

THE  
DEVELOPMENT OF THE DOCTRINE  
OF INFANT SALVATION.

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BY  
BENJAMIN B. WARFIELD, D.D.

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The development of the  
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OF INFANT SALVATION.

BY

BENJAMIN B. WARFIELD,

*Professor in Princeton Seminary.*

NEW YORK :  
THE CHRISTIAN LITERATURE CO.

1891.

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## THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE DOCTRINE OF INFANT SALVATION.

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THE task which we set before us in this brief paper is not to unravel the history of opinion as to the salvation of infants dying in infancy, but the much more circumscribed one of tracing the development of doctrine on this subject. We hope to show that there has been a doctrine as to the salvation of infants common to all ages of the Church ; but that there has also been in this, as in other doctrines, a progressive correction of crudities in its conception, by which the true meaning and relations of the common teaching have been freed from deforming accretions and its permanent core brought to purer expression.

1. It is fundamental to the very conception of Christianity that it is a remedial scheme. Christ Jesus came to save sinners. The first Christians had no difficulty in understanding and confessing that Christ had come into a world lost in sin to establish a kingdom of righteousness, citizenship in which is the condition of salvation. That

infants were admitted into this citizenship they did not question ; Irenæus, for example, finds it appropriate that Christ was born an infant and grew by natural stages into manhood, since “ he came to save all by himself—all, I say, who by him are born again unto God, infants and children, and boys and young men, and old men,” and accordingly passed through every age that he might sanctify all. Nor did they question that not the natural birth of the flesh, but the new birth of the Spirit was the sole gateway for infants too, into the kingdom ; communion with God was lost for all alike, and to infants too it was restored only in Christ.\* Less pure elements, however, entered almost inevitably into their thought. The ingrained externalism of both Jewish and heathen modes of conception, when brought into the Church wrought naturally toward the identification of the kingdom of Christ with the external Church, and of regeneration with baptism. Already in Justin and Irenæus, the word “ regeneration ” means “ baptism ; ” the Fathers uniformly understand John iii. 5 of baptism. The maxim of the Patristic age thus became *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* ; baptism was held to be necessary to salvation with the

\* IRENÆUS, *Haer.*, ii., 22, 4, and iii., 18, 7.

necessity of means ; and as a corollary, no unbaptized infant could be saved. How early this doctrine of the necessity of baptism became settled in the Church is difficult to trace in the paucity of very early witnesses. Tertullian already defends it from objection.\* The reply of Cyprian and his fellow-bishops to Fidus on the duty of early baptism, presupposes it.† After that, it was plainly the Church-doctrine ; and although it was mitigated in the case of adults by the admission not only of the baptism of blood, but also that of intention,‡ the latter mitigation was not allowed in the case of infants. The whole Patristic Church agreed that, martyrs excepted, no infant dying unbaptized could enter the kingdom of heaven.

The fairest exponent of the thought of the age on this subject is Augustine, who was called upon to defend it against the Pelagian error that infants dying unbaptized, while failing of entrance into the kingdom, yet obtain eternal life. His constancy in this controversy has won for him the unenviable title of *durus infantum pater*—a designation doubly unjust, in that not only

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\* *De Bapt.* c. 12.

† *Epistle* lviii. (lxiv.)

‡ With what limitations may be conveniently read in WALL., *Hist. of Infant Baptism*, ed. 2, 1707, pp. 359 sq.

did he neither originate the obnoxious dogma nor teach it in its harshest form, but he was even preparing its destruction by the doctrines of grace, of which he was more truly the father.\* Augustine expressed the Church-doctrine moderately, teaching, of course, that infants dying unbaptized would be found on Christ's left hand and be condemned to eternal punishment, but also not forgetting to add that their punishment would be the mildest of all, and indeed that they were to be beaten with so few stripes that he could not say it would have been better for them not to be born.† No doubt, others of the Fathers softened the doctrine even below this; some of the Greeks, for instance, like Gregory Nazianzen, thought that unbaptized infants "are neither glorified nor punished"—*i. e.*, of course, go into a middle state similar to that taught by Pelagius.‡ But it is not to Augustine, but to Fulgentius († 533),§ or to Alcimus Avitus († 525),|| or to Gregory the Great († 604) ¶

\* Compare *The Post-Nicene Fathers*, edited by Dr. SCHAFF, vol. v. (*Augustin's Anti-Pelagian Treatises*), p. lxx.

† Augustine's doctrine is most strongly expressed in *Sermo xiv.* In *De Peccat. Merit.*, c. 21 (xvi.), and *Contra Julian.*, v., 11, he speaks of the comparative mildness of the punishment.

‡ Cf. WALL, *op. cit.*, p. 365.

§ *De Fide ad Petr.*, c. 27.

|| *Ad Fascinam Sororem.*

¶ *Expos. in Job.*, i., 16.

to whom we must go for the strongest expression of the woe of unbaptized infants. Probably only such anonymous objectors as those whom Tertullian confutes,\* or such obscure and erratic individuals as Vincentius Victor whom Augustine convicts, in the whole Patristic age, doubted that the kingdom of heaven was closed to all infants departing this life without the sacrament of baptism.

2. If the general consent of a whole age as expressed by its chief writers, including the leading bishops of Rome, and by its synodical decrees, is able to determine a doctrine, certainly the Patristic Church transmitted to the Middle Ages as *de fide* that infants dying unbaptized (with the exception only of those who suffer martyrdom) are not only excluded from heaven, but doomed to hell. Accordingly the mediæval synods so define; the second Council of Lyons and the Council of Florence declare that “the souls of those who pass away in mortal sin or in original sin alone descend immediately to hell, to be punished, however, with unequal penalties.” On the maxim that *gradus non mutant speciem* we must adjudge Petavius’s argument † unanswerable, that this deliver-

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\* *De Bapt.*, c. 12.

† PETAVIUS, *Dog. Theol.*, ed. Paris, 1865, ii., 59 sq.

ance determines the punishment of unbaptized infants to be the same in kind (in the same hell) with that of adults in mortal sin : “ So infants are tormented with unequal tortures of fire, but are tormented nevertheless.” Nevertheless scholastic thought on the subject was characterized by a successful effort to mollify the harshness of the Church-doctrine, under the impulse of the prevalent semi-Pelagian conception of original sin. The whole troupe of schoolmen unite in distinguishing between *pœna damni* and *pœna sensus*, and in assigning to infants dying unbaptized only the former—*i.e.*, the loss of heaven and the beatific vision, and not the latter—*i.e.*, positive torment. They differ among themselves only as to whether this *pœna damni*, which alone is the lot of infants, is accompanied by a painful sense of the loss (as Lombard held), or is so negative as to involve no pain at all, either external or internal (as Aquinas argued). So complete a victory was won by this mollification that perhaps only a single theologian of eminence can be pointed to who ventured still to teach the doctrine of Augustine and Gregory—Gregory Ariminensis thence called *tortor infantum* ; and Hurter reminds us that even he did not dare to teach it definitively, but submitted it to the judgment

of his readers.\* Dante, whom Andrew Seth not unjustly calls “by far the greatest disciple of Aquinas,” has enshrined in his immortal poem the leading conception of his day, when he pictures the “young children innocent, whom Death’s sharp teeth have snatched ere yet they were freed from the sin with which our birth is blent,” as imprisoned within the brink of hell, “where the first circle girds the abyss of dread,” in a place where “there is no sharp agony” but “dark shadows only,” and whence “no other plaint rises than that of sighs which from the sorrow without pain arise.” † The novel doctrine attained papal authority by a decree of Innocent III. (c. 1200), who determined “the penalty of original sin to be the lack of the vision of God, but the penalty of actual sin to be the torments of eternal hell.”

