

## CHRISTIAN SACRAMENTS.

Dr. Golbert T. Rowe says, "The first great mis-interpretation of Christianity was sacramentalism. When the church turned into this blind alley it forsook the principles of salvation by faith for salvation by magic."

Sacramentalism in its worst form is a superstition. When a man depends on water baptism or the bread and wine of the Lord's supper to give him a pure heart, he no longer has a faith, he only has a superstition. It is hard to keep any great religious force from being corrupted by superstition. There are two reasons why superstition is so hard to keep out of religion. One is man's natural veneration for holy things. Every good man feels a reverence for the church, the office of the ministry, and even for the vessels of God's house. A man once worked with me some time without knowing I was a minister. When he found it out, he said, "I didn't know you were a preacher. If I have ever said anything in your presence that was unbecoming I hope you will excuse it." The agencies of religion have so much that is good, pure, and holy associated with them a man would have to be a heathen at heart not to feel a reverence for them. A rational feeling of reverence for holy things is good. But when that veneration reaches the point that a man cannot tell a bad ministry from a good one, and cannot distinguish between the material symbol

and the very presence of God it becomes a dangerous superstition.

A great faith gives wings to every faculty of the body or soul. A great faith can raise a man from the lowest walks of life to sit with kings. A great faith took John Bunyan from mending pots and pans and made him the greatest author of his age. But a superstition has exactly the opposite effect on men. It makes slaves of men. A great faith makes a man independent and fearless, but superstition binds him with the chains of slavish fear.

This brings us to the second reason why it is hard to keep superstition out of religion. Selfish designing men find it a handy lever for oppression. Such men encourage an abnormal reverence for holy things for their own gain. Sacramentalism and priest-craft always go hand in hand. In every case where sacramentalism is fostered on men there is a certain class of men who claim the exclusive right to administer the sacraments. This gives them power over the consciences of men that God has never authorized.

It was this question that caused the clash between Martin Luther and the Roman church. Luther dared to say that every man had the right to go to God for his own salvation. It is easy enough to say that today, but it took a heroic spirit to say it then. These men accused Luther of striking a death blow at the ministry itself.

If every man has the right to go to God himself for salvation, of what use is the Christian ministry? Such questions sound childish to us, but they were serious questions then. Instead of trying to destroy the Christian ministry Luther was trying to make the ministry truly Christian. In a religion where every man must make his own peace with God there is far more work, hard work, for the ministry than in one that depends on the magic of sacramentalism. But it is not the kind of work that appeals to a lazy and selfish ministry. You can not blow on your hands and turn men from their sins. A lazy selfish ministry does not relish the kind of work that Paul, Luther, and Wesley did.

Any religion that depends on some outward rite or form for salvation is a sacramental religion. It takes different forms in different churches. In the Roman church it is a pompous religion, full of deep mystery and extravagant of form and ritual. In some of the protestant religions it is a simple Democratic religion, depending on water baptism for salvation. But as much as they differ in outward form they are alike at heart. In each you will find one group of men who claim to hold the keys to the Kingdom of God, and that no one can come in without their permission or sanction.

Sacramentalism has doubtless caused more confusion in the church than any other subject. Even before Paul's death there was such confusion in the Corinthian church

over water baptism that Paul thanked God that he had not baptized any more of them. He said as much emphatically, and that Christ had not sent him to baptize to preach the gospel. What would he have said if he had lived a few centuries and seen the superstition that grew up around the Christian sacraments? If the sacraments of the church were given by our Lord they were only given as symbols of greater things. He certainly did not depend on either to change men's hearts. If they were not given by His authority they have no force in His church. If they had never been used for any other purpose than mere symbols there never would have been such confusion over them.

