

the matter a place and influence which they are wholly unfitted to sustain, and thus tends to lead men to go about to establish a righteousness of their own, instead of doing what is indispensable to their salvation,—namely, submitting themselves to the righteousness of God, the righteousness of Jesus Christ which is of God by faith;—and to cherish a feeling of self-righteousness and self-dependence. The Council of Trent, aware that these charges had been adduced against the Romish doctrine by the Reformers, and that there was at least some appearance of ground for them, wind up their whole deliverance upon the various topics comprehended under the head of justification in their thirty-third or last canon, in the following words: “If any one saith, that, by the Catholic doctrine touching Justification, by this holy Synod set forth in this present decree, the glory of God, or the merits of our Lord Jesus Christ are in any way derogated from, and not rather that the truth of our faith, and the glory in fine of God and of Jesus Christ are rendered (more) illustrious; let him be anathema.”\* And Calvin’s answer to this canon, in his Antidote, to which I have had repeated occasion to refer, is in these words: “An ingenious caution, truly, to prevent every man from seeing what all see. They have almost entirely frustrated or made void the glory of God and the grace of Christ together; and at the same time they forbid, under a curse, any one to imagine that they have derogated in the least from either. This is just as if any one should kill a man in the open market, in the sight of all men, and then should enjoin that no one should believe in the reality of the murder which all had seen committed. These men clearly show their true character, by trying to deter men by anathema from venturing to perceive that impiety of which they themselves were conscious.”† Perhaps this striking statement of Calvin’s, though true in the main, scarcely takes sufficiently into account the skill and caution with which the decree of the Council of Trent upon this subject was framed, and applies more exactly to the general strain of doctrine and sentiments that prevailed in the ordinary public teaching of the Romish Church. Enough, however, has, I trust, been said to show, that in the decrees and canons of the sixth session of the Council of Trent, there is much that

\* Sess. vi., Canon xxxiii., Waterworth’s translation.

† Antidot. in Canon. xxxiii., sess. vi.

contradicts the teaching of the word of God upon the most important of all subjects,—that gives a most erroneous view of the plan which God has devised, executed, and revealed for saving sinners,—a view fitted to exert an injurious influence upon their spiritual welfare, and to endanger the salvation of their souls;—and that, of course, the Church of Rome incurred fearful guilt, and became more deeply and hopelessly apostate than ever, by deliberately, solemnly, and unchangeably rejecting those great scriptural principles concerning the way of a sinner’s salvation, which, under the guidance of the Spirit of God, the Reformers were made the instruments of reviving and restoring, and pressing again upon the attention of men.

We cannot fully understand the bearing and tendency of the Romish system, unless we view its formal doctrinal statements in connection with the known principles and tendencies of human nature; and observe also how Papists, in the application of their doctrines, and in the practical arrangements and outward observances which are based upon them, have most carefully and skilfully made provision for fostering and strengthening tendencies of an erroneous and dangerous description. The view we have given of the doctrine formally professed by the Church of Rome, upon the leading topics involved in the exposition of justification, discloses some very important corruptions of the system unfolded in Scripture, as being that which God has provided and revealed for securing men’s deliverance and salvation, and imparting to them the blessings necessary for that end. This must necessarily be very injurious and very dangerous in its practical bearing upon men’s opinions and conduct with respect to the way of salvation. But the full extent of its injurious and dangerous tendency is brought out only when the system is contemplated in connection with the natural tendencies of depraved men.

One of the strongest and most universal tendencies of men in their fallen and depraved condition, is to go about to establish a righteousness of their own,—to rely upon what they themselves are, or do, or can do, for procuring the forgiveness of their sins and the enjoyment of God’s favour. That this tendency is natural to fallen men, and is deep-seated in their moral constitution, is abundantly proved by a survey of the religions of heathenism and of corrupted Judaism. This tendency was openly and decidedly opposed by the inspired apostles, as going far to neutralize

and counteract the fundamental principles, and to frustrate the practical objects, of the only true method of salvation. The Apostle Paul's account of the cause or reason of the partial success of his efforts to promote the salvation of his kinsmen according to the flesh is full of instruction and warning upon this subject. It is this, that they, being ignorant of God's righteousness,—*i.e.*, of the divine method of justification through the perfect righteousness which God has provided,—and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God, and of course have forfeited the blessings which were offered to them, and have put away from them eternal life. This is the great difficulty which all who are labouring for the salvation of sinners have still to encounter, and which is found to exist in peculiar strength in those who have been subjected to the full action of the Romish system of doctrine and practice. The influence of this tendency, in not only leading men practically to reject the gospel for themselves and their own salvation, but speculatively to obscure and pervert its system of doctrine, was very early and extensively exhibited in the Church, and was most fully developed in the general character of the system of doctrine and practice that generally prevailed in the Church of Rome before the Reformation. After the true doctrine of Scripture had been fully brought out by the Reformers, the Council of Trent, though alive to the importance of avoiding what was grossly offensive in statement, and of evading the arguments adduced by the Reformers from the word of God against the notions that then generally prevailed in the Church of Rome, did not hesitate to lay down many positions which are obviously fitted powerfully to strengthen this tendency, and to give it a firmer hold of men's minds. We cannot now dwell again at any length upon the different doctrines which enter into the Romish system of justification, for the purpose of illustrating this tendency as attaching to them; and it is not very necessary, because, in spite of the anathema of the council, it may be asserted that the tendency of its doctrines to derogate from the glory of God's grace, and from the efficacy and sufficiency of the satisfaction and obedience of Christ, is abundantly manifested. But we may repeat, that the Council of Trent confounds justification and sanctification,—denies the imputation of Christ's righteousness as the immediate ground, or cause, or reason of God's act in pardoning and accept-