A more timid effort was also made in this period to modify the inherited doctrine by the application to it of a development of the baptism of intention. This tendency first appears in Hincmar of Rheims († 882), who, in a particularly hard case of interdict on a whole diocese, expresses the hope that “the

\* HURTER, *Theolog. Dogmat. Compend.*, 1878, iii., p. 516. Tract. x., cap. iii., § 729. Wycliffe must be added.

† *Hell*, iv., 23 sq.; *Purgatory*, vii., 25 sq.; *Heaven*, xxxii., 76 sq. (Plumptre’s translation).

faith and godly desire of the parents and godfathers” of the infants who had thus died unbaptized, “who in sincerity desired baptism for them but obtained it not, may profit them by the gift of Him whose spirit (which gives regeneration) breathes where it pleases.” It is doubtful, however, whether he would have extended this lofty doctrine to any less stringent case.\* Certainly no similar teaching is met with in the Church, except with reference to the peculiarly hard case of still-born infants of Christian parents. The schoolmen (*e.g.*, Alexander Hales and Thomas Aquinas) admitted a doubt whether God may not have ways of saving such unknown to us. John Gerson, in a sermon before the Council of Constance, presses the inference more boldly.† God, he declared, has not so tied the mercy of his salvation to common laws and sacraments, but that without prejudice to his law he can sanctify children not yet born, by the baptism of his grace or the power of the Holy Ghost. Hence, he exhorts expectant parents to pray that if the infant is to die before attaining baptism, the Lord may sanctify it; and who knows but that the Lord may hear them? He adds, however,

\* Cf. WALL, *op. cit.*, p. 371.

† *Sermon, De Nat. Mar. Virg.*, consid. 2, col. 33.



that he only intends to suggest that all hope is not taken away ; for there is no certainty without a revelation. Gabriel Biel († 1495) followed in Gerson's footsteps,\* holding it to be accordant with God's mercy to seek out some remedy for such infants. This teaching remained, however, without effect on the Church-dogma, although something similar to it was, among men who served God in the way then called heresy, foreshadowing an even better to come. John Wycliffe († 1384) had already with like caution expressed his unwillingness to pronounce damned such infants as were intended for baptism by their parents, if they failed to receive it in fact ; though he could not, on the other hand, assert that they were saved.† His followers were less cautious, whether in England or Bohemia, and in this, too, approved themselves heralds of a brighter day.

3. In the upheaval of the sixteenth century the Church of Rome found her task in harmonizing under the influence of the scholastic teaching, the inheritance which the somewhat inconsistent past had bequeathed her. Four varieties of opinion sought a place in her teaching. At the one extreme the earlier doctrine of Augustine and Gregory, that in-

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\* In iv., Sect. iv., q. 11.

† Cf. WALL, as above.

fants dying unbaptized suffer eternally the pains of sense, found again advocates, and that especially among the greatest of her scholars, such as Noris, Petau, Driedo, Conry, Berti. At the other extreme, a Pelagianizing doctrine that excluded unbaptized infants from the kingdom of heaven and the life promised to the blessed, and yet accorded to them eternal life and natural happiness in a place between heaven and hell, was advocated by such great leaders as Ambrosius Catharinus, Albertus Pighius, Molina, Sfondrati. The mass, however, followed the schoolmen in the middle path of *pœna damni*, and, like the schoolmen, only differed as to whether the punishment of loss involved sorrow (as Bellarmine held) or was purely negative.\* The Council of Trent (1545) anathematized those who affirm that the “sacraments of the new law are not necessary to salvation, and that without them or an intention of them men obtain . . . the grace of justification;” or, again, that “baptism is free—that is, is not necessary to salvation.” This is explained by the Tridentine Catechism to mean that “unless men be regenerated to God

\* For this classification see BELLARMINE, *De Amiss. Gratiæ*, etc., vi., 1; and compare GERHARD, *Loci* (Cotta's ed.), vol. ix., p. 279; CHAMIER, *Panstrat. Cath.* (1626), iii., 159, or SPANHEIM, *Chamierus Contractus* (1643), p. 797.

through the grace of baptism, they are born to everlasting misery and destruction, whether their parents be believers or unbelievers ;” while, on the other hand, we are credibly informed \* that the council was near anathematizing as a Lutheran heresy the proposition that the penalty for original sin is the fire of hell. The Council of Trent at least made renewedly *de fide* that infants dying unbaptized incurred damnation, though it left the way open for discussion as to the kind and amount of their punishment. †

The Tridentine deliverance, of course, does not exclude the baptism of blood as a substitute for baptism of water. Neither does it seem necessarily to exclude the application of a theory of baptism of intention to infants. Even after it, therefore, a twofold development seems to have been possible. The path already opened by Gerson and Biel might have been followed out, and a baptism of intention developed for infants as well as for adults. This might even have been pushed on logically, so as to cover the case of all infants dying in infancy. On the principle argued by Richard Hooker, ‡ for ex-

\* So Father PAUL, *Hist. of the Council of Trent*, c. 2.

† PERRONE, *Praelect. Theol. in Compend. Redact.*, i., p. 494.

‡ *Ecclesiastical Polity*, v., ix., 6.

ample, that the unavoidable failure of baptism in the case of Christian children cannot lose them salvation, because of the presumed desire and purpose of baptism for them in their Christian parents and in the Church of God, reasoners might have proceeded only a single step further and have said that the desire and purpose of Mother Church to baptize all is intention of baptism enough for all dying in helpless infancy. Thus on Roman principles a salvation for all dying in infancy might be logically deduced, and infants, as more helpless and less guilty, be given the preference over adults. On the other hand, it might be argued that as baptism either *in re* or *in voto* must mediate salvation, and as infants by reason of their age are incapable of the intention, they cannot be saved unless they receive it in fact,\* and thus infants be discriminated against in favor of adults. This second path is the one which has been actually followed by the theologians of the Church of Rome, with the ultimate result that not only are infants discriminated against in favor of adults, but the more recent theologians seem almost ready to discriminate against the in-

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\* Thus, *e.g.*, DOMINICUS DE SOTO expresses it (*De Natura et Gratia*, ii. 10): "It is most firmly established in the Church that no infant apart from baptism *in re*—since he cannot have it *in voto*—enters the kingdom of heaven."

fants of Christians as over against those of the heathen.\*

The application of the baptism of intention to infants was not abandoned, however, without some protest from the more tender-hearted. Cardinal Cajetan defended in the Council of Trent itself Gerson's proposition that the desire of godly parents might be taken in lieu of the actual baptism of children dying in the womb.† Cassander (1570) encouraged parents to hope and pray for children so dying.‡ Bianchi (1768) holds that such children may be saved *per obla-*

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\* This grows out of the development of the doctrines of ignorance and "invincible ignorance," the latter of which was authoritatively defined by Pope Pius IX. in his Encyclical addressed to the Bishops of Italy. August 10, 1863. See an interesting statement concerning it in NEWMAN'S *A Letter to the Duke of Norfolk*, on the Infallibility of the Pope. Thus while an absolute necessity for baptism *in re* is posited for the infants of even Christian parents, even though they die in the womb, on the other hand, as the law of baptism is in force only where it is known, and even an ignorance morally invincible (as among sectaries) is counted true ignorance, not even an intention of baptism is demanded of the heathen or of certain sectaries. GOUSSET, *Théolog. Dogmat.*, 10 ed., Paris, 1866, i., 548, 549, 351, ii., 382, may be profitably consulted in this connection. Among the heathen thus the old remedies for sin are still probably valid; St. Bernard says (quoted approvingly by Gousset), "Among the Gentiles as many as are found faithful, we believe that the adults are expiated by faith and the sacrifices; but the faith of the parents profits the children, nay, even suffices for them." If the fathers are saved, why not the children? Might not a Christian's infant dying in the womb be said to be "invincibly ignorant"? Why need the "law of baptism" be so inflexibly extended to it?

