

## CHAPTER XVII

ARTICLE XVI.—*Of the Sacraments.*—We acknowledge two sacraments. Baptism and the Lord's Supper, which were instituted by Christ, to be of perpetual obligation as signs and seals of the covenant ratified in His precious blood, as means of grace, by which, working in us, He doth not only quicken, but also strengthen and comfort our faith in Him, and as ordinances through the observance of which His Church is to confess her Lord and be visibly distinguished from the rest of the world.

(1) Baptism with water into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit is the sacrament by which are signified and sealed our union to Christ and participation in the blessings of the new covenant. The proper subjects of baptism are believers, and infants presented by their parents or guardians in the Christian faith. In the latter case the parents or guardians should train up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, and should expect that their children will, by the operation of the Holy Spirit, receive the benefits which the sacrament is designed and fitted to convey. The Church is under the most solemn obligation to provide for their Christian instruction.

(2) The Lord's Supper is the sacrament of communion with Christ and with His people, in which bread and wine are given and received in thankful remembrance of Him and His sacrifice on the cross; and they who in faith receive the same do, after a spiritual manner, partake of the body and blood of the Lord Jesus Christ to their comfort, nourishment and growth in grace. All may be admitted to the Lord's Supper who make a credible profession of their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and of obedience to His law.

In an introductory sentence, this article deals with the considerations which apply to both sacraments. (a) Their number. The Roman Catholic system reckons seven sacraments, corresponding to the stages at which from birth to death, a human being

requires grace to be "infused" into him, through certain rites, celebrated by a mediating priesthood. The Reformers reading the New Testament, and taking it as their only authority, rejected the whole sacerdotal system; and reckoned only two ordinances as of Sacramental importance, one connected with entrance into the Christian fellowship, and the other with the maintenance of life within it. (b) Their institution. The Reformers set aside tradition, and went to the fountain head, the authority of Christ the Head of the Church, and found there, warranted by His Word, the ordinances of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, in a class apart, no other rite or ceremony having the same warrant, or the same sacramental rank. (c) Their meaning and value. Both sacraments are related to the saving work of Christ, and to the Covenant, or relation between God and His people, made in the pouring out of His love and life upon the Cross, so that the redeemed see the cost and the security of their salvation, not in anything they can offer, but in "the precious blood of Christ as of a lamb without blemish and without spot." Of the great salvation accomplished by the work of Christ, the sum and substance is Himself, the living Saviour and Lord, who communicates to us the benefits of His Cross and Passion by the dealing of His Spirit. The sacraments, accordingly, are to be interpreted by reference to the Covenant, or the Salvation, or more simply Christ Himself and His benefits, the "all things" which are ours in Him.



I. They are signs, or pictorial presentations, or typical illustrations, of the very simplest kind, designed to bring to mind the reality and the preciousness of what Christ has wrought for us.

II. They are seals, appended to the Word of God, the Word of promise, attesting it, as His solemn pledge, that He will be to His believing people all that is contained in the Gospel of His grace.

III. They are appointed means, whereby His grace is, on the one hand, communicated to us in all its saving power, and, on the other, is apprehended and appropriated by humble and adoring faith. It might be put more simply still. In the Sacrament, Christ comes definitely and really for the reception of the believing heart, and the believer does definitely and really hold communion with the living Lord, and does really and truly and fully receive Him to "dwell in His heart by faith." The doctrine of transubstantiation is sometimes described as "high." The Protestant claim is that the truly "high" doctrine is that of the Reformers, namely, that in the Sacraments, Christ is Himself present in the completeness of His Person and the fulness of His work, and may be received by faith, so that between the believer and Him a union is renewed, than which none closer can be conceived. It is He, in the ordinance, who carries out His loving design in its institution, quickening, strengthening and comforting us, as we have faith in Him.

IV. Testimonies to a non-Christian world, that the Church stands true to her Head, and publicly separates herself from all that dishonors Him, and solemnly commits herself afresh to a life of loyalty. In this aspect, a Sacrament is indeed, a *Sacramentum*, a soldier's oath of fealty to his sovereign and his flag. Two paragraphs follow dealing with each sacrament respectively.

