

THE PRESBYTERIAN AND REFORMED REVIEW

No. 2—April, 1890.

I.

THE RELATION OF CHRISTIAN ART TO THEOLOGY.

I.

THERE is a reasonable excuse for the many who see no connection between the development of art and that of theological ideas in the history of Christianity, and fail to perceive that art and literature were twin sisters in the service of religion, inspired by the same thoughts, but appealing, the one to the sentiment, the other to the intellect. For this connection was severed long since—fully four centuries ago—never to be fully renewed, and its existence can now be conceived only by an effort of the imagination conjuring up the ghost of departed realities that appeal no more to the common consciousness of the nineteenth century. In art, far more than in literature, the scene shifts as rapidly as the colors of a sunset: words retain their meaning, but a work of art has a different one for every generation. It is strangely difficult for us to grasp the meaning of the fact that through the general illiteracy of the people, works of religious art were the direct means of instruction in religious belief for nine-tenths of the body of Christians up to the time of the Reformation. And yet, what use has been made of this fact? In what history is the aid of the monuments called in systematically? In what work on the development of Christian theology is a place given to the paintings and sculptures which, through a period of over a thousand years, show more strikingly than words the beliefs of the people and their teachers, with all their slight, temporal and local variations? As a modern writer well says: “The faintest shadows that darkened, or the lightest breath that disturbed the

and proceeds by the same methods, in the United States as in Canada, and we therefore count, in fighting this battle, upon the sympathy and moral support of our brethren south of the lakes.

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TORONTO.

THE SALVATION OF INFANTS—THEOLOGIC IMPLICATIONS OF THE DOCTRINE.

WHEN Dr. Hodge declared ("Syst. Theol.," iii, 605), that he had never seen a Calvinistic theologian who held the doctrine that only a portion of those who die in infancy are saved, it is reasonable to presume that he was contemplating only the divines of his own time and country. To this declaration Dr. Krauth, of the Evangelical Lutheran Seminary, responded in an extended essay,* containing quotations from, or reference to, several scores of theologians, extending from the age of Calvin down nearly to the close of the eighteenth century, by whom the dogma of infant damnation had been more or less positively held and taught. This essay makes it quite apparent that what Dr. Hodge elsewhere ("Syst. Theol.," i, 26) declared in 1872 to be the common doctrine of evangelical Protestants would have been pronounced a heresy, or at least a doubtful hypothesis, by the voice and vote of a large majority of European divines in any generation prior to his own.

A similar experience once befell Dr. Lyman Beecher. In a note to his famous sermon, "The Government of God Desirable," he stated that, having been conversant for thirty years with the most approved Calvinistic writers, and personally acquainted with many of the most distinguished Calvinistic divines in this country, he had never seen or heard of any book which contained the doctrine of infant damnation, or seen any man, minister or layman, who believed or taught it. In reply to this sweeping affirmation, the *Christian Examiner* (Unitarian, 1827-8) produced a list of theologians less extensive than that of Dr. Krauth, but including some New England divines, such as Edwards and Bellamy, by whom, not only the depravity of infants in consequence of their relation to the Adamic transgression, but also their culpability and condemnation to eternal death on account of that transgression, had been more or less openly maintained. Dr. Beecher subsequently justified himself ("*Spirit of the Pilgrims*," 1828) partly by saying that he was referring in his note to living rather than dead Calvinists, and partly by showing either that the theologians quoted had been misconstrued by the *Examiner*, or that their teachings had been very largely offset by the testimony of other Calvinistic divines, of equal authority, who held that all infants dying in infancy, though depraved in nature, are saved through Christ.

* "Infant Baptism and Infant Salvation in the Calvinistic System." Pp. 88, 8vo, 1874.