† In 3 Part. Thomæ, Q. 68, art. 2, et 11. ‡ *De bapt. infant.*

*tionem pueri quam Deo mater extrinsecus faciat.\** Eusebius Amort (1758) teaches that God may be moved by prayer to grant justification to such extra-sacramentally.† Even somewhat bizarre efforts have been made to escape the sad conclusion proclaimed by the Church. Thus Klee holds that a lucid interval is accorded to infants in the article of death, so that they may conceive the wish for baptism.‡ An obscure French writer supposes that they may, “shut up in their mother’s womb, know God, love him, and have the baptism of desire.”§ A more obscure German conceives that infants remain eternally in the same state of rational development in which they die, and hence enjoy all they are capable of; if they die in the womb they either fall back into the original force from which they were produced, or enjoy a happiness no greater than that of trees.|| These protests of the heart have awakened, however, no response in the Church.¶ which has preferred to hold fast

\* *De Remedio . . . pro parentis.*

† *Theolog. Moral.*, ii., xi., 3.

‡ *Dog.* iii., 2, § 1.

§ DE LA MARNE, *Traité métaphysique des Dogmes de la Trinité*, etc., Paris, 1826.

|| HERMESSIUS, *Zeitschr. f. Phil. u. kath. Theol.*, Bonn., 1832.

¶ Compare VASQUEZ, in 3 P. s. Th., disp. cli., cap. 1; HURTER, *op. cit.*, 1878, iii., 516 sq.; PERRONE, *Prælect. Theolog.* (1839), vi., 55.

to the dogma that the failure of baptism in infants, dying such, excludes *ipso facto* from heaven, and to seek its comfort in mitigating still farther than the scholastics themselves the nature of that *pœna damni* which alone it allows as punishment of original sin.

And if we may assume that such writers as Perrone, Hurter, Gousset, and Kendrick are typical of modern Roman theology throughout the world, certainly that theology may be said to have come, in this pathway of mitigation, as near to positing salvation for all infants dying unbaptized as the rather intractable deliverances of early popes and later councils permit to them. They all teach, of course (as the definitions of Florence and Trent require of them)—in the words of Perrone\*—“that children of this kind descend into hell, or incur damnation ;” but (as Hurter says†), “although all Catholics agree that infants dying without baptism are excluded from the beatific vision and so suffer *loss*, are *lost* (*pati damnum, damnari*) ; they yet differ among themselves in their determination of the nature and condition of the state into which such infants pass.” As the idea of “damnation” may thus be softened to a mere *failure to attain*, so the idea of “hell” may be elevated

\* *Compend.* 1861, i., 494, No. 585.

† *Op. cit.*, No. 729.

to that of a natural *paradise*. Hurter himself is inclined to a somewhat severer doctrine ; but Perrone (supported by such great lights as Balmes, Berlage, Oswald, Lessius, and followed not afar off by Gousset and Kendrick) reverts to the Pelagianizing view of Catharinus and Molina and Sfondrati—which Petau called a “ fabrication ” championed indeed by Catharinus but originated “ by Pelagius the heretic,” and which Bellarmine contended was *contra fidem*—and teaches that unbaptized infants enter into a state deprived of all supernatural benefits, indeed, but endowed with all the happiness of which pure nature is capable. Their state is described as having the nature of penalty and of damnation when conceived of relatively to the supernatural happiness from which they are excluded by original sin ; but when conceived of in itself and absolutely, it is a state of pure nature, and accordingly the words of Thomas Aquinas are applied to it : “ They are joined to God by participation in natural goods, and so also can rejoice in natural knowledge and love.” \* Thus, after so many ages, the Pelagian conception of the middle state for infants has obtained its revenge on the condemnation of the Church. No doubt it is not admit-

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\* *Compend*, 1861, i., 494, cf. ii., 252.



ted that this is a return to Pelagianism ; Perrone, for example, argues that Pelagius held the doctrine of a natural beatitude for infants as one unrelated to sin, while “ Catholic theologians hold it with the death of sin ; so that the exclusion from the beatific vision has the nature of penalty and of damnation proceeding from sin.” \* Is there more than a verbal difference here ? At all events, whatever difference exists is a difference not in the doctrine of the state of unbaptized infants after death, but in the doctrine of the fall. In deference to the language of fathers and councils and popes, this natural paradise is formally assigned to that portion of the other world designated “ hell,” but in its own nature it is precisely the Pelagian doctrine of the state of unbaptized infants after death. By what expedient such teaching is to be reconciled with the other doctrines of the Church of Rome, or with its former teaching on this same subject, or with its boast of *semper eadem*, is more interesting to its advocates within that communion than to us. † Our interest as historians of opinion is exhausted in simply noting the fact that the Pelagianiz-

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\* *Compend*, 1861, i., 494, No. 590.

† See some of the difficulties very mildly stated in HURTER, *loc. cit.*

ing process, begun in the Middle Ages by assigning to infants guilty only of original sin liability to *pœna damni* alone, culminates in our day in their assignment by the most representative theologians of modern Rome to a natural paradise.

4. It is, no doubt, as a protest against the harshness of the Romanist syllogism, "No man can attain salvation who is not a member of Christ; but no one becomes a member of Christ except by baptism, received either *in re* or *in voto*,"\* that this Pelagianizing drift is to be regarded. Its fault is that it impinges by way of mitigation and modification on the *major* premise, which, however, is the fundamental proposition of Christianity. Its roots are planted, in the last analysis, in a conception of men, not as fallen creatures, children of wrath, and deserving of a doom which can only be escaped by becoming members of Christ, but as creatures of God with claims on him for natural happiness, but, of course, with no claims on him for such additional supernatural benefits as he may yet lovingly confer on his creatures in Christ. On the other hand, that great religious movement which we call the Reformation, the constitutive

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\* The words are AQUINAS'S (p. 3. q. 68, art. 1); see them quoted and applied by PERRONE, *Compend.*, ii., 253.

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principle of which was its revised doctrine of the Church, ranged itself properly against the fallacious *minor* premise, and easily broke its bonds with the sword of the word. Men are not constituted members of Christ through the Church, but members of the Church through Christ; they are not made the members of Christ by baptism which the Church gives, but by faith, the gift of God; and baptism is the Church's recognition of this inner fact. The full benefit of this better apprehension of the nature of that Church of God membership in which is the condition of salvation, was not reaped, however, by all Protestants in equal measure. It was the strength of the Lutheran movement that it worked out its positions not theoretically or all at once, but step by step, as it was forced on by the logic of events and experience. But it was an incidental evil that, being compelled to express its faith early, its first confession was framed before the full development of Protestant thought, and subsequently contracted the faith of Lutheranism into too narrow channels. The Augsburg Confession contains the true doctrine of the Church as the *congregatio sanctorum*; but it committed Lutheranism to the doctrine that baptism is necessary to salvation (Art. IX.) in such a

sense that children are not saved without baptism (Art. IX.)\* inasmuch as the condemnation and eternal death brought by original sin upon all are not removed except from those who are born again by baptism and the Holy Ghost (Art. II.)—*i.e.*, to the doctrine that the necessity of baptism is the necessity of means. In the direction of mollifying interpretation of this deliverance, the theologians urge : 1. That the necessity affirmed is not absolute but ordinary, and binds man and not God. 2. That as the assertion is directed against the Anabaptists, it is not the privation, but the contempt of baptism that is affirmed to be damning. 3. That the necessity of baptism is not intended to be equalized with that of the Holy Ghost. 4. That the affirmation is not that for original sin alone any one is actually damned, but only that all are therefor damnable. There is force in these considerations. But they do not avail wholly to relieve the Augsburg Confession of limiting salvation to those who enjoy the means of grace, and as concerns infants, to those who receive the sacrament of baptism.

It is not to be held, of course, that it asserts such an absolute necessity of baptism for infants dying such, as admits no exceptions.

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\* "Or outside the Church of Christ," as is added in ed. 1540.

