

Liberal Evangelicalism: What it is and What it stands for.¹

V.—THE SACRAMENTS AND THE MINISTRY.

THE whole of life is permeated by sacraments. We fail to see and feel the sacraments of daily life because we are not heavenly-minded. A smile of welcome, a handshake, is a sacrament; every meal, every cleansing of the body, is a sacrament: to the spiritual man, a kiss of greeting or the waving of the hand is the sacrament of love and friendship. We are surrounded by sacrament, enveloped in its folds.

Just as these sacraments of daily life are meant to lift us up to the highest and best ideals in relation to our fellow-creatures, so the Sacraments of the Gospel were designed by Christ to lift us up into the closest and most intimate relation with Himself and our Father. Our bodies need two things for their health and vigour—cleansing and food; and our Lord accepted this commonplace of daily experience, and gave it a deeper and fuller meaning by applying it to our spiritual needs.

The beauty of the Sacraments of the Gospel is that their essence is so apparent, so easily grasped. The simplest Christian, even a young child, can seize upon the great meaning of washing in Baptism and the feeding of the soul in the Holy Communion. It is when we overstep the great meaning and begin to ask questions of secondary importance, as to the *how* and the *why*, that the confusion begins. Nay, perhaps it is rather when we think that we have discovered the *how* and the *why*, and begin to dogmatize and to lay down the law, that schism and dissension, quarrelling and persecution, enter in to disgrace our profession and make the sacred mysteries of our

[¹ It may be convenient to state that the CHURCHMAN is not necessarily identified with all the views set forth in this series of papers. They are contributed by one of the ablest writers amongst the younger Evangelicals who is entitled to be heard.—ED.]

religion the centre of strife. The man who first theorized as to the operation of the Sacraments was a doubtful friend ; the man who first succeeded in getting his theory adopted as a dogma did a very ill service to true spiritual religion.

In theory, it should be enough for us to carry out our Lord's commands in simple obedience, leaving the Divine Spirit to interpret them according to our needs and experiences. We cannot imagine St. Paul lecturing his converts on the nature and character of the Presence in the Eucharist, nor St. John chopping logic over some pet theory of regeneration. It was enough for them to know that the sacred symbols were emblems of the Lord's Body broken and His Blood shed for man's salvation, that the spirit in that blessed feast was nourished with heavenly food ; enough for them to know that that Washing meant that they were Christ's own pledged people, and must walk as such, without curious questioning. But men will always ask curious questions, and they usually suffer accordingly, from the infant who investigates the coal-scuttle upwards. So all of us have to plunge into this pitiful controversy and take sides.

The two Gospel Sacraments—Baptism and the Holy Communion—bear a close analogy to the two Jewish Sacraments—Circumcision and the Passover. "Circumcision made without hands" was a phrase which no Jew would misunderstand. Baptism would do for him as a Christian what Circumcision did for him as a Jew. It would admit him into the Christian Church, and make him eligible for all the covenant privileges which belong to a Christian. Neither would "the washing of regeneration" suggest to him any difficulty whatever.

And with us to-day such expressions would lose nearly all their difficulty if Baptism were administered as in Apostolic times. Then it cost much to be a Christian. No man would dare to confess himself such unless he meant it from his soul, and it would be a duty sacred and awful beyond words to see that his children, baptized in the water at his side, were trained to know the Lord from their childhood up, and to call Him

Master and God with their lips as soon as they could frame the words.

Nearly all our difficulty about Baptismal Regeneration is due to our lapse from Apostolic method. Now anybody can walk into our churches, people who have to ask the way to their parish church, people who never use God's Name in reverence, to have their children baptized. Godparents make awful undertakings glibly, or stumble over their answers in such a way as to show that they have no idea what they are undertaking to do. And we allow such people to join in a service which was drawn up for God-fearing people, who realized their responsibility as the guardians of children who are "an heritage and gift which cometh of the Lord."

It is small wonder, indeed, that we are in difficulty to explain in what sense such children can be called regenerate. The hard cold facts of life shatter all dogmatic theories. Careless, godless, indifferent, blaspheming men and women were baptized and pronounced regenerate. How can this be interpreted in view of these facts? The word is watered down in its meaning, qualifications and mental reservations resorted to, and even the subtle theological mind, so seldom at a loss, is baffled to explain the difficulty.

What God has done for the unconscious child of unbelieving parents we cannot say, we can only hope. But this we do say—that we have no right to declare so positively that such a child is regenerate. This indiscriminate Baptism is one of the gravest scandals in the Church. It "overthroweth the nature of a Sacrament," indeed, and makes it either a mere social formality or an enchantment. If it is legitimate to baptize in this haphazard way, then the priests of Cortes, who baptized the Tlascalan and Aztec infants, and then dashed their brains out, were not essentially wrong.

