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I.

SOME OBJECTIONS TO THE FEDERAL THEORY OF IMMEDIATE IMPUTATION.

WE will notice the most radical objection first. A distinguished theologian, who teaches immediate imputation, and who would be classed as a Calvinist, objects to the federal theory on the ground that "it is extra-scriptural, there being no mention of such a covenant with Adam in the account of man's trial." What he thinks of the covenant of grace may be gathered from the fact that he makes election logically subsequent, in God's decree, to the purpose to redeem. "The true order of the decrees," he holds, "is therefore as follows: 1, The decree to create; 2, the decree to permit the fall; 3, the decree to provide a salvation in Christ sufficient for the needs of all; 4, the decree to secure the actual acceptance of this salvation on the part of some—or, in other words, the decree of election." Such an order of the decrees is obviously inconsistent with a federal relation on the part of the Redeemer to any particular class of fallen men. It implies that his work had equal reference to all. Election is simply an expedient to save the scheme from ignominious failure. We understand this author to make a square issue. The natural relation is the only one we sustain to Adam: our union with Christ begins when we exercise saving faith. The theory of the covenant being extra-scriptural, he does not employ the terms which belong to it. To use Bishop Butler's distinction, he objects to the evidence rather than to the contents of revelation. We agree with him entirely that the question is one of fact. If the doctrine of the covenants is not a matter of divine revelation, then any

X.
CRITICISMS AND REVIEWS.

STAGG'S "CALVIN, TWISSE AND EDWARDS."

CALVIN, TWISSE AND EDWARDS ON THE UNIVERSAL SALVATION OF THOSE DYING IN INFANCY. *By Rev. John W. Stagg, D. D.* Richmond, Va.: Presbyterian Committee of Publication. 1902. Cloth. Pp. 163. 50 cents.

The accomplished pastor of the Second Presbyterian Church in Charlotte, N. C., has set for himself the task, mainly of expounding the views of Calvin, and secondarily those of Twisse and Edwards, on the subject of infant salvation.

His purpose is to show that these great fathers did not, as is so widely supposed, teach the damnation of any infants dying in infancy.

By way of a suitable starting point, he examines the "distinctive systems" of Roman Catholicism, Lutheranism and Episcopalianism, and finds that all of those, because of their sacramentarian premises, logically involve the doctrine of the damnation of those infants dying unbaptized.

The Pelagian system has no difficulty whatever with the subject, because it holds the sinlessness of all infants.

Calvinism he stoutly defends against the charge of infant damnation, declaring it to be nothing less than slander to impute it either to the logic or to the heart of the holders of this great form of theology.

He sets out to rescue these three great representatives of Calvinism, who are judged by many to be indisputably on the side of infant damnation.

His expository difficulties are very great, being partly inherent in the subject itself, one of the most perplexing in all theology; partly in the voluminousness of the discussion which centuries of rancorous debate have gathered around the subject; but principally in the polemical character of the writings which he has under examination. These abound and super-abound in arguments *ad hominem*, arguments *ad absurdum*, arguments *ea hypothesi*, in statements and counter-statements, in replies and sur-replies, until it is almost impossible always to command the writer's exact point of view, and see at just what angle and for just what purpose he argues.

Dr. Stagg proceeds upon the principle, indisputably sound, that the exigencies of debate create a context indispensable to the construction of controversial literature.

Had this rule been more fairly and intelligently applied to the writings of Calvin and the other two, the author thinks abhorrent doctrine would not have been imputed to them.

"We undertake to show," says Dr. Stagg, "that Calvin states positively that infants are damned, and that he exempts from damnation those dying in infancy."

That is, Calvin, from one point of view, teaches the universal damnation of all infants, and, from another point of view, the universal salvation of all infants.

For proof of the first proposition, take this sentence from his *Institutes*: "I inquire, again, how it came to pass that the fall of Adam, independent of any remedy, should involve so many nations, *with their infant children*, in eternal death, but *because such was the will of God.*" This Calvin characterizes an "awful (awe inspiring) decree," and Dr. Stagg says that it, with other contexts, proves that he taught "infant damnation."

As a specimen of the proof of the second proposition, take this sentence from his *Tracts*: "Every one whom Christ blesses is exempted from the curse of Adam and the wrath of God. Therefore, seeing it is certain that infants are blessed by him, it follows that they are freed from death." Here he argues, as in many other places, to the specific conclusion that all infants are "freed from death."