From Luther and Melancthon down, Lutheran theologians have always taught what Hunnius expressed in the Saxon Visitation Articles : “ Unless a person be born again of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven. *Cases of necessity are not intended, however, by this.*” Lutheran theology, in other words, takes its stand positively on the ground of baptism of intention as applied to infants, as over against its denial by the Church of Rome. “ Luther,” says Dorner,\* “ holds fast, in general, to the necessity of baptism in order to salvation, but in reference to the children of Christians who have died unbaptized, he says : ‘ The Holy and Merciful God will think kindly of them. What he will do with them he has revealed to no one, that baptism may not be despised, but has reserved to his own mercy ; God does wrong to no man.’ ” † From the fact that Jewish children dying before circumcision were not lost, Luther argues that neither are Christian children dying before baptism ; ‡ and he comforts Christian mothers of still-born babes by declaring that they should understand that such infants are saved. § So

\* *Hist. of Protestant Theology* (E.T.), i., 171.

† *Opp.*, xxii., 872 (Dorner’s quotation).

‡ *Com. in Gen.*, c. 17.

§ *Christliche Bedenken*.

Bugenhagen, under Luther's direction, teaches that Christians' children intended for baptism are not left to the hidden judgment of God if they fail of baptism, but have the promise of being received by Christ into his kingdom.\* It is not necessary to quote later authors on a point on which all are unanimous; let it suffice to add only the clear statement of the developed Lutheranism of John Gerhard (1610-22): † "We walk in the middle way, teaching that baptism is, indeed, the ordinary sacrament of initiation and means of regeneration necessary to all, even to the children of believers, for regeneration and salvation; but yet that in the event of privation or impossibility the children of Christians are saved by an extraordinary and peculiar divine dispensation. For the necessity of baptism is not absolute, but ordinary; we on our part are obliged to the necessity of baptism, but there must be no denial of the extraordinary action of God in infants offered to Christ by pious parents and the Church in prayers, and dying before the opportunity of baptism can be given them, since God does not so bind his grace and saving efficacy to baptism as that, in

\* See for several such quotations brought together, LAURENCE, *Bampton Lectures*, 1804, ed. 1820, p. 272. Also GERHARD as in next note.

† Ed. Cotta, vol. ix., p. 284.

the event of privation, he may not both wish and be able to act extraordinarily. We distinguish, then, between necessity on *God's* part and on *our* part ; between the case of *privation* and the *ordinary* way ; and also between infants born *in* the Church and *out* of the Church. Concerning infants born out of the Church, we say with the apostle (1 Cor. v. 12, 13), ' For what have I to do with judging them that are without ? Do not you judge them that are within ? For them that are without God judgeth.' Wherefore, since there is no promise concerning them, we commit them to God's judgment ; and yet we hold to no place intermediate between heaven and hell, concerning which there is utter silence in Scripture. But concerning infants born in the Church we have better hope. Pious parents properly bring their children as soon as possible to baptism as the ordinary means of regeneration, and offer them in baptism to Christ ; and those who are negligent in this, so as through lack of care or wicked contempt for the sacrament to deprive their children of baptism, shall hereafter render a very heavy account to God, since they have ' despised the counsel of God ' (Luke vii. 30). Yet neither can nor ought we rashly to condemn those infants which die in their

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mothers' wombs or by some sudden accident before they receive baptism, but may rather hold that the prayers of pious parents, or, if the parents are negligent of this, the prayers of the Church, poured out for these infants, are clemently heard and they are received by God into grace and life."

From this passage, too, we may learn the historical attitude of Lutheranism toward the entirely different question of the fate of infants dying outside the pale of the Church and the reach of its ordinances, a multitude so vast that it is wholly unreasonable to suppose them simply (like Christians' children deprived of baptism) exceptions to the rule laid down in the Augsburg Confession. It is perfectly clear that the Lutheran Confessions extend no hope for them. It is doubtful whether it can even be said that they leave room for hope for them. Melancthon in the *Apology* is no doubt arguing against the Anabaptists, and intends to prove only that children should be baptized; but his words in explanation of Art. IX. deserve consideration in this connection also—where he argues that "the promise of salvation" "does not pertain to those who are without the Church of Christ, where there is neither the Word nor the Sacraments, because the kingdom of Christ exists



only with the Word and the Sacraments." Luther's personal opinion as to the fate of heathen children dying in infancy is in doubt; now he expresses the hope that the good and gracious God may have something good in view for them;\* and again, though leaving it to the future to decide, he only expects something milder for them than for the adults outside the Church;† and Bugenhagen, under his eye, contrasts the children of Turks and Jews with those of Christians, as not sharers in salvation because not in Christ.‡ From the very first the opinion of the theologians was divided on the subject. (1) Some held that all infants except those baptized in fact or intention are lost, and ascribed to them, of course—for this was the Protestant view of the desert of original sin—both privative and positive punishment. This party included such theologians as Quistorpius, Calovius, Fechter, Zeibichius, Buddeus. (2) Others judged that we may cherish the best of hope for their salvation. Here belong Dannhauer, Hulsemann, Scherzer, J. A. Oslander, Wagner, Musæus, Cotta, and Spener. But the great body of Lutherans, including such names as Gerhard, Calixtus, Meisner,

\* Cf. DORNER, *Hist. Prof. Theol.*, i., 171.

† Cf. LAURENCE, *Bampton Lectures*, p. 272.

‡ *Ibid.*

Baldwin, Bechmann, Hoffmann, Hunnius, held that nothing is clearly revealed as to the fate of such infants, and they must be left to the judgment of God. (3) Some of these, like Hunnius, were inclined to believe that they will be saved. (4) Others, with more (like Hoffmann) or less (like Gerhard) clearness, were rather inclined to believe they will be lost; but all alike held that the means for a certain decision are not in our hands.\* Thus Hunnius says :† “ That the infants of Gentiles, outside the Church, are saved, we cannot pronounce as certain, since there exists nothing definite in the Scriptures concerning the matter; so neither do I dare simply to assert that these children are indiscriminately damned. . . . Let us commit them, therefore, to the judgment of God.” And Hoffmann says :‡ “ On the question, whether the infants of the heathen nations are lost, most of our theologians prefer to suspend their judgment. To affirm as a certain thing that they are lost could not be done without rashness.”

This cautious agnostic attitude has the best right to be called the historical Lutheran attitude. It is even the highest posi-

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\* This classification is taken from COTTA (Gerhard's *Loci*, ix., 282).

† *Quæst. in cap. vii. Gen.*

‡ See KRAUTH, *Conservative Reformation*, p. 433.

tion thoroughly consistent with the genius of the Lutheran system and the stress which it lays on the means of grace. The drift in more modern times has, however, been decidedly in the direction of affirming the salvation of all that die in infancy, on grounds identical with those pleaded by this party from the beginning—the infinite mercy of God, the universality of the atonement, the inability of infants to resist grace, their guiltlessness of despising the ordinance, and the like.\* Even so, however, careful modern Lutherans moderate their assertions. They may affirm that “it is not the doctrine of our Confession that any human creature has ever been or ever will be lost purely for original sin;” † but they speak of the matter as a “dark” or a “difficult question,” ‡ and suspend the salvation of such infants on an “extraordinary” and “uncovenanted” exercise of God’s mercy.§ We cannot rise to a conviction or a “faith” in the matter, but may attain to a “well-grounded hope,” based on our apprehension of God’s all-embracing mercy.|| In short, the Lutheran doctrine seems to lay no firm

\* Compare the statements in COTTA and KRAUTH, *loc. citt.*

† KRAUTH, *l.c.*, p. 429.

‡ *Ib.*, pp. 561–63.