(1) Baptism. (a) Its meaning. It is the rite, in which is set forth, the believer's entrance into the new life, and the beginning of his participation in those benefits which are his by purchase and by promise. (b) Its subjects. It would be absurd and even blasphemous to confer this privilege upon any who, being capable of it, had declined to make profession of their faith in Christ, and to dedicate themselves to Him in a life-long obedience. (In foreign mission work, baptism is sometimes conferred upon non-Christians, who come, in a "mass movement," desiring to enter the Church. Missionaries must be the judges of the sincerity of applicants, whose ignorance and immaturity are necessarily very great.) The Reformers had before them the practice of infant baptism. The theory that lay behind this practice, they could not accept, namely, that baptism is essential to salvation, and that children dying unbaptized, are in Hell, not, indeed, in the place of woe, but in that part of the nether regions known as "limbo." Yet they deliberately continued the practice. They did so, because they were not individualists in their



doctrine of the Church. They held that the Church was not an aggregate of loosely-related individuals. They held the family in high regard, as a holy institution of Divine appointment. The unit from which the Church originates, under normal conditions, and from which in all generations it derives its strength, is the Christian home, the family circle where Jesus is known and loved, and children are brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Following the Reformers, The United Church continues the practice, and bases it on the same principle.

By so doing, the Church is bound to seek by all possible means, the following conditions, apart from which the baptism of young children is a meaningless ceremony. *First*, the parents or guardians must themselves be professors of the Christian faith, and members of the Christian fellowship. Only so, can their presentation of their children for baptism be anything else than a fragment of pre-reformation superstition. *Second*, the family must be so ordered that the children shall grow up to trust and love the Saviour. Then, by the operation of the Spirit, they will consciously accept the Baptismal pledge, and enter on possession of the Baptismal blessing, a sign and seal and application of the benefits of Christ. *Third*, Christian instruction must be secured for the children, both within and beyond the inner circle of the family. In the present day, the Christian conception of the family is threatened. If Christian homes cease to abound

among us, not only the Church, but civilization itself will lose its only sure basis. In continuing the practice of infant Baptism, The United Church is standing for the sanctity of the Christian home, and is setting on its loveliest members the outward attestation of the privilege, which is theirs in Christ. (2) The Lord's Supper. (a) Its Meaning. It is in a special and high degree the festival of the fellowship. In it there is a real communion with the unseen, but present, Lord, and with those who are one in Him. It is, therefore, emphatically, the Lord's Table. The visible Church has no right to confine its blessings to a section of the Lord's people. The action of the Church of Rome in denying access to the Sacrament to all but its own members, is intelligible and even justifiable on the Roman claim to be the whole and sole Catholic Church. For non-Roman Churches to proceed in the same manner, is not only wrong; it is ridiculous. (b) The Action. This (Latin, *actio*) is the Reformation descriptive designation of the ritual. It is, in fact, a feast reduced to its simplest elements, namely, giving and receiving. Its symbolism is also very simple. What is given is, in reality, Christ Himself, once crucified for us, now risen and present and offering Himself in His saving power to every trustful soul. This gift of Christ is symbolized in Bread and Wine, forming as these did, in the time when believers first gathered round the Holy Table, the material of an ordinary meal, the sustenance of this mortal life. (c) The mental attitude of the



recipients. They *remember*, recalling what their Lord did for them, how He went to the Cross, and there offered the sacrifice in and through which the redeeming love of God is victorious over sin and the grave. They *give thanks*. The exercise of the communicant is, at the Table, wholly outward, directed toward the Lord, who loved him, and gave Himself for him. Such love constrains and evokes answering love, and floods the soul with praise. They *receive* the emblems, and in the same act they receive *Christ*, who died for them, and now lives to be their life. In that spiritual oneness, nothing of Christ is withheld from them, not His body—His full personal being; not His blood—His life given as a ransom, blood of the New Covenant. (d) The Benefit. All His benefits are summed up in Himself. In the Lord's Supper we do, in uttermost fact and value, receive Jesus Christ to be the Indweller of our hearts by faith. From such a supreme gift, all other benefits flow—comfort for the heavy-laden, nourishment for the fainting, renewed vigor for those who are lagging in their upward growth. (e) The Recipients. The Church may not treat the Table as the perquisite of a class. At the same time, it must clearly indicate the terms of communion, and, so far as it is humanly possible, see that they are observed. The terms are faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and obedience to His law. Everyone who approaches the Table must make definite profession that he does trust Christ as Saviour, and does acknowledge Him as Master and Lord.

Whether the "profession" is sincere, is known only to the Searcher of hearts. The Church is bound to see that it is "credible," that is, that it does on the whole correspond with the applicant's known manner of behavior, and that it is not contradicted by his character and conduct. The duty of making this as sure as possible is committed in The United Church to the Pastor, and to those associated with him in the spiritual charge of the congregation. It is a sacred duty, whose neglect is grievous sin, and is fraught with danger to many souls.