ing sinners,—substitutes in its place a personal inherent righteousness of our own,—represents six other virtues, as they call them, as standing in the very same relation to justification as faith does,—the whole seven equally and alike being declared to prepare and dispose men to justification,—leaves room *on purpose* for allowing Romanists to hold, as almost all Romish writers do, that they deserve justification of congruity,—explains the special prominence assigned to faith in Scripture, on the ground of its being the source or root of the other virtues;—and, finally, ascribes to men, when once justified, a power of making satisfaction to God for the temporal punishment due to their sins, and of strictly and properly meriting or deserving at His hand increase of grace and eternal life. The confounding of justification and renovation or sanctification, tends to involve the whole subject in obscurity and confusion, and to diminish men's sense of the necessity and importance of a change in their judicial relation to God and His law, as a distinct and definite step in the process by which their salvation is effected. It tends, also, in the case of men who have been justified,—as is strikingly exhibited in the lives and writings of the Jansenists, who were the best and holiest men, and the soundest theologians, the Romish Church has ever produced,—to deprive them of legitimate comfort and enlargement of heart, to engender a spirit of bondage and servile fear, and to involve them in foolish, injurious, and degrading observances in the way of penance and mortification.

The denial of the direct and immediate bearing of the vicarious work of Christ upon God's act in pardoning and accepting sinners,—the substitution in its room of a personal righteousness of our own, while the work of Christ is regarded as bearing upon the result only indirectly, by procuring in some way for men the infusion of the personal righteousness which is the only formal cause or ground of justification,—not only obscures and perverts the true foundation of the whole process, by throwing its most essential feature into the background, but has also the most direct and powerful tendency to lead men to rely upon what is, in some sense, their own, and what they will be very prone to regard as solely, or at least principally, their own, or something wrought in them or done by them. This tendency is obviously confirmed by the representation given of the function and operation of faith: the subordinate place assigned to it, on the one hand, in classing it

along with half a dozen of other virtues which flow from it; and, on the other, the exalted place assigned to it, as well as to them, in exerting some meritorious efficacy in procuring the result,—in operating in the matter of justification by reason of its own worth or excellency. And, when all this is viewed in connection with the Romish doctrine of human satisfaction and proper merit in the case of men already justified, what can be reasonably expected but that Romanists should be practically and principally relying upon the doings and deservings of themselves and others, for the forgiveness of their sins and the enjoyment of God's favour? All this tends to strengthen and confirm, in place of checking and subduing, men's natural tendency to self-righteousness and self-dependence; and the doctrine, thus formally and explicitly taught, viewed in connection with this natural tendency, is obviously fitted to endanger men's spiritual and eternal welfare, by leading them to abstain from doing what, according to God's revealed arrangements, is indispensable to their happiness,—to build their hopes upon a false foundation,—and to cherish a habitual state of mind and feeling which prevents them from giving to the grace of God and the work of Christ the glory which is due to them.

There is in the Romish system such an acknowledgment of the grace of God and the work of Christ, as in some way concerned in the matter, as to affect somewhat the perfect accuracy of Calvin's illustration derived from the case of a murder committed openly in the market; but, on this very account, the scheme is all the more insidious and the more dangerous: for while it is true, on the one hand, that the general acknowledgment that the grace of God and the merits of Christ, which the Council of Trent permits, may be applied and improved by some for the salvation of their souls, the other doctrines with which this acknowledgment is accompanied and obscured, tend, on the other, to lead men in general in a wrong direction, and to expose them to serious danger. It is so obvious that, in the sacred Scriptures, the forgiveness and acceptance of sinners are ascribed chiefly to the grace of God and the work of Christ, that this could scarcely be formally and explicitly denied by any who admitted the divine authority of the Bible. In these circumstances, the ingenuity of the great enemy of souls was directed to the object of preserving this general acknowledgment in words and outward profession, but at the same time counteracting and neutralizing it in its practical ten-

dency. To this the whole system of Popish doctrine and practice is directed, and for the accomplishment of all this it is admirably fitted. It deludes men with an appearance and a profession of referring their salvation to God and Christ, while it enables them to indulge their natural tendency to rely upon themselves. If any opening is left for the indulgence of this tendency, it will be sure to insinuate itself, and to exert a perverting and dangerous influence upon men's opinions, feelings, and conduct. The doctrine of the Scripture shuts up every chink through which any feeling of self-righteousness and self-dependence could be introduced, by representing men as wholly worthless and wholly helpless, and by ascribing their deliverance and salvation, in all its causes and in all its results, to the grace of God and the work of Christ. The Church of Rome throws down the barriers which have thus been erected, and practically divides the work of men's salvation between God and themselves; and when men are encouraged formally and directly to make such a partition, they are not likely to be very careful about preserving what they admit in words to be the lawful shares of the respective parties, and they will not hesitate to take the largest portion to themselves.