§ *Ib.*, pp. 430, 437.

|| KRAUTH, *Infant Salvation in the Calvinistic System*, p. 22.

foundation for a conviction of the salvation of all infants dying in infancy ; at the best it is held to leave open an uncontradicted hope. We are afraid we must say more ; it seems to contradict this hope. For should this hope prove true, it would no longer be true that "baptism is necessary to salvation," even *ordinarily* ; the exception would be the rule. Nor would the fundamental conception of the Lutheran theory of salvation—that grace is in the means of grace—be longer tenable. The logic of the Lutheran system leaves little room for the salvation of all infants dying in infancy, and if their salvation should prove to be a fact, the integrity of the system is endangered.

5. A similar difficulty is experienced by all types of Protestant thought in which the older idea of the Church, as primarily an external body, has been incompletely reformed. This may be illustrated, for example, from the history of thought in the Church of England. The Thirty-nine Articles, in their final form, are thoroughly Protestant and Reformed. And many of the greatest English theologians, even among those not most closely affiliated with Geneva, from the very earliest days of the Reformation, have repudiated the "cruel judgment" of the Church of Rome as to the fate of in-

fants dying unbaptized. But this repudiation was neither immediate, nor has it ever been universal. The second of the Ten Articles of Henry VIII. (1536) not only declares that the promise of grace and eternal life is adjoined to baptism, but adds that infants "by the sacrament of baptism do also obtain remission of their sins, the grace and favor of God, and be made thereby the very sons and children of God; insomuch as infants and children dying in their infancy shall undoubtedly be saved thereby, and else not." The first liturgy embodied the same implication. The growing Protestant sentiment soon revised it out of these standards.\* But there have never lacked those in the Church of England who still taught the necessity of baptism to salvation. If it can boast of a John Hooper, who speaks of "the ungodly opinion that attributeth the salvation of men unto the receiving of an external sacrament," "as though the Holy Spirit could not be carried by faith into the penitent and sorrowful conscience except it rid always in a chariot and external sacrament," and who (probably first after Zwingli) taught that all infants dying in infancy, whether children of Christians or in-

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\* For an outline of the history see SCHAFF, *Creeds of Christendom*, i., 642; cf. LAURENCE, *op. cit.*, p. 176 sq.

fidels, are saved ;\* it also has counted among its teachers many who held with Matthew Scrivener that Christ's " death and passion are not communicated unto any but by outward signs and sacraments," so that " either all children must be damned, being unbaptized, or they must have baptism." † The general position of the Church up to his day is thus conceived by Wall :‡ " The Church of England have declared their sense of its [*i. e.*, baptism's] necessity by reciting the saying of our Saviour, John iii. 5, both in the Office of Baptism of Infants and also in that for those of riper years. . . . Concerning the everlasting state of an infant that by misfortune dies unbaptized, the Church of England has determined nothing (it were fit that all churches would leave such things to God) save that they forbid the ordinary *Office for Burial* to be used for such an one ; for that were to determine the point and acknowledge him for a Christian brother. And tho' the most noted men in the said Church from time to time since the Reformation of it to this time have expressed their hopes that God will accept the purpose of

\* *An Answer to My Lord of Winchester's Book*, etc., 1547, in Parker Society's *Early Writings of Bishop Hooper*, pp. 129, 131.

† *Course of Divinity*, London, 1674, p. 196.

‡ *Hist. of Infant Baptism*, ed. 2, 1707, p. 377.

the parent for the deed ; yet they have done it modestly and much as Wycliffe did, rather not determining the negative than absolutely determining the positive, that such a child shall enter into the kingdom of heaven." If this is all that can be said of the children of the faithful, lacking baptism, where will those of the infidel appear ? Many other opinions—more Protestant or more Pelagian—have, of course, found a home for themselves in the bosom of this most inclusive communion, but they are no more characteristic of its teaching than that of Wall. It is only needful to remember that there are still many among the clergy of the Church of England who, retaining the old, unreformed view of the Church, still believe " that the relationship of sonship to God is imparted through baptism and is not imparted without it ;" \* though, of course, many others, and we hope still a large majority, would repudiate this position as incredible.

6. It was among the Reformed alone that the newly recovered scriptural apprehension of the Church to which the promises were given, as essentially not an externally organized body but the people of God, membership in which is mediated not by the ex-

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\* *Oxford Tracts*, vol. ii., No. 66.

ternal act of baptism but by the internal regeneration of the Holy Spirit, bore its full fruit in rectifying the doctrine of the application of redemption. This great truth was taught alike by both branches of Protestantism, but it was limited in its application in the one line of teaching by a very high doctrine of the means of grace, while in the other it became itself constitutive of the doctrine of the means of grace. Not a few Reformed theologians, even outside the Church of England, no doubt also held a high doctrine of the means ; of whom Peter Jurieu may be taken as a type.\* But this was not characteristic of the Reformed churches, the distinguishing doctrine of which rather by suspending salvation on membership in the invisible instead of in the visible Church, transformed baptism from a necessity into a duty, and left men dependent for salvation on nothing but the infinite love and free grace of God. In this view the absolutely free and loving election of God alone is determinative of the saved ; so that how many and who they are is known absolutely to God alone, and to us only so far forth as it may be inferred from the marks and signs of election revealed to us in the

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\* See his views quoted and discussed by WITSIUS, *De Efficacie et Utilitate Bapt.* in *Miscel. Sacra* (1636), ii., 513.



Word. Faith and its fruits are the chief signs in the case of adults, and he that believes may know that he is of the elect. In the case of infants dying in infancy, birth within the bounds of the covenant is a sure sign, since the promise is "unto us and our children." But present unbelief is not a sure sign of reprobation in the case of adults, for who knows but that unbelief may yet give place to faith? Nor in the case of infants, dying such, is birth outside the covenant a trustworthy sign of reprobation, for the election of God is free. Accordingly there are many—adults and infants—of whose salvation we may be sure, but of reprobation we cannot be sure; such a judgment is necessarily unsafe even as to adults apparently living in sin, while as to infants who "die and give no sign," it is presumptuous and rash in the extreme.

The above is practically an outline of the teaching of Zwingli. He himself worked it out in its logical completeness, and taught:

1. That all believers are elect and hence are saved, though we cannot know infallibly who are true believers except in our own case.
2. All children of believers dying in infancy are elect and hence are saved, for this rests on God's immutable promise.
3. It is probable, from the superabundance

of the gift of grace over the offence, that all infants dying such are elect and saved ; so that death in infancy is a sign of election ; and although this must be left with God, it is certainly rash and even impious to affirm their damnation. 4. All who are saved, whether adult or infant, are saved only by the free grace of God's election and through the redemption of Christ.\*

The central principle of Zwingli's teaching is not only the common possession of all Calvinists, but the essential postulate of their system. They can differ among themselves only in their determination of what the signs of election and reprobation are, and in their interpretation of these signs. On these grounds Calvinists early divided into five classes : 1. From the beginning a few held with Zwingli that death in infancy is a sign of election, and hence that all who die in infancy are the children of God and enter at once into glory. After Zwingli, Bishop Hooper was probably the first† to embrace

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\* Zwingli's teaching may be conveniently worked out by the aid of AUGUST BAUR's valuable *Zwingli's Theologie*, especially vol. ii. (Halle, 1889). Zwingli's doctrine of original sin had practically no influence on this question.

† The adverb is used advisedly. CALVIN is often held to have believed that all infants dying such are saved. For a careful statement of this opinion see especially the full and learned paper of Dr. CHARLES W. SHIELDS, in *The Presbyterian and Reformed Review* for October, 1890 (vol i., pp. 634-651). To us, however, Calvin seems, while speaking with ad-

this view.\* It has more lately become the ruling view, and we may select Augustus Toplady† and Robert S. Candlish as its types. The latter, for example, writes :‡ “ In many ways I apprehend it may be inferred from Scripture that all dying in infancy are elect, and are, therefore, saved. . . . The whole analogy of the plan of saving mercy seems to favor the same view, and now it may be seen, if I am not greatly mistaken, to be put beyond question by the bare fact that little children die. . . . The death of little children must be held to be one of the fruits of redemption. . . .” 2. At the opposite extreme a very few held that the only sure sign of election is faith with its fruits, and, therefore, we can have no real ground of knowledge concerning the fate of any infant ; as, however, God certainly has his elect among them too, each man can cherish the hope that his children

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mirable caution, to imply that he believed some infants dying such to be lost. See, *e.g.*, his comment on Rom. v. 17, and his treatises against Pighius, Servetus, and Castellio. DR. SCHAFF repeatedly speaks of BULLINGER as agreeing in this point with Zwingli—on what grounds we know not unless the note in *Creeks of Christendom*, i., 642, note 3, is intended to direct us to the passages quoted by Laurence as such. But these passages do not seem to support that opinion ; and in a diligent search in Bullinger’s works we find nothing to favor it and much to negative it.