"What is the remedy?" it may be asked. We cannot enter into this, for we are not lecturing on pastoral theology. We fear that to deny "the rights of parishioners" to have their children baptized is a bold course which might lead to a grave

crisis between Church and State. This we cannot discuss. But we maintain that the difficulty concerning Baptismal Regeneration is not one for which our service can be blamed. The Gorham Judgment has made the situation bearable for us, for we cannot conscientiously evade the problem by giving the word "regenerate" a meaning which it never has either in Scripture or in primitive Christian writings.

Over the child of godly parents we have no scruples in pronouncing the splendours of its inheritance. We have no occasion to resort to verbal shifts and evasions. We accept the words at their face value. "If two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of My Father which is in heaven," said our Lord.* Can we, therefore, doubt that a God-fearing father and mother, desiring above all things the redemption of their child, will have their prayer heard? It may be granted at the time of baptism, it may be granted later, but as surely as God is in heaven it will be granted. As those believing parents have dedicated their child to Christ in obedience to His invitation, and in accordance to His appointed plan, so will He seal it as His own by the dower of His Holy Spirit. "This promise He, for His part, will most surely keep and perform."

Holy Communion, like the Jewish Sacrament it succeeded, is the Sacrament of edification. To the pious Jew the lamb, whose blood he had shed and whose flesh he was eating, not only recalled the deliverance of his people from bondage, but foreshadowed a greater and future deliverance—a deliverance from spiritual bondage and the power of evil. When the Lamb of God was slain once for all for sin, there was no more looking forward to a saving act yet to be performed. But there was need for a Sacrament whose essential purpose would be to make the soul look back to the great deed once for all done. So the Holy Communion was given in order that we might remember Him whose Body was broken and whose Blood was shed for our deliverance. That is the essence of the Eucharist.

Now, upon this we must enlarge. No intelligent Christian, whether Churchman or Nonconformist, holds that the Holy Communion is a mere commemorative rite (like, for instance, the laying of a wreath of flowers upon the grave of a dead friend). Such a defective view is still ignorantly attributed to Zwingli, sometimes by writers who ought to know better. In this wonderful service the heart, the mind, the soul, are all concentrated upon the atoning Death of Christ. As we kneel in adoring love at the Communion-rails we are in spirit translated to Calvary, and it is around His Cross that we are grouped, with hearts bowed in penitence, with heads bent in reverential awe, with souls alive and waiting to receive His benediction. As we receive the emblems of His Body broken and His Blood shed, there is poured into our hearts from His loving hands the stream of His refreshing grace, and we receive "forgiveness of our sins and all other benefits of His Passion."

If the catchwords of controversy must be used, then we Evangelicals, believing this, do believe, and must believe with all our souls, in the most real of all Real Presences at such a time. It is not that our Lord is any more present with us than when we are at work or asleep. He cannot be *more* present than present, but we are more fully conscious of His nearness than at any other time; our spirits are alert, the vision is cleared, and He is made known to us in the Breaking of Bread.

So sacred is all this to us that we cannot without regret turn to the controversial questions associated with the Holy Communion.

Such a view of the Sacrament as we have described is for us obscured, if not destroyed, by the extreme reaction towards medieval teaching which has become so common in our Church. The view that, owing to the repetition of certain words by the priest, Christ enters the elements, and is conveyed to us in some material way, is a conception so foreign to our whole thought that the objections to it based upon philosophy and Scripture are subordinated to the objection arising out of our religious

experience. It is difficult to correlate such a theory to our intelligence, but impossible to do so to our spiritual instinct ; we have neither a mental nor religious point of contact with such a view ; even if it were true, we cannot perceive what blessing could be derived from such a gift so given.

It is in much the same way that we regard non-communicating attendance. Such a practice cannot be of no spiritual value, for we assume that the worshipper is engaged in prayer, and so is receiving a blessing. But he is not joining in the act of communion, and, since all the other worshippers are there for that very purpose, we are really at a loss to know what specific blessing he expects to receive from watching other people do what he is bidden to do himself. But much more strongly do we feel that the whole Communion Service is evacuated of its meaning when it becomes a display before a large congregation at which only two or three partake and the rest look on. Whatever such a service may be, we know what it is not. It may be the "principal service," but it is not a Communion Service. Such a theory of the Communion, and such a service (apart altogether from the objections we have for them on quite other grounds), cannot be co-ordinated with our religious outlook ; to us they have no religious value, no religious meaning.