It is evidently a fundamental principle in God's arrangements, in connection with the everlasting destinies of the human race, that men are to be saved by or through knowing and applying the provision which He has made for saving them. Ignorance or error, therefore, in regard to the nature and bearing of this provision, must be at once sinful and dangerous, as implying a refusal to submit to the authority of the revelation which God has made of His mind and purposes, and as tending to frustrate the great practical object to which the provision was directed. And the ignorance or error must be the more sinful and the more dangerous, according as it is connected more directly and immediately with the fundamental principles of the provision,—with the leading features of the state of feeling and the course of conduct which the contemplation of the provision is fitted to produce. If God, as the only means of saving sinners in a way consistent with the attributes of His nature, the principles of His moral government, and the honour of His law, sent His Only-begotten into the world to suffer and die for them, it must be of the last importance that men should distinctly and correctly understand *how it is* that the mediatorial work of Christ bears

upon their relation to God and their everlasting destiny; and what is the state of feeling they ought to cherish, and the course of conduct they ought to pursue, in regard to it. We have seen that the Protestant doctrine of justification presents a consistent and harmonious scheme, in full accordance with all the general views unfolded to us in Scripture concerning the unchangeable character of God, and the natural condition and character of men,—ascribing to the work of Christ a prominence and efficacy suited to the exalted character of so extraordinary a provision,—leading men to seek and to receive salvation, and all that it involves, as the free and unmerited gift of God's grace, and to live thereafter under a deep and heartfelt conviction that they are not their own, but bought with a price,—and teaching them that the one object which they are bound to aim at is to show forth the praises of Him who hath called them out of darkness into His marvellous light; while the Popish system, of throwing the work of Christ into the background, and of ascribing much in the matter to what is done by men themselves, by telling them that they can do much to procure, and even merit, for themselves the blessings they need, tends to produce a different mode of acting, and a different state of feeling,—tends to lead men to go about to establish their own righteousness, instead of simply receiving the righteousness which God has provided for and offered to them, and to cherish a feeling of confidence and dependence upon themselves,—a feeling inconsistent at once with that profound sense of obligation, and that depth of filial affection, towards God which are the distinguishing characteristics of true believers. Upon the ground of the general acknowledgment of the grace of God and the work of Christ which the Council of Trent permits, men may, even in the Romish communion, be practically resting upon the mercy of God and the righteousness of Christ. But the tendency of the whole Popish system, when fully imbibed and applied, is to lead men to build upon a different, a false foundation; while the very profession they are permitted to make of relying upon God's mercy and Christ's work may just conceal from them the truth, that they are practically relying upon themselves, and thus only increase the danger to which all their strongest natural tendencies expose them, of disregarding and rejecting the only provision whereby guilty and fallen men can be saved.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### THE SACRAMENTAL PRINCIPLE.

WE have referred only incidentally to the doctrine of the Church of Rome as to the bearing and influence of the sacraments in the justification of sinners. But as this is a very important feature of the Romish system of theology,—as the Romish doctrine on this subject was strenuously opposed by the Reformers,—and as the doctrine of sacramental justification, as it has been called, has been revived in our own day, and been zealously maintained even by men who have not yet joined the Church of Rome,—it may be proper to make some further observations upon it

#### *Sec. I.—Sacramental Grace.*

The natural enmity of the human heart to the principles and plans of the divine procedure in regard to the salvation of sinners,—the natural tendency to self-righteousness which is so strongly and universally characteristic of mankind,—has appeared in two different forms: first, a tendency to rely for the forgiveness of sin and the enjoyment of God's favour upon what men themselves are, or can do; and, secondly, a tendency to rely upon the intervention and assistance of other men or creatures, and upon outward ordinances. Heathenism exhibited both; and the corrupted Judaism of our Saviour's days,—the prevailing party of the Pharisees,—exhibited both. The Sadducees of the apostolic days, and the Socinian and the rationalistic, or the semi-infidel and the infidel, forms of professed Christianity in modern times, have exhibited only the first of these tendencies, in different degrees of grossness, on the one hand, or of plausibility, on the other; while Popery, like heathenism and corrupted Judaism, exhibits a combination of both. There appeared in the church at an early period,

a tendency to speak of the nature, design, and effects of the sacraments, or the "tremendous mysteries," as some of the fathers call them, in a very inflated and exaggerated style,—a style very different from anything we find in Scripture upon the subject. This tendency increased continually as sound doctrine disappeared and vital religion decayed, until, in the middle ages, Christianity was looked upon by the great body of its professors as a system which consisted in, and the whole benefits of which were connected with, a series of outward ceremonies and ritual observances. The nature, design, and effects of the sacraments occupied a large share of the attention of the schoolmen; and, indeed, the exposition and development of what is sometimes called in our days the "sacramental principle," may be justly regarded as one of the principal exhibitions of the anti-scriptural views and the perverted ingenuity of the scholastic doctors. An exaggerated and unscriptural view of the value and efficacy of the sacraments was too deeply ingrained into the scholastic theology, and was too much in accordance with the usual policy of the Church of Rome, and the general character and tendency of her doctrine, to admit of the Council of Trent giving any sanction to the sounder views upon the subject which had been introduced by the Reformers, and especially by the Calvinistic section of them,—for Luther always continued to hold some defective and erroneous notions upon this point. The doctrine of the Church of Rome upon this subject is set forth in the first part of the decree of the seventh session of the Council of Trent, which treats *de Sacramentis in genere*, and in other statements made in treating of some of the sacraments individually. The leading features of their doctrine are these:—that, through the sacraments of the Church, all true righteousness either begins, or when begun, is increased, or when lost, is repaired; that men do not obtain from God the grace of justification by faith alone without the sacraments, or at least without a desire and wish to receive them; that the sacraments confer grace always upon all who receive them, unless they put an obstacle in the way (*ponunt obicem*),—that is, as they usually explain it, unless they have, at the time of receiving them, a deliberate intention of committing sin,—and that they confer grace thus universally *ex opere operato*, or by some power or virtue given to them, and operating through them. And with respect, more particularly, to the forgiveness of sin, the Church of Rome

teaches, as we have seen, that baptism is the instrumental cause of justification,—that all previous sins are certainly forgiven in baptism,—and that no sin is forgiven, not even the original sin of those who die in infancy, without it;—and, finally, that post-baptismal sin is forgiven only in the sacrament of penance, that is, through the confession of the sinner and the absolution of the priest.