The sacrament of water baptism was a symbol of the purification of the believer. In nature water does wash and purify unclean things. This makes it a fit symbol for the washing of the spirit. It is a natural symbol of a spiritual purification. The regeneration of an immortal spirit cannot be a natural process. Physically a Christian is no cleaner than a sinner. It takes just as much soap and water to clean a good man as it does a bad one. Most of my life I have had to toil with my own hands for my daily bread. I have come from my work many times when a man would have had to examine me pretty close to tell if I was white. I may die with some of that old dirt on me. Many a rail road man has. But I had rather die coated with honest dirt than die with one dollar in

my pocket that was not honestly mine. Bankers say that paper money is one of the filthiest things in the world. One who handles money all the time can hardly keep his fingers clean. But if a bank teller always counts his money honestly and gives every man his dues the dirt on his fingers will not keep him out of heaven. The slick fingered artist, with fingers so soft and delicate that he can detect the click in the combination of a safe, has much whiter and cleaner fingers than an honest bank teller or a rail road man. But that does not keep him from being a thief. There is no connection between the dirt that gets on a bank teller's fingers and the moral degeneracy that would make him steal. Christ came to save men and women from moral and spiritual uncleanness.

Salvation by faith is a reasonable salvation. When a man is converted to a great faith he is a changed man. He changes his habits, his passions, his whole attitude of life. Sam Jones said that he dreamed one night that he had signed a man's note for five thousand dollars, and that the man had defaulted. He said he thought he went to the bank and told the cashier that he did not have a penny, but that he would pay every dollar of the note if they would only give him a little time. Then he waked up and found that he did not owe five thousand dollars. But he said he was glad he did not act a rascal even in his sleep. A converted man is a good man even in his sleep. A purely sacramental religion is not a reasonable religion. If God saves me because I have been bap-

tized with water and condemns because I have not, what reason could He have for doing it? In days of old, when God called men to repentance and life, He said, "Come and let us reason together." In every discourse Christ ever had with men He appealed to their sound reason and common sense.

As a symbol of regeneration water baptism is a beautiful and precious thing. It is a symbol of the spiritual regeneration that comes from a great faith. There can be no salvation without such a regeneration. A spiritual birth is as essential to a spiritual life as a natural birth is to a natural one. Water baptism is a reminder that our original state is one of uncleanness, and that we must be washed before we are fit to enter into a new life.

The bread and wine are symbols also. Bread and wine are foods. They nourish the body and prolong physical life. For that reason they are suitable symbols of that heavenly food that nourishes the spirit. But the spirit of man cannot be nourished by natural foods. If it could the more a man eats the better man he would be. We know this is not true. Eating and drinking has destroyed more men than any other excess. One of the first passions a reasonable man must subdue is his natural appetite. When a man or woman exercises moderation and refuses to eat or drink more than is good for them, that is a moral act. If he does this that he may live closer to God and be more useful to his neighbor it is a religious

act.

The bread and wine are also memorials. I think the sweetest name I ever heard them called by was "Dear memorials of a dying Lord." A memorial can be a very precious thing. When I was a boy there was a little cheap trunk in one corner of the old log house. It contained a little pair of shoes, a little coat, and a few battered toys. Our gray-haired mother still had this little trunk when she died. We children never opened that trunk. No one ever forbade it, there was no need. We knew there was only one pair of hands in all the world worthy of that honor. Sometimes when we came tearing through the house like a storm we would find her sitting over the little box with some of the sacred articles in her lap, the tears fast falling over them. No one needed to say then, "Children, be quiet." As soon as we saw her there was a solemn hush through the whole group of noisy youngsters. It seems to me now that even the old dog knew the sanctity of those hours of love and sorrow, and walked very soberly. Those were memorials.

The bread and wine are memorials of our elder brother. He left us these to remember the dark day he laid down His life for men.

If we could recover one of the bloody foot prints of the heroes of Valley Forge what a shrine of liberty it would be. We could say to the youth of America, "This is what your liberty cost our fathers." The elements of

bread and wine are not the body and blood of Christ  
litterally. They are only His footprints---the  
bloody foot-prints of the greatest hero that ever  
died.