\* See reference *ante*, p. 129.

† *The Works of*, etc., new ed., 1837, p. 645.

‡ *The Atonement*, etc., 1861, pp. 183, 184.

are of the elect. Peter Martyr approaches this sadly agnostic position (which was afterward condemned by the Synod of Dort), writing : " Neither am I to be thought to promise salvation to all the children of the faithful which depart without the sacrament, for if I should do so I might be counted rash ; I leave them to be judged by the mercy of God, seeing I have no certainty concerning the secret election and predestination ; but I only assert that those are truly saved to whom the divine election extends, although baptism does not intervene. Just so, I hope well concerning infants of this kind, because I see them born from faithful parents ; and this thing has promises that are uncommon ; and although they may not be general, *quoad omnes*, yet when I see nothing to the contrary it is right to hope well concerning the salvation of such infants." \* The great body of Calvinists, however, previous to the present century, took their position between these extremes. 3. Many held that faith and the promise are sure signs of election, and accordingly all believers and their children are certainly saved ; but that the lack of faith and the promise is an equally sure sign of reprobation, so that all the children of unbelievers,

\* *Loci Communes*, i., class 4, cap 5, § 16 (compare iv., 100).

dying such, are equally certainly lost. The younger Spanheim, for example, writes : “ Confessedly, therefore, original sin is a most just cause of positive reprobation. Hence no one fails to see what we should think concerning the children of pagans dying in their childhood ; for unless we acknowledge salvation outside of God’s covenant and Church (like the Pelagians of old, and with them Tertullian, Epiphanius, Clement of Alexandria, of the ancients, and of the moderns, Andradius, Ludovicus Vives, Erasmus, and not a few others, against the whole Bible), and suppose that all the children of the heathen, dying in infancy, are saved, and that it would be a great blessing to them if they should be smothered by the midwives or strangled in the cradle, we should humbly believe that they are justly reprobated by God on account of the corruption (*labes*) and guilt (*reatus*) derived to them by natural propagation. Hence, too, Paul testifies (Rom. v. 14) that death has passed upon them which have not sinned after the similitude of Adam’s transgression, and distinguishes and separates (1 Cor. vii. 14) the children of the covenanted as holy from the impure children of unbelievers.” \* 4. More held that faith and

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\* *Opera*, iii., cols. 1173-74, § 22.

the promise are certain signs of election, so that the salvation of believers' children is certain, while the lack of the promise only leaves us in ignorance of God's purpose ; nevertheless that there is good ground for asserting that both election and reprobation have place in this unknown sphere. Accordingly they held that all the infants of believers, dying such, are saved, but that some of the infants of unbelievers, dying such, are lost. Probably no higher expression of this general view can be found than John Owen's. He argues that there are two ways in which God saves infants : “ (1) by interesting them in the covenant, if their immediate or remote parents have been believers. He is a God of them and of their seed, extending his mercy to a thousand generations of them that fear him ;\* (2) by his grace of election which is most free and not tied to any conditions, by which I make no doubt but God taketh many unto him in Christ whose parents never knew or had been despisers of the Gospel.” † 5. Most Calvinists of the past, however, have simply held that faith and the promise are marks by which we may know assuredly that all

\* It is, perhaps, worth noting that this is the general Calvinistic view of what “children of believers” means. Compare CALVIN, *Tracts*, vol. iii., p. 351.

† *Works*, x., 81 ; compare v., 137.

those who believe and their children, dying such, are elect and saved, while the absence of sure marks of either election or reprobation in infants, dying such outside the covenant, leaves us without ground for inference concerning them, and they must be left to the judgment of God, which, however hidden from us, is assuredly just and holy and good. This agnostic view of the fate of uncovenanted infants has been held, of course, in conjunction with every degree of hope or the lack of hope concerning them, and thus in the hands of the several theologians it approaches each of the other views, except, of course, the second, which separates itself from the general Calvinistic attitude by allowing a place for reprobation even among believers' infants, dying such. Petrus de Witte may stand for one example. He says: "We must adore God's judgments and not curiously inquire into them. Of the children of believers it is not to be doubted but that they shall be saved, inasmuch as they belong unto the covenant. But because we have no promise of the children of unbelievers we leave them to the judgment of God." \* Matthew Henry † and our own Jonathan Dickinson ‡ may also stand as types. It is this cautious, agnostic view

\* *Catechism*, q. 37.† *Works*, ii., 940.‡ *Sermons*, 205.

which has the best historical right to be called the general Calvinistic one. Van Mastricht correctly says that while the Reformed hold that infants are liable to reprobation, yet "concerning *believers'* infants . . . they judge better things. But *unbelievers'* infants, because the Scriptures determine nothing *clearly* on the subject, they judge should be left to the divine discretion."\*

The Reformed Confessions with characteristic caution refrain from all definition of the negative side of the salvation of infants, dying such, and thus confine themselves to emphasizing the gracious doctrine common to the whole body of Reformed thought. The fundamental Reformed doctrine of the Church is nowhere more beautifully stated than in the sixteenth article of the Old Scotch Confession, while the polemical appendix of 1580, in its protest against the errors of "antichrist," specifically mentions "his cruell judgement againis infants departing without the sacrament : his absolute necessitie of baptisme." No synod probably ever met which labored under greater temptation to declare that some infants, dying in infancy, are reprobate, than the Synod of Dort. Possibly nearly every mem-

\* *Theoretico-Pract. Theol.* (1724), p. 308.



ber of it held as his private opinion that there are such infants; and the certainly very shrewd but scarcely sincere methods of the Remonstrants in shifting the form in which this question came before the synod were very irritating. But the fathers of Dort, with truly Reformed loyalty to the positive declarations of Scripture, confined themselves to a clear testimony to the positive doctrine of infant salvation and a repudiation of the calumnies of the Remonstrants, without a word of negative inference. "Since we are to judge of the will of God from his Word," they say, "which testifies that the children of believers are holy, not by nature, but in virtue of the covenant of grace in which they together with their parents are comprehended, godly parents have no reason to doubt of the election and salvation of their children whom it pleaseth God to call out of this life in their infancy" (Art. XVII.). Accordingly they repel in the Conclusion the calumny that the Reformed teach "that many children of the faithful are torn guiltless from their mothers' breasts and tyrannically plunged into hell." \* It is easy to

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\* The language here used has a not uninteresting history. It is CALVIN'S challenge to Castellio: "Put forth now thy virulence against God, who hurls innocent babes torn from their mothers' breasts into eternal death" (*De Occulta Dei Providen-*

say that nothing is here said of the children of any but the “godly” and of the “faithful;” this is true; and therefore it is *not* implied (as is so often thoughtlessly asserted) that the contrary of what is here asserted is true of the children of the ungodly; but nothing is taught of them at all. It is more to the purpose to observe that it *is* asserted that the children of believers, dying such, are saved; and that this assertion is an inestimable advance on that of the Council of Trent and that of the Augsburg Confession that baptism is necessary to salvation. It is the confessional doctrine of the Reformed churches and of the Reformed churches alone, that all believers’ infants, dying in infancy, are saved.