This is just, in substance, the doctrine which is taught by the modern Tractarians, under the name of the "sacramental principle." Mr Newman, in his Lectures on Justification, published several years before he left the Church of England, gives the following summary of his views upon the subject: "Justification comes *through* the Sacraments; is received *by* faith; *consists* in God's inward presence, and *lives* in obedience;"\* and again: "Whether we say we are justified by faith, or by works, or by Sacraments, all these but mean this one doctrine, that we are justified by grace, which is given through Sacraments, impetrated by faith, manifested in works."† He admits, indeed, that, in some sense, faith is the internal, while baptism is the external, instrument of justification; but, in explaining their respective offices and functions as instruments in the production of the result, he ascribes to faith a position of posteriority and subordination to baptism. "The Sacraments," he says, "are the immediate, faith is the secondary, subordinate, or representative instrument of justification." "Faith being the appointed representative of Baptism, derives its authority and virtue from that which it represents. It is justifying because of Baptism; it is the faith of the baptized, of the regenerate, that is, of the justified. Justifying faith does not precede justification; but justification precedes faith, and makes it justifying. And here lies the cardinal mistake of the views on the subject which are now in esteem (evangelical). They make faith the sole instrument, not after Baptism but before; whereas Baptism is the primary instrument, and makes faith to be what it is, and otherwise is not."‡ He admits, indeed, what could not well be denied, that, in some sense, faith *exists* before baptism,—*i.e.*, of course, in adults; but he denies that faith has then,—or until after baptism makes it, as he says, justifying,—any

\* Newman, Lectures on Justification, pp. 316, 317.

† *Ibid.*, p. 345.  
‡ *Ibid.*, p. 257.

influence whatever upon justification. This was certainly raising the efficacy of the sacraments at least as high as the Council of Trent did; while it also exhibited, in addition to its heresy, a depth of folly and absurdity, and a daring opposition to the plain teaching of Scripture, which the Council of Trent had usually the sense and the decency to avoid.

The essential idea of this Popish and Tractarian doctrine of the sacraments is this: that God has established an invariable connection between these external ordinances, and the communication of Himself,—the possession by men of spiritual blessings, pardon, and holiness; with this further notion, which naturally results from it, that He has endowed these outward ordinances with some sort of power or capacity of conveying or conferring the blessings with which they are respectively connected. It is a necessary result of this principle, that the want of the outward ordinance,—not the neglect or contempt of it, but the mere want of it, from whatever cause arising,—deprives men of the spiritual blessings which it is said to confer. The Church of Rome has found it necessary or politic to make some little exceptions to this practical conclusion; but this is the great general principle to which her whole system of doctrine upon the subject leads, and which ordinarily she does not hesitate to apply. The Protestant doctrine, upon the other hand, is, that the only thing on which the possession by men individually of spiritual blessings,—of justification and sanctification,—is made necessarily and invariably dependent, is union to Christ; and that the only thing on which union to Christ may be said to be dependent, is faith in Him: so that it holds true, absolutely and universally, that wherever there is faith in Christ, or union to Christ by faith, *there* pardon and holiness,—all necessary spiritual blessings,—are communicated by God and received by men, even though they have not actually partaken in any sacrament or external ordinance whatever. If this great principle can be fully established from Scripture,—as Protestants believe it can,—then it overturns from the foundation the Popish and Tractarian doctrine about the office and function of the sacraments; while, on the other hand, if they can establish from Scripture their doctrine of the sacraments, this would necessitate a rejection or modification of the great Protestant principle above stated. It is to be observed, however, that even after this Protestant principle has been established from Scripture, and after

the Popish and Tractarian view of the sacraments, which is inconsistent with it, has been disproved, it still remains incumbent upon Protestants to explain what the design and efficacy of the sacraments are,—what is the place they hold, and what is the influence they exert, in connection with the bestowal by God, and the reception by men, of spiritual blessings. The general doctrine of Protestants upon this subject, though there is some diversity in their mode of explaining it, is this,—that the sacraments are symbolical or exhibitivè ordinances, signs and seals of the covenant of grace, not only signifying and representing Christ and the benefits of the new covenant, but sealing, and, in some sense, applying, them to believers. They regard them, however, as mere appendages to the word or the truth, and as exerting no influence whatever, apart from the faith which the participation in them expresses, and which must exist in each adult *before* participation in them can be either warrantable or beneficial. These are the leading topics involved in the discussion of this subject, and this is the way in which they are connected with each other.

There is one remark that may be of some use in explaining the discussions which have taken place upon this point,—namely, that when the subject of the sacraments in general,—that is, of their general nature, design, and efficacy,—is under consideration, it is usually assumed that the persons who partake of them are possessed of the necessary preliminary qualifications; and, more particularly, that when statements are made upon this subject which are applied equally to baptism and the Lord's Supper, or when the general object and design of baptism and the Lord's Supper are set forth in the abstract, it is adult participation only which theologians have ordinarily in view,—the participation of those who, after they have grown up to years of understanding, desire to hold communion with the visible church of Christ. It is in this aspect that baptism, as well as the Lord's Supper, is usually referred to, and presented to us, in the New Testament; and it is from the case of adult participation that we ought to form our general views and impressions of the meaning and design of these ordinances. It tends greatly to introduce obscurity and confusion into our whole conceptions upon the subject of baptism, that we see it ordinarily administered to infants, and very seldom to adults. This leads us insensibly to form very defective and erroneous conceptions of its design and effect, or rather to live

