoughts seem to us so sound and judicious as those of Rev. W. A. Stearns, to whose work on "Infant Church-membership," we have already referred. Speaking of the supervision to which the children of the church are subject, and asking "to what extent are baptized children properly subject to the watch and discipline of the church, he says: "This is a delicate and important question. It may, however, be intelligently answered. Being church-members, they are to be treated in all respects like other church-members, so far, and only so far, as the peculiar circumstances of their age and cou-

<sup>1</sup> Bertha and her Baptism, pp. 234-236.

dition will allow. This should be remembered as the great and guiding principle in all that is to follow.

“The church, then, is to watch over its children as faithfully as over its adult members. The baptized children are the peculiar objects of its hopes, its instructions, and its prayers. When such children fall into open sin, the church should mourn over, pray for, and seek to reclaim them.

“In doing this they must exercise great gentleness and discretion. Anything like *espionage*, or officious intermeddling, or attempts at undue restraint in things unessential, should be scrupulously avoided. The young have rights and liberties, as well as the old. When it is said that they are in some sense the subjects of discipline in the church, it is intended rather that they are entitled to the affectionate supervision of adult members in full communion.”<sup>1</sup>

“One thing seems certain—there is no necessity for hasty exclusions. We may wait for indications of repentance, while by prayer and all judicious means we seek to secure it, one year, or ten, or even under some circumstances till the individual is excommunicated by death. In the meantime, such persons should be regarded, not as heathen and publicans, but as wanderers from the Good Shepherd’s fold. They are the prodigal sons of the church, for whom unwearied intercessions should be made, and to whom messages of mercy should be often sent, and of whose return strong hopes should be cherished, until we see them standing in the church, and saying: ‘I have sinned.’ Moreover, if children were rightly educated as members of the church, it is believed that cases requiring severe discipline would be as infrequent as they now are among adults.”<sup>2</sup>

“If the child has occasion to leave the parental roof, and fix his residence in some other city or town, it may not be necessary to give him a letter of dismissal and recommendation, as in the case of adults; but it is important that he should carry with him testimonials of character and church-membership, and be regularly introduced to the

<sup>1</sup> Infant Church-membership, p. 58.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p. 60, 61.



pastor and brethren of the church with whom he is intending to worship. It then becomes their duty, according to the principles of fellowship adopted by Congregational churches, to love, watch over and cherish him as a lamb of their own fold. . . . . If at any time a baptized person proposes himself for public profession in some other church than that to which he properly belongs, testimonials of character and a certificate of church-standing should be required as always indispensable to an orderly reception. Thus, in all cases, the children of the church are to be kept under its sanctifying influences and supervision.”<sup>1</sup>

Considered in this light, there is a peculiar propriety and significance in regarding baptized children as members of the church. The relation is most intimate and endearing, sacred and responsible. Taught to regard themselves as of the body of Christ, how can the influence of this thought be otherwise than hallowed and redeeming? Looking upon them as members of herself, how can the church be otherwise than most deeply interested in their welfare? How can she fail to be quickened to fidelity, diligence, and prayer, that they may be shielded from danger, nurtured in the truth, trained for service, and fitted for heaven?

But to speak of the special advantage of this doctrine, in its influence upon the minister, the church, parents, and children, or of the special end of this relation, as for protection, nurture, service, and salvation, would be to transcend alike the leading purpose of this Article and the limits assigned it.

<sup>1</sup> *Infant Church-membership*, pp. 63, 64.