What has been said of the Synod of Dort may be repeated of the Westminster Assembly. The Westminster divines were generally at one in the matter of infant salvation with the doctors of Dort,

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*tia*, in *Opp.* ed., Amst., viii., pp. 644–45). The underlying conception that God condemns infants to eternal death seems to be Calvin’s; but the mode of expression is Calvin’s *reductio ad absurdum* (or rather *ad blasphemiam*) of Castello’s opinions. Nevertheless the Remonstrants allowed themselves in their polemic zeal to apply the whole sentiment to the orthodox, and that, even in a still more sharpened form—viz., with reference to *believers’* children. This very gross calumny the Synod repels. Its deliverance is subjected to a very sharp and not very candid criticism by EPISCOPIUS (*Opera* I., i., p. 176, and specially II., p. 28).

but, like them, they refrained from any deliverance as to its negative side. That death in infancy does not prejudice the salvation of God's elect they asserted in the chapter of their Confession which treats of the application of Christ's redemption to his people: "All those whom God hath predestined unto life, and those only, he is pleased, in his appointed and accepted time, effectually to call, by his word and Spirit, . . . so as they come most freely, being made willing by his grace. . . . Elect infants dying in infancy are regenerated and saved by Christ, through the Spirit who worketh when, and where, and how he pleaseth." \* With this declaration of their faith that such of God's elect as die in infancy are saved by his own mysterious working in their hearts, although incapable of the response of faith, they were content.

\* *Westminster Confession of Faith*, X., i. and iii. The opinion that a body of non-elect infants dying in infancy and not saved is implied in this passage, although often controversially asserted, is not only a wholly unreasonable opinion exegetically, but is absolutely negatived by the history of the formation of this clause in the Assembly as recorded in the *Minutes*, and has never found favor among the expositors of the Confession. DAVID DICKSON'S (1684) treatment of the section shows that he understands it to be directed against the Anabaptists; and all careful students of the Confession understand it as above, including SHAW, HODGE, MACPHERSON and MITCHELL. The same is true of all schools of adherents to the Confession. See, e.g., LYMAN BEECHER (*Spirit of the Pilgrims*, i., pp. 49, 81); cf. also PHILIP SCHAFF (*Creeds of Christendom*, i., 795).

Whether these elect comprehend all infants, dying such, or some only—whether there is such a class as non-elect infants, dying in infancy, their words neither say nor suggest. No Reformed confession enters into this question ; no word is said by any one of them which either asserts or implies either that some infants are reprobated or that all are saved. What has been held in common by the whole body of Reformed theologians on this subject is asserted in these confessions ; of what has been disputed among them the confessions are silent. And silence is as favorable to one type as to another.

Although the cautious agnostic position as to the fate of uncovenanted infants dying in infancy may fairly claim to be the historical Calvinistic view, it is perfectly obvious that it is not *per se* any more Calvinistic than any of the others. The adherents of all the types enumerated above are clearly within the limits of the system, and hold with the same firmness to the fundamental position that salvation is suspended on no earthly cause, but ultimately rests on God's electing grace alone, while our knowledge of who are saved depends on our view of what are the signs of election and of the clearness with which they may be inter-

preted. As these several types differ only in the replies they offer to the subordinate question, there is no "revolution" involved in passing from one to the other ; and as in the lapse of time the balance between them swings this way or that, it can only be truly said that there is advance or retrogression, not in fundamental conception, but in the clearness with which details are read and with which the outline of the doctrine is filled up. In the course of time the agnostic view of the fate of uncovenanted infants, dying such, has given place to an ever-growing universality of conviction that these infants too are included in the election of grace ; so that to day few Calvinists can be found who do not hold with Toplady, and Doddridge, and Thomas Scott, and John Newton, and James P. Wilson, and Nathan L. Rice, and Robert J. Breckinridge, and Robert S. Candlish, and Charles Hodge, and the whole body of those of recent years whom the Calvinistic churches delight to honor, that all who die in infancy are the children of God and enter at once into his glory—not because original sin alone is not deserving of eternal punishment (for all are born children of wrath), nor because they are less guilty than others (for relative innocence would merit only relatively light

punishment, not freedom from all punishment), nor because they die in infancy (for that they die in infancy is not the cause but the effect of God's mercy toward them), but simply because God in his infinite love has chosen them in Christ, before the foundation of the world, by a loving foreordination of them unto adoption as sons in Jesus Christ. Thus, as they hold, the Reformed theology has followed the light of the Word until its brightness has illuminated all its corners, and the darkness has fled away.

7. The most serious peril which the orderly development of the Christian doctrine of the salvation of infants has had to encounter, as men strove, age after age, more purely and thoroughly to apprehend it, has arisen from the intrusion into Christian thought of what we may, without lack of charity, call the unchristian conception of man's natural innocence. For the task which was set to Christian thinking was to obtain a clear understanding of God's revealed purpose of mercy to the infants of a guilty and wrath-deserving race. And the Pelagianizing conception of the innocence of human infancy, in however subtle a form presented, put the solution of the problem in jeopardy by suggesting that it needed no solution. We have seen how some Greek

Fathers cut the knot with the facile formula that infantile innocence, while not deserving of supernatural reward, was yet in no danger of being adjudged to punishment. We have seen how in the more active hands of Pelagius and his companions, as part of a great unchristian scheme, it menaced Christianity itself, and was repelled only by the vigor and greatness of an Augustine. We have seen how the same conception, creeping gradually into the Latin Church in the milder form of semi-Pelagianism, lulled her heart to sleep with suggestions of less and less ill-desert for original sin, until she neglected the problem of infant salvation altogether and comforted herself with a constantly attenuating doctrine of infant punishment. If infants are so well off without Christ, there is little impulse to consider whether they may not be in Christ.

The Reformed churches could not hope to work out the problem free from menace from the perennial enemy. The crisis came in the form of the Remonstrant controversy. The anthropology of the Remonstrants was distinctly semi-Pelagian, and on that basis no solid advance was possible. Nor was the matter helped by their postulation of a universal atonement which lost in intention as much as it gained in extension. Infants

may have very little to be saved from, but their salvation from even it cannot be wrought by an atonement which only purchases for them the opportunity for salvation—an opportunity of which they cannot avail themselves, however much the natural power of free choice is uninjured by the fall, for the simple reason that they die infants ; while God cannot be held to make them, without their free choice, partakers of this atonement without an admission of that sovereign discrimination among men which it was the very object of the whole Remonstrant theory to exclude. It is not strange that the Remonstrants looked with some favor on the Romish theory of *pœna damni*. Though the doctrine of the salvation of all infants dying in infancy became one of their characteristic tenets, it had no logical basis in their scheme of faith, and their proclamation of it could have no direct effect in working out the problem. Indirectly it had a twofold effect. On the one hand, it retarded the true course of the development of doctrine, by leading those who held fast to biblical teaching on original sin and particular election, to oppose the doctrine of the salvation of all dying in infancy, as if it were necessarily inconsistent with these teachings. Probably Calvinists were never so



united in affirming that some infants, dying such, are reprobated, as in the height of the Remonstrant controversy. On the other hand, so far as the doctrine of the salvation of all infants, dying such, was accepted by the anti-Remonstrants, it tended to bring in with it, in more or less measure, the other tenets with which it was associated in their teaching, and thus to lead men away from the direct path along which alone the solution was to be found. Wesleyan Arminianism brought only an amelioration, not a thoroughgoing correction of the faults of Remonstrantism. The theoretical postulation of original sin and natural inability, corrected by the gift to all men of a gracious ability on the basis of universal atonement in Christ, was a great advance. But it left the salvation of infants dying in infancy logically as unaccounted for as original Remonstrantism. *Ex hypothesi*, the universal atonement could bring to these infants only what it brought to all others, and this was something short of salvation—viz., an ability to improve the grace given alike to all. But infants, dying such, cannot improve grace; and therefore, it would seem, cannot be saved, unless we suppose a special gift to them over and above what is given to other men—a supposition subversive

at once of the whole Arminian contention. The assertion of the salvation of all infants dying in infancy, although a specially dear tenet of Wesleyan Arminianism, remains therefore, as with the earlier Remonstrants, unconformable to the system. The Arminian difficulty, indeed, lies one step further back ; it does not make clear how *any* infant dying in infancy is to be saved.\*