with our minds very much in the state of blanks, so far as concerns any distinct and definite views upon the subject. There is a difficulty felt,—a difficulty which Scripture does not afford us materials for altogether removing,—in laying down any very distinct and definite doctrine as to the precise bearing and efficacy of baptism in the case of infants, to whom alone ordinarily we see it administered. And hence it becomes practically, as well as theoretically, important to remember, that we ought to form our primary and fundamental conceptions of baptism from the baptism of adults, in which it must be, *in every instance*, according to the general doctrine of Protestants, *either* the sign and seal of a faith and regeneration *previously existing*,—already effected by God's grace,—or else a hypocritical profession of a state of mind and feeling which has no existence. This is the original and fundamental idea of the ordinance of baptism, as it is usually represented to us in Scripture. And when we contemplate it in this light, there is no more difficulty in forming a distinct and definite conception regarding it than regarding the Lord's Supper. We have no doubt that the lawfulness of infant baptism can be conclusively established from Scripture; but it is manifest that the general doctrine or theory with respect to the design and effect of baptism, as above stated, must undergo some modification in its application to the case of infants. And the danger to be provided against, is that of taking the baptism of infants, with all the difficulties attaching to giving a precise and definite statement as to its design and effect in their case, and making *this* regulate our whole conceptions with respect to the ordinance in general,—and even with respect to sacraments in general,—instead of regarding adult baptism as affording the proper and fundamental type of it; deriving our general conceptions of it from that case, and then, since infant baptism is also fully warranted by Scripture, examining what modifications the leading general views of the ordinance must undergo when applied to the special and peculiar case of the baptism of infants. The Reformers, when discussing this subject, having adult baptism chiefly in their view, usually speak as if they regarded baptism and regeneration as substantially identical; not intending to assert or concede the Popish principle of an invariable connection between them, as a general thesis,—for it is quite certain, and can be most fully established, that they rejected this,—but because the Council of

Trent, in treating of the general subject of justification, discussed it chiefly in its bearing upon the case of those who had not been baptized in infancy, and with whom, consequently, baptism, if it was not a mere hypocritical profession, destitute of all worth or value, was, in the judgment of Protestants, a sign and seal of a faith and a regeneration previously wrought in them, and now existing; and because it was when viewed in this aspect and application, that the great general doctrine of the design and efficacy of the sacraments, in their bearing upon the justification of sinners, stood out for examination in the clearest and most definite form. Accordingly, all that Calvin says upon the declaration of the Council of Trent, that baptism is the instrumental cause of justification, is this: "It is a great absurdity to make baptism *alone* the instrumental cause. If it be so, what becomes of the gospel? Will it, in turn, get into the lowest corner? But they say baptism is the sacrament of faith. True; but when all is said, I will still maintain that it is nothing but an appendage to the Gospel (*Evangelii appendicem*). They act preposterously in giving it the first place,—that is, in preference to the gospel or the truth; and this is just as if a man should say that the instrumental cause of a house is the handling of the workman's trowel (*trullæ manubrium*). He who, putting the gospel in the background, numbers baptism among the causes of salvation, shows thereby that he does not know what baptism is or means, or what is its functions or use."\*

These considerations are to be applied—and, indeed, must be applied—to the interpretation of the general abstract statements about a sacrament or the sacraments, and more particularly about baptism, which are to be found in the confessions of the Reformed churches. They ought to be kept in view in considering the general declarations of our own Confession and Catechisms. Sacraments are there described † "as holy signs and seals of the covenant of grace, immediately instituted by God, to represent Christ and His benefits, and to confirm our interest in Him; as also to put a visible difference between those that belong unto the church and the rest of the world; and

\* Tractatus, p. 389. Ed. 1576. | of the Reformation," pp. 245, etc.  
See "The Reformers and Theology" (Edrs.)  
† Confession, C. xxvii., s. 1.

solemnly to engage them to the service of God in Christ, according to His word." This statement, of course, applies equally and alike to both sacraments; and it evidently is assumed, that those whose interest in Christ is to be confirmed by the sacraments, are persons who already, before they participate in either sacrament, have an interest in Christ, and are possessed of the necessary qualifications, whatever these may be, for the reception and improvement of the sacraments. This is brought out, if possible, still more clearly in the simple statement of the Shorter Catechism, that "a sacrament is an holy ordinance, instituted by Christ, wherein, by sensible signs, Christ and the benefits of the new covenant are represented, sealed, and applied to believers;" *to believers*,—a statement plainly conveying, and intended to convey, the doctrine that one fundamental general position concerning the sacrament is, that they are intended for believers, and, of course, for believers only, unless some special exceptional case can be made out, as we are persuaded can be done in the case of the infants of believers. In like manner, baptism is described in our Confession \* as "a sacrament of the New Testament, ordained by Jesus Christ, not only for the solemn admission of the party baptized into the visible church, but also to be *unto him* a sign and seal of the covenant of grace, of his engraving into Christ, of regeneration, of remission of sins, and of his giving up unto God, through Jesus Christ, to walk in newness of life." Now here, first, it is to be observed, in general, that this is just an application to the special case of baptism,—its import, object, and design,—of the general definition previously given of the sacraments, and, of course, with the assumption of the possession of the necessary qualifications of the persons baptized; and secondly, and more particularly, that it applies primarily and fully only to the case of adult baptism, where the previous existence of these qualifications may be tested; while it still remains a question, to be determined after the lawfulness of infant baptism has been established, how far this general description of baptism applies fully to infant baptism, or how far some modification of the general doctrine may be necessary in that special case.

