

## The Baptismal Controversy.—III.

### A PLEA FOR CAREFUL DEFINITION.

BY THE REV. N. DIMOCK.

SHALL we wonder, then, if, in the dispensation of the Gospel, one who has been in covenant relationship made God's child by adoption and grace, and so called to a state of salvation, should yet have to deal with the solemn question,<sup>1</sup> "Are you saved?" If it is a question to be dealt with, what a question it is! If it is to be asked, what urgent need that in these days it should be pressed home on the hearts and consciences of men! And that not only among those who are looked down upon as the lower and degraded classes of society, but also among many of those who take rank among the upper and cultivated classes, where also Christian baptism may be in fashion, but Christianity not in possession! What a need for many to be taken down to the school "in the midst of the valley," there to hear the words, "Can these dry bones live?" They can live, but only by the breath of the Divine Spirit, like the wind blowing where it listeth. Truly, we have to do with the question of life and death. Truly, to many the word needs to be spoken (in a sense full of awful solemnity), "Ye must be born again."<sup>2</sup> But if so, it should be made plain that to a baptized soul the question of life or death is the question of life—the free gift of life in

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<sup>1</sup> "Ecce, accepit sacramentum nativitatis homo baptizatus. Sacramentum habet, et magnum sacramentum, divinum, sanctum, ineffabile. Considera quale, ut novum hominem faciat dimissione omnium peccatorum. Attendat tamen in cor, si perfectum est ibi, quod factum est in Corpore. Videat si habeat charitatem; et tunc dicat, *Natus sum a Deo*. Si autem non habet, characterem quidem impositam habet, sed desertor vagatur. Habeat charitatem; aliter, non se dicat natum a Deo" (Augustin in 1 Ep. Joan, Tract v., Op. Tom. IX., p. 220. See Faber, p. 222). In Serapion's "Baptismal Prayers," it is asked for the baptized "that having been formed and regenerated, they may be *able to be saved* and counted worthy of Thy Kingdom" (see Wordsworth's "Bishop Serapion's Prayer-Book," p. 69; S.P.C.K.). But too much weight must not be made to rest on such language as this. See quotation from Boyd on "Baptism and Regeneration" in "Doctrine of Sacraments," p. 144.

<sup>2</sup> See Bishop Harold Browne "On Articles," pp. 616, 617, eighth edition.

Christ—accepted by faith, or of the donation of life rejected—rejected in unbelief—unbelief which loves darkness rather than light, and chooses a death in trespasses and sins rather than the life—the begetting again unto a lively hope—which comes to lost sinners through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

It is a terrible perversion of a truth, indeed, to think that the anxieties of an awakening soul should be set at rest by simply giving a satisfactory answer to the question, "Have you been baptized?"<sup>1</sup> "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." It is the Spirit of God which brings us to Christ. And it must be the Spirit of God that brings us aright to the water of baptism. Ambiguous expressions, which admit of two allied senses, need sometimes to have their senses carefully distinguished.<sup>2</sup> But in making

<sup>1</sup> "Noli de baptisate gloriari, quasi ex ipso salus tibi sufficiat" (Aug., in Ev. Joan, Tract vi., Op. Tom. IX., p. 19. See Faber, p. 59).

<sup>2</sup> It is well, perhaps, to observe that infantine age may be said to be sufficient qualification for regeneration in the lower covenant sense (see Archbishop Lawrence, "Doctrine of the Church of England," pp. 90, 96),—"seeing that God's sacraments have their effects, where the receiver doth not (*ponere objicem*) put any bar against them (which children cannot do)" (see Cardwell's "Conferences," pp. 356, 357)—but is ordinarily a disqualification for regeneration in the full and higher evangelical sense, according to high authority (see Chrysostom, Hom. xxxix. in Gen., and Augustin, Ep. 23, ad Bonifacium). If this teaching of Chrysostom had been a denial of the received faith of the Christian Church, it would hardly have waited for Dr. Wall to point to it as "a very singular notion in divinity" (see Wall's "Infant Baptism," vol. i., p. 229. He had used stronger language in his first edition; see vol. iii., p. 32). It was of circumcision that Chrysostom had asked—"For a *new-born* child, that knows not what is done to him, nor has any sense, what profit for his soul can he receive thereby?" But that his words are equally applicable to baptism when received *ἐν ἀώρῳ ἡλικίᾳ* is sufficiently obvious. See on this subject Nowel's "Catechism," pp. 162, 163; edit. Jacobson; Bradford's Works, vol. i., p. 533; vol. ii., p. 404 (from P. Martyr), P.S.; Jewel's Works, vol. iii., p. 462, P.S.; also Professor Mozley's "Review of Baptismal Controversy," p. 21, and Baxter's Works, vol. v., pp. 351, 352, ed. Orme, 1830; also Aquinas, "Summa," vol. viii., p. 136, ed. 1663.