How can the great Genevan be reconciled with himself? Is reconciliation possible? If we must leave him in contradiction to himself, which view shall we elect to charge upon the heart and consciousness of the great theologian—the view that infants are damned, or the view that infants are freed from death? If we elect the former, and charge that infant damnation was Calvin's conscious doctrine on the subject, we must do so in spite of his explicit statement that "to exclude from the grace of redemption those who are of that age (infants) would be too cruel."

Dr. Stagg is confident that the great theologian of Geneva did not thus contradict himself, nor was he either consciously or logically guilty of the great "cruelty" of excluding infants from the grace of redemption. All the antecedent probabilities are overwhelmingly on the side of the commentator; but, in view of much that Calvin has written, and in view of the able criticisms which have been written on the contrary side, it behooves Dr. Stagg to give us a rational theory of harmony. If he does this—if he makes it rationally possible for us to believe that Calvin did not hold and teach what he characterized as a "cruelty"—fairness, to say nothing of generosity, requires us to accept the explanation which makes the great writer consistent with himself and with the sentiments of his own heart.

What is the author's theory of explanation? Its development is always intricate, sometimes not clear, but finally triumphant. We now attempt its reproduction.

When Calvin treats of predestination, he divides the human race into two classes, those predestined to life and those predestined to death. As all men are at one period of their lives infants, these two classes become—infants predestinated to life and infants predestinated to death. In the development of this aspect of his theology he uses language which clearly implies infant damnation. This is not the proper "head" under which to treat the subject of infant salvation, and observations upon it here by Calvin would be premature. But his system is in a process under his hand: there are sequæ.

So, too, when he treats of the fall and original sin, he reaches the broad conclusion that the entire race, infants not excepted, are guilty and tainted, and so are justly damnable, and are actually condemned. Here, again, the door is wide open for him to use language which implies the damnation, not of some, but of all infants. Calvin's logical moment is still antecedent to redemption, and all his statements are made from that point of view.

When he comes to treat of the covenant, he is face to face with the sacramentarianism of the hour, which ties all the grace of redemption to the church and its sacraments. Here Calvin concedes that this sacramentarian and ecclesiastical conception of grace would be adequate to explain the salvation of the children of believers, but denies that such a premise would be effective for the infants of heathens and aliens. These denials, *upon these premises*, are construed by some of his commentators as his denial outright and point-blank of the salvation of the infants of heathens and aliens on any basis whatever.

What, then, was Calvin's premise? How did he ground infant salvation? Not as the Pelagians, in the childness of the child, in the innocency and sinlessness of the infants, for he held to the culpability and damnability of original sin, and taught that all infants were implicated in the fall and ruin of Adam. Not in the premises of Romanists and sacramentarians, for he combatted the whole *ex opere operato* theory of the sacraments, and sought to show how these premises would exclude unbaptized children from the grace of redemption. Calvin, on the contrary, held that there was such an application of the atonement of Christ as carried away from every infant descendant of Adam the guilt of original sin, the liability to an eternal doom. In the language of Dr. Stagg, "In Christ the consequence of the fall is destroyed, unless, by actual sin, one may incur the consequences. There is left, then, only the corrupt nature consequent to the fall in infants." From this remnant of the fall, "the corrupt nature," they are purged by regeneration.

"What are we left to," says Dr. Stagg, "but to conclude that Christ blessed the *state* of infancy, and assured us that those dying in this *state* are regenerated by the Spirit, and saved."

It will be noticed that Dr. Stagg, in his examination of Calvin's writings, makes three points, to-wit:

1. That Calvin consciously and avowedly held the doctrine of the salvation of infants dying in infancy.

2. That this faith of Calvin can be reconciled with all statements which he has made to the contrary, by observing the logical and polemical point of view from which the great theologian gave utterance to adverse opinions.

3. That Calvin not only held to the fact of the salvation of infants dying in infancy, but that he also had a theology of infant salvation—a scheme by which he explained, and premises upon which he defended, this fact. The Genevan denied the salvation of infants upon the Pelagian premise of their inherent innocence and sinlessness; he denied it upon the sacramentarian premise of their participation in baptism; but affirmed it and explained it by predicating the atonement of Christ as the cause of the elimination of infant guilt, and the regeneration of the Spirit as the efficient

cause of the elimination of infant depravity. Over against the guilt of original sin attaching to the infant he set Christ and the atonement, and over against the corruption of original sin he set the Spirit and regeneration.

We think Dr. Stagg has made out his first point irrefutably. We think he has made out the second point probably. There is an element in the third about which we are hesitant.

If we have not missed the author's meaning, he holds that Calvin taught that Christ exempted, not infants, but the *infant state* from the wrath and curse of God, when he took little children in his arms and blessed them; consequently any child dying in this *state* was necessarily a subject of salvation. This view is interesting and original, but not altogether satisfying.