It is doubtful whether any two men, at least in this country, did so much to bring about the very remarkable change of belief which these incidents call to mind, as Charles Hodge and Lyman Beecher. The earlier developments of this theologic transformation are visible even in the last century, as a few illustrations will show. As early as 1731, Ridgley, in his "Body of Divinity" (Ans. 27), affirmed, as an admissible hypothesis merely, that infants born of other than believing parents may share in the election of grace, and that God may have merciful purposes towards them which are not revealed to us; at least he is assured that they are not punished as other sinners are. Watts, in his treatise on the "Ruin and Recovery of Mankind" (1740), after admitting the condemnation of infants on account of their share in the first transgression, sought escape from the current belief as to their eternal punishment in the dark alternative of annihilation. Toplady († 1778), although a more decided Calvinist than Watts or Ridgley, held positively that all deceased infants, whether baptized or unbaptized, though they be under condemnation in this life, are delivered at death, and are with God in glory. Other British divines, in the latter part of the century (for example, Hill, "Lectures in Divinity"), took the more cautious position that, while the problem is a mystery unsolved by Scripture, one may hope that the mercy of God will find some way of disposing tenderly of all such infants in the world to come.

In this country, as early as 1741, Jonathan Dickinson, afterwards President of Princeton College, in his discourses on the "Five Points of Calvinism" (Presbyterian Board, p. 127), took the ground that, while the Bible does not teach us openly that all deceased infants are saved, neither does Scripture or the nature of things teach us that any of this class are lost. This was undoubtedly a very marked advance beyond the current Calvinistic belief, here as well as abroad, in that generation. Nine years later, the eminent Bellamy, the theological teacher of Jonathan Edwards, in his "True Religion Delineated," and afterwards in his essay on the "Nature and Glory of the Gospel," so defined the doctrine of infant culpability on account of original sin as to leave little ground of hope for the redemption at death of any except the offspring of believers. Hopkins, on the other hand, is said ("Works," i, 103) to have declared repeatedly, a generation later, that there is not an infant in hell—a fact which may explain the admonition of the General Assembly of 1798, addressed to Balch, a disciple of Hopkins, against making "positive declarations in regard to the state of infants, when it has pleased a wise and holy God to be silent on this subject in the revelation of His Will."*

* Those who are interested in the development of modern belief on this subject, in other denominational connections, may consult with profit *Krauth (Lutheran)*, "Conservative Reformation," p. 431; *Watson (Methodist)*, "Institutes," Vol. ii, pp. 54, 344; *Strong (Baptist)*, "Systematic Theology," p. 355. Also, numerous review articles, representing various phases of belief. Cf. *Poole*, Index.

As has been intimated, it is especially to Lyman Beecher, and to his spirited discussion with the *Christian Examiner*, as early as 1823, that we largely owe the remarkable transition in this country from the seventeenth-century declaration of Twisse, that many infants depart this life in original sin, and consequently are condemned to eternal death on account of original sin alone (*Vindicatio Gratiæ, Potestatis et Providentiæ Dei*), to the nineteenth-century declaration of Hodge ("Syst. Theol.," ii, 211), that no human being ever actually perishes who does not personally incur the penalty of the law by his actual transgression. The process might almost be said to have originated even with Calvin himself, in his denial of a necessary connection, as asserted by Romanists, and practically held by Lutherans of that period, between baptism and infant salvation. From this point of departure, it gradually went on by successive stages of questioning and modification; all children of believers, unbaptized as well as baptized, being first included within the election of grace; afterwards the children of unbaptized and unbelieving parents, and at length all children born in Christian lands being in like manner gradually included; until finally all who die in infancy throughout the world, in Christian or in pagan countries, are regarded as elect and as saved through the mediation of Christ, and by the agency of the Spirit who worketh when and where and how He pleaseth. A proposition, which at first embraced only a relatively small number, has thus by successive steps been expanded until now it includes in its scope at least half of all who are born into the world. It is also noticeable that the dogma is first advanced as an opinion in consonance with Scriptures, or, at least, not forbidden by it; then it is openly affirmed as a doctrine more or less distinctly taught in the Word of God; and finally, as recent discussions show, it is emphasized as a cardinal truth which should be wrought into the creeds of the Church, and made obligatory upon all believers as an article of the faith.