It is common to adduce against the Popish and Tractarian view of the design and efficacy of the sacraments,—against the

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\* C. xxviii., s. 1.

alleged invariable connection between them, and the communication and reception of spiritual blessings,—the general character of the Christian dispensation as contrasted with the Jewish, in that, under the gospel, external rites and ceremonies have nothing like prominence assigned to them; and that its whole arrangements are manifestly adapted to the object of addressing directly men's understandings and consciences, and engaging *them* in the worship and service of God,—while very little provision is made for impressing their external senses. I have no doubt that the predominant spiritual character of the Christian dispensation affords a very strong presumption against the Popish system, with its seven sacraments, and its huge and burdensome load of rites and ceremonies, contrasting, as it does, very glaringly with the Christianity of the New Testament. But a general and indefinite consideration of this sort is scarcely of itself sufficient to overturn a distinct and definite position which professed to rest upon scriptural evidence. Men are not able to determine, upon general grounds, with anything like certainty, whether a particular principle or arrangement is, or is not, inconsistent with the spiritual character of the Christian dispensation. The Quakers, or Society of Friends, deduce, as an inference from the spiritual character of Christianity, that no external ordinances were intended to be permanently administered in the Christian church, and allege that the apostles baptized and administered the Lord's Supper for a time merely in accommodation to Jewish weakness and prejudice. Even if a great deal that was plausible could be said in support of the general position, that the permanent observance of any outward ordinances is inconsistent with the spiritual character of the Christian dispensation, it would still be a competent and valid answer to the Quakers, to undertake to prove from Scripture that it was manifestly Christ's intention that the observance of Baptism and the Lord's Supper should continue permanently in His church. And, in like manner, Papists might argue, that, if the permanent observance of these two outward ordinances is not inconsistent with the spiritual character of the Christian dispensation, neither can it be easily proved that such an inconsistency necessarily attaches to any particular view of their office or function, or of the relation subsisting between them and spiritual blessings.

I have made these observations chiefly for the purpose of



teaching the general lesson, that in estimating the truth or falsehood of a doctrine which professes to rest upon scriptural authority, the best and safest course is to examine, first and chiefly, the scriptural statements that bear most directly and immediately upon the point under consideration, instead of resting much upon mere inferences from views or principles of a somewhat general and indefinite description. Now, it cannot be said that we have in Scripture any explicit statements, bearing very directly and immediately upon the precise question of what is the design and effect of the sacraments, and of whether or not there subsists an invariable connection between the observance of them and the reception of spiritual blessings. The Scriptures, indeed, contain nothing bearing very directly upon the topics usually discussed in systems of theology, under the head, *De Sacramentis in genere*. They tell us nothing directly about the general subject of sacraments, as such; but the New Testament sets before us two outward ordinances, and two only,—the observance of which is of permanent obligation in the Christian church, and which both manifestly possess the general character of being means of grace, or of being connected, in some way or other, with the communication and the reception of spiritual blessings. As these ordinances evidently occupy a peculiar place of their own in the general plan of the Christian system, and in the arrangements of the Christian church, it is natural and reasonable to inquire what materials there are in Scripture for adopting any general conclusions as to their nature, design, and efficacy, that may be equally applicable to them both; and what is usually given as the definition or description of a *sacrament*, or of the sacraments, is just an embodiment of what can be collected or deduced from Scripture as being equally predicable of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Under this general head, the question to which we have had occasion to refer may very reasonably be broached,—namely, Does the Scripture represent the observance of these ordinances as *necessary* to the enjoyment of any spiritual blessings? does it contain any materials which establish an invariable connection between the observance of them, and the reception and possession of anything needful for men's salvation? And in considering this question, we must first examine the scriptural materials that seem to bear upon it most directly and immediately.

Now, this brings us back to the consideration of the topics

formerly adverted to, as those on which the settlement of this subject depends. Protestants, as I have said, maintain that it is a scriptural doctrine, that the only thing on which the possession of spiritual blessings absolutely and invariably depends, is union to Christ; and that the only thing on which union to Christ depends, is faith in Him. As soon as, and in every instance in which, men are united to Christ by faith, they receive justification and regeneration; while without, or apart from, personal union to Christ by faith, these blessings are never conferred or received. Every one who is justified and regenerated, is certainly admitted into heaven whether he be baptized or not, and whether he have performed any actual good works or not, as was undoubtedly exhibited in the case of the thief whom the Redeemer saved upon the cross. In saying that the possessing of spiritual blessings, and the attaining to the everlasting enjoyment of God, depend absolutely and universally upon union to Christ through faith, and upon nothing else, we do not of course mean to deny the importance and obligation either of sacraments or of good works in their proper order and connection, and upon legitimate scriptural grounds. It is undoubtedly *the imperative duty* of every one not only to repent, but to bring forth fruits meet for repentance,—to obey the whole law of God; and when these fruits,—this obedience,—are not manifested whenever an opportunity is afforded in providence of manifesting them, this of itself is a universally conclusive proof that the blessings of justification and regeneration have not been bestowed, and that, of course, men are still in their sins, subject to God's wrath and curse. In like manner, the sacraments are of imperative obligation; it is a duty incumbent upon men to observe them, when the means and opportunity of doing so are afforded them, so that it is sinful to neglect or disregard them. But there is nothing in all this in the least inconsistent with the position, that union to Christ by faith infallibly and in every instance secures men's eternal welfare, by conveying or imparting justification and regeneration, even though they may not have been baptized, or have performed any good works.