The "principal service" is another popular phrase upon which we must touch, in order to explain further our position. To us Evangelicals the Holy Communion is in a very real sense the principal service. It cannot be anything else, for it is the commemoration of the saving Death of our Redeemer, the time of most blessed and most intimate intercourse with Him, when life and power, virtue and grace, pour into our hearts in an overflowing stream. It is the central act of worship, summing up as it does, and focussing upon our souls, the essential facts of our Faith. But what is "principal" is not prominent in the sense that it is open to the gaze of all. The principal things in every man's life—his love for his wife and family, for instance—are not the things that he advertises, nor does he discuss them with all and sundry ; they are too intimate and sacred.

Hence, it is *just because* we feel that the Holy Communion is the principal act of public worship that we recoil from making it a public exhibition, and shrink from allowing non-Christians, indifferent and irreligious persons, to gaze at a service in which they have no part whatever. We admit the cogency of many of the arguments of the advocates of the "parochial Eucharist," but we dissent from their conclusions. Just because of its specific appointment by our Lord, just because it lies at the heart of our religion, just because it is the memorial of the blessed fact upon which our salvation depends, just because of all these and kindred arguments, we maintain that the godless and unbelieving have no place at the service whatever. We shield this principal thing from vulgar gaze, for to us it is desecration that the memorial of the sacrificial Death of the Redeemer of the world, the thought of which hushes our hearts into awful reverence, should be a public gazing-stock.

A few words must be added to explain the general views of Liberal Evangelicals upon the question of the ministry.

The government of the Church by an Episcopal form of ministry we regard as the most Scriptural, the most ancient, and the most convenient and effective, of all the methods which have been adopted. We therefore congratulate ourselves upon the circumstance that we are members of an Episcopal Church, for we love and value this link with the past, and we can imagine nothing which could induce us to part from it.

But some of our fellow-Churchmen have sought to strengthen the authority of the Episcopate by advocating the theory of Apostolic Succession. Now, if this theory were only a mere matter of sentiment or romance, we should not feel called upon to criticize it at all. But the deductions made from the assumptions are, in our judgment, so mischievous and so prejudicial to the cause of Christian Unity that we are driven to challenge Apostolic Succession at every point. We ourselves value the continuity of the present with the past, and the dignity of our ministry is much enhanced by its venerable

associations. But Apostolic Succession does not rest at this point. Not satisfied to prove Episcopacy an ancient, Scriptural, and efficient system, it embarks upon the ungracious and rash attempt to prove it the only legitimate and tolerable method of Church government.

The theory postulates that Bishops are the delegates of the Apostles; that by an unbroken chain of Bishops succeeding Bishops, Apostolic power and authority rests upon our Bishops; that no ministry unconnected with this chain is in complete accord with the Divine ideal, or possesses in full the Divine sanction. Hence we cannot be *sure* that we are members of Christ's Body (*i.e.*, the Church), nor *sure* that we receive sacramental grace, unless we are members of an Episcopal Church.

This theory has broken down hopelessly under the fire of historical criticism, and we rejoice at the collapse of a dogma which has proved to be the hotbed of bigotry, spiritual pride, and prejudice. No scholar now attempts to prove Apostolic Succession in its original form. One distinguished Anglican Bishop is bold enough to declare that it has not suffered by recent research! We admire his courage in saying this, but we note that, despite his assertion, he himself holds a view of Apostolic Succession modified in some very important points.

The arguments upon which it is based (like the stone of Sisyphus) never quite get to the top of the hill of proof.

The theory of Apostolic Succession seems to us such a petty thing that it would be a great obstacle to faith in a great and good God if it were true. We cannot think of God, whose mercy and love are infinitely wide, denying the assurance of His blessing to all forms of Church government except one—a form, moreover, not definitely enjoined in Scripture. We cannot think of God acting in this trivial way. History mocks it; everyday experience ridicules it. An Episcopal ministry we believe is the best, the most dignified, the most venerable. But we believe that the ministry in a Little Bethel, in both its functions of preaching and administering the Sacraments, is

as potent to save souls and to build them up as our own ministry.

Away, therefore, with all this schism-provoking talk of "valid Sacraments" and "valid ministries"! Such adjectives suit well the quibblings and the hair-splittings of the legal profession, but they are grotesquely out of place in reference to the free grace of the Father of us all, and they are falsified by the experience of ten thousand simple souls who have fed in the rich pastures of God, but know nothing of an Episcopal ministry.

Apostolical Succession we recognize as the eternal foe of Christian unity, and we say again we rejoice at its downfall.

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