It is not the purpose of this paper to discuss on either side the doctrine whose evolution constitutes so striking a feature in the history of Christian and especially of Calvinistic theology since the Reformation. What the writer seeks is simply to indicate some of the important theologic implications and consequences which are involved in the transition of belief thus briefly described:

1. It is obvious at the outset that this new doctrine brings up in an interesting form the general question respecting the proper grounds of Christian belief, and the proper basis of church authority in the matter of creed statements. Three propositions pertinent to this question are laid down in our Confession: *First*, that the whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary to faith and life or to human salvation is either expressly set down in Scripture, or may by good and necessary consequence be deduced from Scripture. *Second*, that those things which are necessary to be proved and believed in

order to salvation are so clearly propounded and opened in some place or other, that not only the learned, but the unlearned may sufficiently understand them. *Third*, that nothing is to be added to the teachings of Scripture at any time by the traditions of men, or the voice of the Church, or even through new revelations from the Holy Spirit. These three propositions leave room for the freest research into the meaning of the Bible, and for every change in belief, however radical, which such research may justify. They permit all sound deduction, by good and necessary consequence or inference, from what is expressly set down in the Divine Word, though they clearly imply that what is directly or openly revealed must ever constitute the main matter of Christian faith. They guard us carefully both against the Romish dogma of a doctrinal development, over and beyond Scripture, through the expanding consciousness of the Church, and the opposite error of an inward illumination of the Spirit by which the Christian mind is taught of God to know and believe more than the Bible reveals. They by no means justify the current forms of appeal to the religious consciousness as if that were an ultimate test of belief, but rather would bring all sentiments, opinions, creeds, commandments of men directly to the one supreme and absolute test, the inspired Word.

That such is the fundamental teaching of the Confession will not be questioned. But are we not bound to observe these general principles faithfully, in their application to the present doctrine that all infants dying in infancy enjoy the benefits of instant and complete salvation? After a full survey of all the particular texts adduced to sustain this doctrine, can we positively affirm that it is expressly laid down in Scripture, and in such forms and such fullness that even the unlearned may attain to such an understanding of it as shall justify devout credence? If not thus expressly revealed, is the doctrine so clearly and necessarily deduced from the more general instructions of the Word of God, that we are warranted not merely in accepting it, but also in incorporating it among the important articles in our ecclesiastical belief? And if the deduction is found to be a good and necessary one, are we not bound as Protestants and Presbyterians to make very manifest to ourselves and to all men those teachings of Scripture, generic and particular, from which we derive this stupendous inference, and by which we are justified in setting forth as an essential doctrine something which neither Calvin himself nor any of his disciples for two centuries, with a possible exception here or there, ever maintained? And, further, are we entirely assured that in setting forth this most comforting article of belief, we are not either yielding ourselves unawares to the Roman Catholic heresy of a development of doctrine through the Church and outside of Scripture, or admitting the still more dangerous notion of a religious consciousness personal or general as a legitimate and sufficient basis of faith? These are inquiries which it is incumbent upon us as intelligent Protestants and Presbyterians to make, and which just at this juncture we must

not allow ourselves to shirk or evade. They are urged here, not in any spirit of unfriendliness to the doctrine in question, but under a profound conviction that no greater damage can be done to the doctrine or to Protestant Christianity, than to affirm and hold it as an article of belief on grounds which are either insufficient in themselves, or which involve a departure from some fundamental principles of the common Protestantism.

2. It is obvious, further, that this new doctrine, when carried to its legitimate results, must work some important changes in our Calvinistic conception of Christian theology, and this in two general directions. On one side, it will unquestionably press out into prominence, or develop by expansion, some elements of doctrine which have hitherto been kept relatively very much in the background. For example, while it does not indeed invalidate the fundamental dogma of Calvin as to the absolute sovereignty of God and as to His system of administration over men on principles partly of grace and partly of justice strict and terrible, it is evidently bringing in, as a positive antithesis to such sovereignty, a new conception of the Divine Fatherhood, more comprehensive and more effective in its tenderuess than the divines of the seventeenth century ever admitted—a fatherliness which especially illustrates its breadth and quality by providing salvation for that innumerable throng of infants whom God translates in their infancy from the vicissitudes of time to the blessedness of a holy world. In other words, it is giving and will give us a greatly expanded view of what the grace of God is, as working on a far wider scale and accomplishing much larger results for our humanity than the older Calvinists ever imagined. Again, in its peculiar light, the mediation of Christ becomes something much broader and more significant when it is seen to include from the outset nearly one-half of the race, and to be making full and perfect provision for their salvation; since this mediation also goes back to the beginning of time, and with a retroactive efficiency saves not only the devout Hebrew and the Jewish patriarch, but also every infant that has died in whatever land from the earliest ages until now. Indeed, does not the mediatorial work of Christ for adult humanity seem small when compared with what on this hypothesis He is doing, and has been doing from the first origin of the race for children? It would almost appear as if His main business as Redeemer had been and still is to save these myriads of little ones whom the earlier Calvinism largely ignored, but whom the Church is now so confidently committing to His celestial care.