The Council of Trent\* insinuated that the Reformers taught that the sacraments "*non esse ad salutem necessaria, sed superflua.*" The Reformers never denied that the sacraments were necessary

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\* Session vii., Can. iv.

in the sense that has now been explained,—that is, that they were matters of imperative obligation,—and they never alleged that they were superfluous. Calvin's remark upon the canon which we have just quoted is this, "Facile patiar, ut quæ nobis Christus dedit salutis adjuncta, eorum usus necessarius dicatur: quando scilicet datur facultas. Quanquam semper admonendi sunt fideles, non aliam esse cujusvis sacramenti necessitatem, quàm instrumentalis causæ, cui nequaquam alliganda est Dei virtus. Vocem sanè illam nemo pius est qui non toto pectore exhorreat, res esse superfluas."\* Upon the subject of the necessity of the sacraments, Protestant divines have been accustomed to employ this distinction, and it brings out their meaning very clearly,—viz., that they are necessary, *ex necessitate præcepti, non ex necessitate medii*: necessary, *ex necessitate præcepti*, because the observance of them is commanded or enjoined, and must therefore be practised by all who have in providence an opportunity of doing so, so that the voluntary neglect or disregard of them is sinful; but not necessary *ex necessitate medii*, or in such a sense that the mere fact of men not having actually observed them either produces or proves the non-possession of spiritual blessings,—either excludes men from heaven, or affords any evidence that they will not, in point of fact, be admitted there. Regeneration or conversion is necessary both *ex necessitate præcepti* and *ex necessitate medii*; it is necessary not merely because it is commanded or enjoined, so that the neglect of it is sinful, but because the result cannot, from the nature of the case, be attained without it,—because it holds true absolutely and universally, in point of fact, and in the case of each individual of our race, that "except we be born again, we cannot enter the kingdom of heaven."†

Now, the question comes virtually to this, Can a similar necessity be established in regard to the sacraments? And here comes in the argument upon which Papists and Tractarians rest their case. They scarcely allege that there is any evidence in Scripture bearing upon the necessity (*ex necessitate medii*) of the sacraments generally, or of the two sacraments the observance of which Protestants admit to be obligatory, singly and separately. But they assert that, in regard to one of them,—viz., Baptism,—they can

\* Antidot., sess. vii., in Canon iv.

† The Reformers and Theology of the Reformation, p. 235. (Edrs.)

prove from Scripture that it is invariably connected with justification and regeneration, so that those who are not baptized do not receive or possess these blessings, and that those who are baptized do, universally in the case of infants, and in the case of adults whenever men are suitably disposed and prepared to receive them,—the preparation required not being very formidable. Now, this is a perfectly fair argument; and though there is a very large amount of presumption or probability from Scripture against its truth, both in general considerations and in specific statements, there is perhaps nothing which can at once and *a priori* disprove its truth, or deprive it of a right to be examined upon its own proper professed grounds. The establishment of the position, however, it should be observed, would not prove anything in regard to the sacraments in general, or entitle us to put a statement, asserting the invariable connection between the sacraments and grace or spiritual blessings, into the general definition or description of a sacrament. It would establish nothing about what is called the sacramental principle. In order to effect this, the same general position must be established *separately and independently* about the Lord's Supper, and about any other ordinance for which the character and designation of a sacrament are claimed; for the sacramental principle, rightly understood, whatever may be the definition or description given of it, is just that, and neither more nor less, which *can be proved from Scripture* to attach to, and to be predicable of, each and all of the ordinances to which the name sacrament may be applied. But though the general doctrine of Papists and Tractarians about the design and effect of the sacraments could not be proved merely by this process, still it would be a great matter for them if they could establish from Scripture the more limited position, that Baptism is the instrumental cause of justification; and that, according to God's arrangements, there subsists an invariable connection between the outward ordinance of baptism, and the communication and reception of forgiveness and renovation; and it may therefore be proper to make a few remarks upon the evidence they adduce to this effect.

#### Sec. II.—Baptismal Regeneration.

We have seen that Papists and Tractarians assert an invariable connection between the observance of the sacraments and the pos-

session of spiritual blessings, and even ascribe to the sacraments an important amount of actual influence upon the production of the result; maintaining that they confer grace *ex opere operato*, by an intrinsic power or virtue which God has bestowed upon them, and which operates invariably when men do not put a bar in the way of their operation,—that is, as it is usually explained by Romish writers, when men are free at the time of their participation in the sacrament of a *present intention* of committing sin. The Tractarians, indeed, have not formally committed themselves to the language of the Council of Trent upon the subject of the *opus operatum*; but they teach the whole substance of what is intended by it, and, generally, inculcate as high views of the efficacy of the sacraments as the Church of Rome has ever propounded,—as is evident from the extracts already quoted from Mr Newman, in which he, while still a minister of the Church of England, explicitly ascribed the whole efficacy of faith in justification to baptism, and declared that “baptism makes faith justifying.”

Protestants in general, on the contrary, regard the sacraments as signs and seals of the covenant of grace, signifying and representing in themselves, as symbols appointed by God, Christ and His benefits, and the scriptural truths which set them forth, and expressing, in the participation of them by individuals, their *previous* reception of Christ and His benefits by faith,—operating beneficially only in those in whom faith already exists, and producing the beneficial effect of confirming and sealing the truths and blessings of the gospel to the individual only through the medium of the faith which participation in them expresses. There is nothing like evidence in Scripture in favour of the general doctrine of an invariable connection between participation of the sacraments and the reception of spiritual blessings; and, indeed, as I have explained, there is nothing said in Scripture directly about sacraments in general, or about a sacrament as such. The only plausible evidence which Papists and Tractarians have to produce upon this point, is to be found in those passages which seem to establish an invariable connection between baptism on the one hand, and regeneration and salvation on the other. I cannot enter upon a detailed examination of these passages; but a few general observations will be sufficient to indicate the leading grounds on which Protestants have maintained that they do not warrant the conclusions which Romanists and Tractarians have

deduced from them; and that, on the contrary, to adopt the language of our Confession,\* “grace and salvation are not so inseparably annexed unto” baptism, “as that no person can be regenerated or saved without it, or that all that are baptized are undoubtedly regenerated.”