The argument of Augustine, *de Baptismo contra Donat*, Lib. IV., c. 23, 24, proceeds (as Faber observes), "on the principle constantly recognised by the early Church," that "circumcision under the law was a sacrament morally corresponding with the sacrament of baptism under the Gospel . . . without the admission of this identity the argument of Augustine cannot advance a single step" ("Primitive Doctrine of Regeneration," p. 301; see also p. 354, and quotation there given from our "Homily of Common Prayer and Sacraments").

and carefully marking the distinction, it is also necessary that we should not fail to note that the distinction does not by any means deny a connection nor dissolve a relation. The relation here is very important. The higher sense is rooted in the lower. "We ought," so taught the reformer and saintly martyr Bradford, "to believe of ourselves that we are regenerate." "I mean that we are so by our baptism, the sacrament thereof requiring no less faith" (Works, vol. i., p. 218, P.S.). But all the spiritual power and inward renewing blessing are in abeyance till the soul—knowing itself (however imperfectly) really and truly a child of wrath—comes by faith to lay hold of and stead-

Prebendary George Stanley Faber, acknowledging the doctrine of Augustine to be "that infants are invariably regenerated in and through Baptism" (p. 313), argues with great force that as to the *moral change of disposition* (which he names *moral regeneration*), he "absolutely pronounces them incapable of any such moral regeneration." He adds: "The only regeneration of which he believes them to partake is that *federal regeneration* which is defined to be a *federal change of relative condition*" ("Primitive Doctrine of Regeneration," pp. 246, 274, 314; see quotations from Aug. in p. 315, and let the words be specially marked, "Et tamen nullus Christianorum dixerit eos inaniter baptizari," Contra Don., Lib. IV., c. 23. See also Marriott's *Ευρημικα*, pp. 177, 178).

The words of St. Augustine about *putting any bar* are as follows:

"Longe melior est ille parvulus, qui etiamsi fidem nondum habeat in cogitatione, non ei tamen obicem contrariæ cogitationis opponit, unde sacramentum ejus salubriter percipit" (Op. Tom. II., c. 268).

It may be well, perhaps, to call attention to the fact—without desiring to deduct anything from the true meaning of his words—that this Epistle has not so much the character of anything like an authoritative exposition of the Church's traditional faith, as that of a friendly opinion expressed in answer to the inquiries of a brother Bishop who had sought relief from the pressure of felt difficulties in connection with the sponsorial system of the Church's practice. The letter concludes with the words: "Nec tibi ad excusationem meam objeci firmissimam consuetudinem, sed saluberrimæ consuetudinis reddidi quam potui rationem."

It is certainly to be observed that our Catechism in its teaching concerning the requirements for baptism does not point us to the "no bar" belonging to infantine age, but directs our thoughts to promises by sponsorial representation accepted as sufficing till the coming of age (see Jewel, "Apol. and Defence," p. 462, P.S.). In Nowel's larger Catechism it is taught: "Infantibus vero promissio Ecclesiæ facta per Christum, in Cujus fide baptizantur, in præsens satis erit, deinde postquam adoleverint, Baptismi sui veritatem ipsos agnoscere, ejusque vim in animis eorum vigere, atque ipsorum vita et moribus representari omnino oportet" (p. 162; edit. Jacobson). See Bishop Bethell in Ussher's Works, vol. xv., pp. 508, 512-520; edit. Elrington; see also Archbishop Wake in Gibson's "Preservative," vol. xii., p. 100; edit. 1848; and Willet's "Synopsis Papismi," vol. v., pp. 120-124; edit. 1852.

fastly to believe the promises of God made to it in that sacrament.<sup>1</sup> *Then* it has to look back and in faith to rest upon the donation—the free gift of God, as in that sacrament sealed—the free gift, the donation, in virtue of which it has a sure covenanted warrant to say, “I am the Lord’s” (Isa. xlv. 5). “I was a child of wrath, but now, as a member of Christ and a child of God, I belong to the Lord Jesus Christ, who loved me, and gave Himself for me.” If we would have the witness of the Spirit with our spirit that we are the children of God, we must remember that the Spirit is the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, “Abba, Father”; and that we must first in order receive the free gift of adoption, which we are to lay hold of in the gift sealed to us in the one baptism for the remission of sins. “Baptism,” says Becon, “is a continual sign of the favour of God towards us, of the free remission of sins, of our reconciliation unto God for Christ’s sake, and that we be by adoption the sons of God and heirs of everlasting glory”<sup>2</sup> (“Prayers,” etc., p. 173, P.S.).