Again, while our Confession teaches that the Holy Spirit worketh when, and where, and how He pleaseth, that work of grace becomes incomparably more vast and more significant in our view, if, indeed, the Spirit has thus been engaged, not from the day of Pentecost onward, but from the beginning of time, in the task of cleansing untold myriads of dying children from every taint of sin, and preparing them to enter at once on the life of heaven. Where now He is effectually

calling and slowly sanctifying one adult believer, He is on this hypothesis regenerating and purifying as in a moment a hundred or a thousand infants on their swift passage from time into eternity. This has been, still is, in some sense must ever be, His main work as the Sanctifier. His processes of grace as seen in adult experience, His wonderful operations in believers and in the Church, become on this basis relatively secondary. And in this light the transition of these youthful myriads, through His purifying hands, into the intermediate state becomes an event of transcendent interest, and heaven itself, as the home into which these myriads are thus graciously ushered, becomes a much more wonderful place than our older Calvinism ever regarded it—a blessed universe of purified childhood.

These are among the more obvious illustrations of the fact that on the side of expansion, the doctrine in question must sooner or later bring in what might almost be described as a structural change in Calvinistic belief. Is it not obvious that this doctrine cannot be intelligently held and promulgated, except at the cost of such modification and enlargement? Must not elements inevitably be brought into the foreground through its influence, which have hitherto been either unknown or relegated to the obscurer background of our faith? While our doctrinal system will not, cannot, be subverted through these changes, still, as a theological structure, will it not, must it not, in the course of time, become at their touch in form and coloring a considerably different edifice?

3. What is true on the side of expansion, is likely also to occur on the side of repression, even to the extent of excluding some tenets heretofore accepted as conspicuous elements in our Calvinistic system. For example, is there not reason to anticipate that the doctrine of original sin, of innate depravity, must come to occupy a less conspicuous place in the system, if we repudiate the dogma of Twisse, and accept the teaching of the venerated Hodge, that, however serious a thing such sin may become as the source of adult transgression in this life, it is rather a dark calamity than a fault in the infant, and one which through the grace of God in Christ never involves the dying child in condemnation in the life to come? Again, must not the decree of predestination distinctly change its aspect, and in the form of an eternal reprobation become a dogma of doubtful value, if it be admitted that there are no reprobate infants, and that the innumerable multitudes who die in childhood are from all eternity foreordained unto everlasting life? In like manner, will not the headship of Adam, whether natural or federal, change somewhat its import and force, if it be held that the guilt of his offense is not in the full sense imputed to the multitude of dying infants who have never sinned after the similitude of his transgression, and that every taint of the evil brought in through him is washed away at death, and the child is rather accepted than pardoned, rather adopted immediately into the Divine family than formally justified, as the adult transgressor must be? Is

it not clear also that the doctrine of particular election can hardly fail to be affected by the proposition that God deals with dying infants as a class, and as a class elects them to salvation—a proposition which Watson pronounces “a mere hypothesis, brought in to serve a theory without any evidence,” and which Krauth characterizes as a “presumption in charity?” If we are to hold that every child that dies is an elect child, and that early death is an infallible evidence of election, and that God is thus conferring His grace generically, comprehensively, on so large a proportion of our race, will it not inevitably become incumbent upon us as intelligent Calvinists to alter our phraseology, if not our opinion, in respect to the whole doctrine of individual election as now embodied in the Calvinistic scheme?