We remark, first, that, in opposition to the Popish and Tractarian view of an invariable connection between baptism and regeneration, and in support of the doctrine just quoted from our Confession of Faith, there is a large amount of scriptural evidence, both in general principles and in specific statements, which, though it may not amount to strict and conclusive proof, so as to entitle us to reject as incompetent any attempt to rebut the conclusion to which it points by an offer of direct scriptural evidence on the other side, is yet quite sufficient to require us to maintain this conclusion as a part of God’s revealed truth, *unless* it be disproved by very clear, direct, and cogent scriptural proofs, and to authorize us to direct our attention, in considering the proofs that may be adduced upon the other side, to this special point,—viz., to show that they do not *necessarily require* the construction put upon them, and to reckon it quite sufficient for the establishment of our doctrine when we can show this.†

We remark, in the second place, that the sacraments have manifestly, and by universal admission, a symbolical character,—that they are signs or representations of something signified or represented. And if this be so, then there is an obvious foundation laid, in accordance with the practice of all languages and the usage of the sacred writers, for a sort of interchange between the terms properly applicable to the sign, and those properly applicable to the thing signified,—for a certain promiscuous use of the expressions applicable to these two things. Our Confession of Faith ‡ lays down this position: “There is in every sacrament a spiritual relation, or sacramental union, between the sign and the thing signified; whence it comes to pass, that the names and effects of the one are attributed to the other;”—and as this general position can be established, partly *a priori* from general views about the nature and objects of the sacraments which are admitted by all

\* C. xxviii., s. v.

† I cannot enter upon the proof of this important general position. There is a masterly summary of it in Turre-

tine, Loc. xix., Qu. viii. De efficacia Sacramentorum.

‡ C. xxvii., s. ii.

parties, and partly by general considerations of a philological kind, which cannot reasonably be disputed, we are entitled to apply it to the interpretation of the scriptural passages in which baptism may be spoken of, or referred to; as if it were virtually identical with the faith or regeneration which it signifies or represents.

We remark, in the third place, that participation in the ordinance of baptism is an imperative duty incumbent upon all who are enabled to believe in Christ and to turn to God through Him, which it is assumed that they will at once proceed, if they have an opportunity in providence, to discharge, not merely as a duty required by God's authority, but also as a suitable expression and appropriate evidence of the change that has been wrought in their views and principles; and, moreover, that the New Testament, in its general references to this subject, having respect principally and primarily, as I have explained, to the case of adult baptism, usually assumes that the profession made in baptism corresponds with the reality of the case,—that is, with the previous existence of faith and union to Christ, and deals with it upon this assumption. All these general considerations, when brought to bear upon the interpretation of the passages usually produced by Papists and Tractarians in support of their doctrine upon this subject, afford abundant materials for enabling us to prove that these passages do not *require*, and therefore upon principles already explained, do not *admit*, of a construction which would make them sanction the notion that there is an invariable connection between baptism and regeneration, or even—what, however, is only a part of the general doctrine of an invariable connection—that none are regenerated or saved without baptism.

Some of the passages commonly adduced in support of the Popish and Tractarian doctrine upon this subject, contain, *in gremio*, statements which not only disprove their interpretation of the particular passage, but afford a key to the explanation of other passages of a similar kind. It is said, for instance,\*—"the like figure whereunto, even baptism, doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God)." Now here, indeed, as in one or two other passages, baptism is said to save us; but then a formal ex-

\* 1 Pet. iii. 21.

planation is given of what this statement means; and it just amounts in substance to this, that it is not the outward ordinance of baptism, or anything which an outward ordinance is either fitted or intended to effect, to which this result is to be ascribed, but the reality of that of which baptism is the figure,—the sincerity of the profession which men make when they ask and receive the ordinance of baptism for themselves.

The only passage of those usually quoted by Papists and Tractarians in support of their doctrine of baptismal regeneration, which seems to bear with anything like explicitness upon the conclusion they are anxious to establish, is the declaration of our Saviour,\* "Except a man be born again of *water* and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." Protestants have usually contended that our Lord did not here speak of baptism at all, any more than He spoke of the Lord's Supper in the discourse recorded in the sixth chapter of the same Gospel; and they have no great difficulty in proving *this* much at least, which is all that the condition of the argument requires of them,—namely, *that it cannot be proved* that the water of which our Lord here speaks was intended by Him to describe the outward ordinance of baptism.

There is one of the passages commonly adduced by Papists and Tractarians, which, while it gives no real countenance to their doctrine, affords a very clear indication of the true state of the case in regard to this matter, and of what it is that Scripture really meant to convey to us concerning it. It is the record of the commission given by our Lord to His apostles after His resurrection, as contained in the sixteenth verse of the sixteenth chapter of Mark's Gospel, where we find that, after directing them to go into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature, our Saviour added, "He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved;" (here Papists and Tractarians commonly stop in quoting the passage, but our Lord goes on), "he that believeth not, shall be damned." None can fail to be struck with the very remarkable contrast between the two different portions of this declaration,—the manifestly intentional, and very pointed, omission of any reference to baptism in the second part of it. Had the first part of it stood alone, it might have seemed to countenance the idea

\* John iii. 5.