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The Recovery of Baptism.

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BROUGHT up under Evangelical teaching, and for practically half a life-time a member of an Evangelical congregation, the Faith of the Gospel in its simplest and purest form has been familiar to me from my youth. To mention the pastor's name to whom I was a listener for many years would be to mention a name honoured far and wide for whole-hearted devotion to God and to His command to evangelize the world. Now, on looking back and thinking over what was learnt from this teacher, amid much—very much—to be thankful for, there appears one defect—never, in all the many sermons that I have heard from him, can I remember one reference to the Sacrament of Baptism, except to warn us against the error of thinking that in our Baptism we were regenerate. What we were to believe about the Sacrament was never told us. Baptism was, of course, regularly administered in the church, but, except for that fact, the Sacrament was practically unrecognized, and one who only listened to his teaching might very well have come to the conclusion that Baptism had no place in his theology—never was it made the basis of encouragement or appeal to his hearers.

Now, it is to be feared that this defect is not an uncommon one in evangelical teaching. Look through many of our writers, listen to our speakers, whether appealing to the unconverted to accept the mercy of God in Christ Jesus our Lord, or to God's children to rise to the possibilities that are hidden for them in Christ, the fact is the same, the Sacrament of Baptism—the fact that their hearers have been baptized—is ignored. Yet surely the Sacrament of God must have some bearing on such matters—must be capable of being used as a means to further these objects.

Why is this? With some, perhaps, it is the rebound from the false sacramental teaching which has put the Sacrament in the wrong place, and attributed to it effects which do not attach to it. To avoid this they give Baptism no place at all.

With some it arises from a feeling that such an act as Baptism has something unspiritual about it, and is out of place in spiritual religion.

With some it arises from uncertainty about Baptism—they are not certain what it means, especially in the case of infants, and therefore, though in obedience to the orders of their Church they baptize infants when presented, they are silent about it in their teaching.

With some it arises from the honest conviction that Baptism has no bearing on such things as conversion or holiness, looking on Baptism almost entirely as our act, and, so regarding it as an act of man, they can find no encouragement as to the acts of God upon it.

Now, this silence about Baptism is disastrous in two ways: On the one hand, it gives our brother who teaches what he calls the Full Catholic Faith a great advantage. People do want to know about Baptism, and finding that Evangelical teachers are silent about it, or at the most are only prepared to say what it is not, they turn to those who are prepared to give them definite instruction on the subject. This our Catholic brother can supply. He has his doctrine of Baptism clear-cut and definite, and is able to back it up with what at first sight seems clear proof from Scripture and the Prayer-Book. Is it to be wondered at that, under these circumstances, people are swayed by the teaching of the man who has definite opinions?

On the other hand, Baptism is of no use to the Evangelical, while it is to his Catholic brother. The latter can, and does, ground his appeals to his people on the fact of Baptism. At a definite time new life, with all its blessings and powers, was conferred on them, and they now have only to make use of that which was then ingrafted. Baptism is in his hands a ground of assurance and appeal, which it is not to the Evangelical.

How can we remedy this, and so restore this Sacrament to its rightful place in our thoughts and teaching that it may be used by us as a ground of confidence for our people, whether we are trying to lead them to the blessing of assurance, or to encourage them in their pursuit of holiness? In recovering the

Sacrament for this use we shall be going back to and following good precedent.

We shall be following the precedent of our Reformers. They held strong views on Baptism, and were not afraid to appeal to it as a ground of assurance and confidence of the blessing of God. Cranmer says: "He that is baptized ought to believe that in Baptism he doth in deed and in truth put Christ upon him, and apparel him with Christ." Bradford: "A man regenerate—which we ought to believe of ourselves, I mean that we are so by our Baptism, the Sacrament thereof requiring no less faith." And, to go back to Scripture, we find St. Paul making much the same use of Baptism in his epistles: "So many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death. Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism into death" (Rom. vi. 3, 4). "For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Gal. iii. 27). "Buried with Him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with Him through the faith of the operation of God" (Col. ii. 12).

How can we proceed to bring our use of this Sacrament into line with these precedents? The first thing would seem to be to bring forward prominently the fact that Baptism is an act of God, that in the Sacrament He does something to us, and that that fact is the most important thing to consider. *Our* part is important, but secondary; the act and intention of *God* is the first thing. It is the Divine acts in redemption that are the rock of our confidence, upon which we can rest our souls in peace; and until we have restored Baptism to its proper place among these, we can never use it as it should be used. To give our Catholic brother full credit, he does this. His doctrine of regeneration in Baptism may be untrue, but at least it holds up to us clearly and decisively the fact that in Baptism there is an act of God for our profit and blessing, and until we replace his false idea of what this act is by the true one, there is no ground for wonder if his teaching sways people.

What, then, are we to say that this act of God does for us which can be made a ground of confidence and encouragement

to our people? Perhaps some words from our Articles may show us: "The promises of forgiveness of sin, and our adoption to be the sons of God by the Holy Ghost, are visibly signed and sealed" (Art. XXVII.). Now, if these words are true, surely we may use the act which does this as a means of assurance and ground of encouragement.

The anxious, troubled soul we can refer back to the moment of Baptism. Here is an act of God by which the forgiveness, of which you feel the need, was not merely promised, but definitely signed and sealed over to you individually. From that you may be sure He will not draw back, and may, with full assurance, claim the gift of forgiveness which He thus made yours.

Again, in the hours of weariness in the struggle after holiness, to this same act of God we may point back as a source of encouragement. Here is an act of God assuring you of the help that you need. The promise of adoption to be sons of God by the Holy Ghost was made and signed and sealed to you in your Baptism; surely, then, He who did this act, and thereby sealed this promise to you, will, on your seeking them, give you the gifts and graces needful for you, if you are to be in character a worthy son of God. All was included in the one act and deed, and you have only to arise and claim the heritage thus made over to you by Him who is faithful.

Along some such lines as these Baptism may be made of use to troubled and anxious souls, and this Sacrament of God restored to its right place and use in the Christian life; and, instead of being a mysterious, unintelligible act, divorced from all practical bearing on daily life, take its place again as a means of grace, fruitful in daily assurance and comfort.

Possibly at first such use of the Sacrament would be regarded with suspicion. Past neglect would have its revenge by causing such teaching to be regarded as dangerous because of its novelty, but gradually, by its reasonableness and spirituality, it would win its way, and this Sacrament of God, after years of neglect, **at last** come to its own, to the joy and blessing of His Church.