A like change may be anticipated in regard also to the conditions of salvation. In the case of adults, repentance and faith, as personal and voluntary experiences, are indispensable to the application of the salvation which Christ has provided. But dying infants are saved without repentance, in the ordinary sense of that term: they are saved without faith, in the sense in which faith is experienced by the adult disciple on earth. In general, the manner of their salvation differs distinctly from that through which we enter into the kingdom of grace; shorter and sweeter methods are substituted in their case. As the writer has had occasion to say elsewhere: “By a process deeper than conscious volition, and antecedent to all moral choices, their spiritual state is from the moment of death divinely determined, so that they are truly saved before responsible action commences, and their new life is, from the first, not one of testing with possible fall or failure, but one of holiness instant and above all change” (“Salvation after Death,” pp. 196, 197). A different conception of the conditions and methods of salvation, and also of the covenants and sacraments in their relations to salvation, seems to become imperative upon us, if we are to incorporate this doctrine formally into our theology and our symbols.

Many other illustrations of change by repression as well as expansion will at once occur to the thoughtful reader.* What has been said is sufficient to make manifest the important fact that in this direction as in the opposite we may expect extensive and serious consequences to follow in our current theology from this new article of belief. At what rate these consequences may reveal themselves, or how far they may ultimately reach, no living man can foretell. It is not likely that the doctrine will ever be cast aside, and the old phrase, elect infants, reinstated, since at this point Calvinism has now become one with Lutheranism and Arminianism, in the belief that there are no infants dying in infancy whom God regards as reprobate. Whether the new dogma shall find a secure place in our Confession is a question on which the fact that it has a place in no other historic creed of Chris-

* See *Presbyterian Review*, July, 1883. Article on “Infant Salvation and its Theological Bearings.” By Prof. George L. Prentiss, D.D.

tendom sheds an important light, and on which the comparative silence of Scripture sheds a light still more important. It may also be that a discovery of the theological implications involved in the doctrine, and of the difficulties developing themselves in the effort to make a proportionate and harmonious place for it in our theological system, will lead to some reactionary sentiment towards the doctrine itself. It may also become apparent that there are theological exposures involved in the sweeping or careless statement of the doctrine—for example, in the relations of the work of Christ and of the Spirit to the heathen world—against which it will be necessary to erect new and strong safeguards, even in our creed. These possible results are known only to Him whose blessed office it is to guide the Church into all truth, and who assuredly will not suffer the chosen people of God to fall into dangerous error on a matter of such unspeakable magnitude. Meanwhile the manifest duty of the hour is to study the Divine Word more faithfully at this point as at every other; to help one another by temperate and loving discussion; to construct and organize our theological opinions by more vital processes and with a view to more practical effectiveness; and finally to make confessional changes carefully and slowly.

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CINCINNATI.

SOME OBSERVATIONS ON REVISION.

THE overtures proposed by the General Assembly, May, 1889, implied the right to revise our Confession of Faith. This right has been repeatedly exercised since the Westminster Assembly, in 1643-8, formulated our Presbyterian Standards—exercised on the various occasions to the extent desired by the Presbyterian Church. Revision of our Standards is, therefore, no new thing. The right is indeed generally conceded by all parties, while the broad and broadening discussion since last May has proceeded on the very principle of this concession. The Westminster Confession, however venerable, is a human production. Yet, strangely enough, some extremists have assumed that it is too venerable to be modified or revised—indeed, that to revise the Confession is to modify and revise the Bible itself. This is the *proteron pseudos* in the one direction. Other extremists as readily assume that because the Westminster Confession is venerable it ought to be modified—ought to be superseded. This is the *proteron pseudos* in the other direction. The reasonable, valid and safe ground lies between these two extremes. To this ground we think the Church is steadily and surely advancing, by maturer consideration and sober discussion and Scriptural study.

In seeking and finding this common ground, neither party is compromising the truth. But each is seeking, rather, in the spirit of enlightened and tolerant honesty to find and defend the truth, to fortify