If we would learn to know aright the regenerating, life-giving power of the Gospel of Christ, and its sacred connection with the washing of baptism, we must, under the teaching of the Spirit, submit to be taught of the offence of the Gospel, the offence of the Cross, the offence of the true conviction of sin and of sin’s deadly condemnation, and with this to apprehend by faith the Divine truth of free justification through the redeeming love of Christ, the doctrine of “No condemnation to

<sup>1</sup> So Archbishop Ussher—“We may rather deem and judge [as against the idea of *habit of grace infused*] that baptism is not actually effectual to justify and sanctify until the party do believe and embrace the promises. . . . All the promises of grace were in my baptism estated upon me, and sealed up unto me, on God’s part; but then I come to have the profit and benefit of them, when I come to understand what grant God, in baptism, hath sealed unto me, and actually to lay hold on it by faith” (“Body of Divinity,” chap. xlii.). See further extracts from Hooker, Jeremy Taylor, and Beveridge in Bishop Moule’s “Outlines of Christian Doctrine,” pp. 246, 247; see also quotations in “Essays on the Church,” pp. 133-136, seventh edition.

<sup>2</sup> “His word declareth His love towards us; and that word is sealed and made good by baptism” (Jewel, vol. ii., p. 1105, P.S.). “If any take not the seal of regeneration, we cannot say he is born the child of God” (*ibid.*, p. 1108).

them that are in Christ Jesus." Then shall we not most thankfully acknowledge the mercy of God in appointing for us a cleansing, washing ordinance, in which our faith may take full and assured possession of all the riches of grace which come to us through the death and resurrection of Christ, being baptized into His death, that we may rise with Him in newness of life? How gladly should leprous sinners hear the words, "Wash and be clean," and, casting away all proud thoughts of human wisdom, go down to the fountain open for sin and uncleanness, and come again with new hearts to serve God without fear "in holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life"!

Our reformers knew well what was meant by the *opus operatum* doctrine of the sacraments. In its accepted sense they utterly rejected it.<sup>1</sup> It would not stand beside the evangelical doctrine of justification by faith. Did they, therefore, cease to believe and teach the doctrine of the one baptism for the remission of sins? Did they condemn all doctrine of baptismal regeneration? Not so. They put the doctrine of baptism into its true position in relation to the grace of the Gospel.<sup>2</sup> They saw in it the seal of that wondrous gift, the real

<sup>1</sup> See Prebendary Gee in Gibson's "Preservative," vol. viii., p. 164; edit. 1848; and Bishop Carleton in Goode's "Infant Baptism," p. 338; see also Jewel, vol. ii., p. 750 *et seq.*, P.S.; 3. Whitgift, p. 382, P.S.; 1. Tyndale, pp. 342, 423; 2. Tyndale, pp. 90, 103; 2. Becon, p. 454; 2. Bradford, p. 278, P.S.; 2. Coverdale, p. 257; Rogers "On Articles," pp. 247, 250, 268, P.S.

In another, an explained sense, the phrase might be accepted. See my "Doctrine of the Sacraments," pp. 74-76; see also Bishop Bethell's "Regeneration in Baptism," Preface, p. xxvi, fifth edition.

<sup>2</sup> There was a contention at one time among our reformers whether the sacraments could rightly be said to *confer grace* (as stated in certain Articles of 1549), which appears to have mainly been due to a want of clear apprehension of the *status controversiæ*. If the opponents had been satisfied with condemning the phrase "sacramenta *per se* gratiam conferunt" (see Calvin, Inst., Lib. IV., c. 17), or the statement that they confer grace "*ex opere operato*" (see Bullinger's "Decad. V.," pp. 302, 321, P.S.), there might probably have been little difference of opinion on the subject. Indeed, it is very observable (see Hardwick, "History of Art.," pp. 96, 97) that Hooper, who appears to have been among the foremost in objecting to the word *confer*, did, in his "Confession of the Christian Faith" (first published in 1550), strongly assert that sacraments "are such signs as do *exhibit* and *give* the thing that they signify indeed" (Later Writings, P.S., p. 45), almost following the language of Hugo

covenant donation of that Divine pearl of great price—that precious gift, in comparison of which they counted all things but loss—the gift which cost the precious blood of the Son of God. And they knew faith's acceptance of that gift as the very beginning of that new life which the believer lives by the faith of the risen Son of God, rejoicing with joy unspeakable and full of glory, receiving the end of his faith, even the salvation of his soul.