Dr. Stagg next defends Twisse and Edwards with like ability, and then, briefly and bitingly, repels some "present day slanders."

This done, the way is clear for him to construct the Scripture doctrine on this subject. He lays down, as proof texts, three passages—"Suffer little children to come unto me;" "except ye be converted, and become as little children;" "the promise is unto you, and to your children"—and from them infers two facts: "The first is, we are told what the kingdom of God is like, and who shall enter it. The second is, we are told that the covenant of grace is as extensive as the human family."

This second inference is not to our mind clearly involved in these texts, and we are apprehensive of the theological consequences it implicates.

Dr. Stagg finally comes to the conclusion that the celebrated clause in the Westminster Confession—"elect infants dying in infancy are regenerated and saved"—needs no amendment. "The Confession does not need revision, nor does it need any such weak prop as a 'foot-note.' The Confession needs nothing. The people need to be taught what the framers of the Confession meant, and that they stated what they meant, and nothing more."

In this judgment we concur. The Confession teaches all that can be taught, all that needs to be taught, on this subject.

We cannot refrain from adding an argument of our own upon a topic which is at this time so prominent among us.

All infants are federally guilty, subjectively corrupt, and, therefore, damnable.

The decree of God distributes all infants into two classes—elect and non-elect.

Many elect infants die in infancy, and are saved by the gracious imputation to them of the righteousness of Christ and the regenerating and sanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit; while all other elect infants live to the years of maturity, and are saved in the same way. The only difference between the two cases being that those dying in infancy are saved *without* the use of "the means of grace," while those who live to adulthood are saved *through* "the means of grace."

All the non-elect infants live to adulthood, transmute federal sin into actual and conscious sin, and perish on that account. A non-elect infant does not, and cannot, die in the state of infancy. Why not?

Because it would defeat the whole end of punishment, which is not the prevention of crime, but the administration of justice.

Suppose the State should execute a criminal unconscious of his offence, mentally incapable of appreciating the reasons for his execution, and in a state of unconsciousness at the time of his hanging? If a delay would bring him to his senses, would not justice require a stay of execution?

The figure is inadequate, but it illustrates how justice would defeat itself by a premature infliction of penalty.

The infant has no consciousness of original sin—there is no sense of evil in his conscience. He is a sensitive creature, and can feel pain, but he cannot appreciate *penalty*. To him, hell would be pain, but his incapacity of understanding and appreciating the reasons for hell would prevent him from looking upon it, or feeling it, as *penalty*. But God sends no creature to hell just to inflict suffering, but that he may appreciate penalty—that he may experience the consequences of transgression.

An infant in hell would be mentally incompetent of asking the question, Why am I here? If he should ask the question, he would be mentally incapable of answering it, or of understanding the answer were it explained to him. His endless sufferings would be an endless enigma.

What course, then, shall providence pursue with that infant whom grace has passed by? Preserve his life until he passes out of infancy into adulthood, when he will become conscious of his sin and guilt, and will then be able to say "Amen" to the judgment which consigns him to death.

This is all inference, very fallible and meagrely expressed, but, it strikes us, as a safer explanation, and one more consistent with Calvinistic premises, than that offered by Dr. Stagg, who seeks to make some sort of universal application of the atonement of Christ to the redemption of "the infant state."

Still, it would be a thousand pities to have to support an amendment to the Confession of Faith with his, or ours, or anybody else's, mere theologizing.

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VAUGHAN'S "SERMONS."

SERMONS. *By Rev. C. R. Vaughan, D. D., of the Synod of Virginia.* Richmond, Va.: Presbyterian Committee of Publication. 1902. Cloth. Pp. 363. \$1.25, net.

Dr. Vaughan is a stalwart champion of Calvinistic orthodoxy. He always sees clearly, feels truly, fights intelligently, and triumphs splendidly. He perceives issues in their trueness and gravity, and grapples in earnest and awful debate with premises. It is a joy to see him in the arena. You feel his strength, you see his skill, you foreknow his victory. Truth never suffers dishonor at his hands. The hosts of Israel never lament over his championship.

The sermons before us are classified as "apologetic, doctrinal, and miscellaneous." They are not pitiful sermonets, scissored anecdotes, recitations of trifling experiences, sensational pyrotechnics, sophomoric phrases and figures. The preacher is incapable of trifling. These sermons are discussions. They lay down grave propositions; they draw clarifying distinctions; they deal in rational arguments, and make appeals to the sober and sane hearts of hearers. They compel thought, force instruction, expose fallacies,