And I venture humbly to submit that in the theology of the Reformation the true *status controversiæ* did not turn at all on the question, Is there or is there not a true doctrine of baptismal regeneration? About this there should be no controversy. The reformers knew no hesitation in admitting that baptism is the sacrament of regeneration. But it did hinge on the question, Is there or is there not a regenerating inward and spiritual efficacy in the *opus operatum* of the administration, apart from its ordained connection with the Gospel of Christ, with the reconciliation of the sinner's soul to God, and the true conversion of the heart to Christ through the free gift given and effectually

de Sancto Victore, "significatione gratiam conferens" (see Bonaventura, Op. Tom. VI., p. 90; Lugduni, 1668). It may be observed in passing that at the date of the Reformation, the verb *exhibit* carried with it a Latin signification, which *now* seems scarcely to survive except in the language of medical science. Compare especially Bradford's Works, vol. i., p. 94, P.S.; and see "Doctrine of Sacraments," p. 121.

Bishop Bedell speaks of inconvenience avoided "by making the sacraments to confer grace only by obsignation of God's promises, and the end of them to be certerioration" (quoted from Goode, "Effects of Baptism," p. 355).

And so in Bullinger's "Decades," while we are taught not to look to the sacraments as of themselves conferring or giving, or bestowing grace to the receivers of them (see Goode, "Effects of Baptism," p. 267), yet we are assured that "they are effectual, and not without force; for in the Church, with the godly and faithful, they work the same effect and end whereunto they were ordained of God" (*ibid.*, p. 269).

So Dr. Whitaker speaks of the adversaries who say "that the sacraments not only confer grace, but even confer it from the mere *work wrought*"—which "*opus operatum*" doctrine he declares was unheard of by the ancient Church (*ibid.*, pp. 295, 296).

For good evidence in answer to the Romanist's charge against the reformers of making the sacraments *only significant* of grace, and not truly *exhibitive* signs of what they signify, I may refer to my "Doctrine of the Sacraments," pp. 21, 89-97. 116-118.

sealed to faith in the one baptism for the remission of sins? To this question the theology of the Reformation answered "No." But, then, it may be asked, Is the privilege of adoption *all*? Is the gift of remission and free justification in the washing of the blood of Christ—is this all that we are to think of as the free gift given and sealed to believing souls in the Sacrament of Baptism? Oh no! God's ancient promise of cleansing by water is followed by the promise, "A new heart also will I give you" (Ezek. xxvi. 25, 26). And so, in the teaching of the Apostle, "the washing of regeneration" is followed by "the renewing of the Holy Ghost." Oh no! It is not all, but it is *the foundation of all*,<sup>1</sup> and may be quite truly called a regeneration. *Upon this* our faith is to receive that Divine life-giving power of the Holy Ghost whereby we are not only started as adopted children on our heavenly race, but as new-born babes, accepted in the Beloved, with a new spirit put within us, we are in the strength of a new life, *as* living branches of the true Vine, to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, knowing and believing the love which God hath to us, and learning continually more and more of the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, and more and more and much more of the exceeding greatness of God's power to usward who believe—the power which makes us to be more than conquerors through Him that loved us.

<sup>1</sup> "Primum ergo in nos, ad accipiendam vitam æternam, quæ in novissimo dabitur, de bonitate Dei munus venit ab initio fidei, remissio peccatorum. . . . Nam et illa regeneratio, ubi fit omnium præteritorum remissio peccatorum, in Spiritu Sancto fit, dicente Domino, Nisi quis renatus fuerit ex aqua et Spiritu, non potest introire in regnum Dei. . . . Primum itaque credendum beneficium est benignitatis Dei in Spiritu Sancto remissio peccatorum" (Aug., Serm. LXXI. in verb. Matt. xiii., § 19).

N. DIMOCK.