The truth seems to be that there is but one logical outlet for any system of doctrine which suspends the determination of who are to be saved upon any action of man's own will, whether in the use of gracious or natural ability (that is, of course, if it is unwilling to declare infants, dying such, incapable of salvation); and that lies in the extension of "the day of grace" for such into the other world. Otherwise, there will inevitably be brought in covertly, in the salvation of infants, that very sovereignty of God, "irre-

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\* The prevailing view in the Methodist Episcopal Church is probably that infants are all born justified. The difficulties of this view are hinted by a not unfriendly hand in *The Cumberland Presbyterian Review* for January, 1890, p. 113. The best that can be said toward placing the dying infant "in the same essential gracious position as that into which the justified and regenerate adult is brought by voluntary faith," may be read from DR. D. D. WHEDON'S pen in *The Methodist Quarterly Review* for 1883, p. 757. It is inconsequent ; and its consequences are portentous to Arminianism — or shall we say that God does not determine who are to die in infancy ?

sistible" grace and passive receptivity, to deny which is the whole *raison d'être* of these schemes. There are indications that this is being increasingly felt among those who are most concerned ; we have noted it most recently among the Cumberland Presbyterians,\* who, perhaps alone of Christian denominations, have embodied in their confession their conviction that all infants, dying such, are saved. The theory of a probation in the other world for such as have had in this no such probation as to secure from them a decisive choice has come to us from Germany, and bears accordingly a later Lutheran coloring. Its roots are, however, planted in the earliest Lutheran thinking,† and are equally visible in the writings of the early Remonstrants ; its seeds are present, in fact, wherever man's salvation is causally suspended on any act of his own. But the outcome offered by it certainly affords no good reason for affirming that all infants, dying such, are saved. It is not uncommon, indeed, for the advocates of this theory to suppose the present life to be a more favorable opportunity for moral renewal in Christ

\* *Cumberland Presbyterian Review*, July, 1890, p. 369 ; cf. January, 1890, p. 113

† Cf. *e.g.*, ANDREE, *Actis Colloq. Montisbelligart*, p. 447, 448 ; and note BEZA's crushing reply.

than the next.\* Some, no doubt, think otherwise. But in either event what can assure us that *all* will be so renewed? We are ready to accept the subtle argument in Dr. Kedney's valuable work, *Christian Doctrine Harmonized*,† as the best that can be said in the premises; for although Dr. Kedney denies the theory of "future probation" in general, he shares the general "ethical" view on which it is founded, and projects the salvation of infants dying in infancy into the next world on the express ground that they are incapable of choice here. He assures us that they will surely welcome the knowledge of God's love in Christ there. But we miss the grounds of assurance, on the fundamental postulates of the scheme. If the choice of these infants, while it remains free, can be made thus certain *there*, why not the same for all men *here*? And if their choice is thus made certain, is their destiny *determined* by their choice, or by God who makes that choice certain? Assuredly no thoroughfare is open along this path for a consistent doctrine of the salvation of all those that die in infancy. But this seems the only pathway that is consistently open to those, of whatever name, who make man's

\* Cf. *Progressive Orthodoxy*, p. 76.

† Vol. ii., pp. 91 *sq.*

own undetermined act the determining factor in his salvation.\*

8. The drifts of doctrine which have come before us in this rapid sketch may be reduced to three generic views. 1. There is what may be called the *ecclesiastical doctrine*, according to which the Church, in the sense of an outwardly organized body, is set as the sole fountain of salvation in the midst of a lost world; the Spirit of God and eternal life are its peculiar endowments, of which none can partake save through communion with it. Accordingly to all those departing this life in infancy, baptism, the gateway to the Church, is the condition of salvation. 2. There is what may be called the *gracious doctrine*, according to which the visible Church is not set in the world to determine by the gift of its ordinances who are to be saved, but as the harbor of refuge for the saints, to gather into its bosom those whom God himself in his infinite love has selected in Christ Jesus before the foundation of the world in whom to show the wonders of his grace. Men accordingly are not saved be-

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\* The Rev. D. FISK HARRIS, himself a Congregational minister (*Calvinism Contrary to God's Word and Man's Moral Nature*, p. 107), tells us that a view not essentially differing from Dr Kedney's "seems to be the prevailing view of Congregationalists." This he states thus: "All infants become moral agents after death. Exercising a holy choice, they 'are saved on the ground of the atonement and by regeneration.'"

cause they are baptized, but they are baptized because they are saved, and the failure of the ordinance does not argue the failure of the grace. Accordingly to all those departing this life in infancy, inclusion in God's saving purpose alone is the condition of salvation; we may be able to infer this purpose from manifest signs, or we may not be able to infer it, but in any case it cannot fail. 3. There is what may be called the *humanitarian doctrine*, according to which the determining cause of man's salvation is his own free choice, under whatever variety of theories as to the source of his power to exercise this choice, or the manner in which it is exercised. Accordingly whether one is saved or not is dependent not on baptism or on inclusion in God's hidden purpose, but on the decisive activity of the soul itself.

The first of these doctrines is characteristic of the early, the mediæval, and the Roman churches, not without echoes in those sections of Protestantism which love to think of themselves as "more historical" or less radically reformed than the rest. The second is the doctrine of the Reformed churches. These two are not opposed to one another in their most fundamental conception, but are related rather as an earlier misapprehen-

sion and a later correction of the same basal doctrine. The phrase *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* is the common property of both ; they differ only in their understanding of the "ecclesia," whether of the visible or invisible church. The third doctrine, on the other hand, has cropped out ever and again in every age of the Church, has dominated whole sections of it and whole ages, but has never, in its purity, found expression in any great historic confession or exclusively characterized any age. It is, in fact, not a section of Church doctrine at all, but an intrusion into Christian thought from without. In its purity it has always and in all communions been accounted heresy ; and only as it has been more or less modified and concealed among distinctively Christian adjuncts has it ever made a position for itself in the Church. Its fundamental conception is the antipodes of that of the other doctrines.

The first step in the development of the doctrine of infant salvation was taken when the Church laid the foundation which from the beginning has stood firm, *Infants too are lost members of a lost race, and only those savingly united to Christ are saved*. In its definition of what infants are thus savingly united to Christ the early Church missed

the path. All that are brought to him in baptism, was its answer. Long ages passed before the second step was taken in the correct definition. The way was prepared indeed by Augustine's doctrine of grace, by which salvation was made dependent on the dealings of God with the individual heart. But his eyes were holden that he should not see it. It was reserved to Zwingli to proclaim it clearly, *All the elect children of God, who are regenerated by the Spirit who worketh when, and where, and how he pleaseth.* The sole question that remains is, Who of those that die in infancy are the elect children of God? Tentative answers were given. The children of God's people, said some. The children of God's people, with such others as his love has set upon to call, said others. *All those that die in infancy* said others still; and to this reply Reformed thinking and not Reformed thinking only, but in one way or another, logically or illogically, the thinking of the Christian world has been converging. Is it the Scriptural answer? It is as legitimate and as logical an answer as any, on Reformed postulates. It is legitimate on no other postulates. If it be really conformable to the Word of God it will stand; and the third step in the development of the doctrine of



infant salvation is already taken. But if it stand, it can stand on no other theological basis than the Reformed. If all infants dying in infancy are saved, it is certain that they are not saved by or through the ordinances of the visible Church (for they have not received them), nor through their own improvement of a grace common to all men (for they are incapable of activity) ; it can only be through the almighty operation of the Holy Spirit who worketh when and where and how he pleaseth, through whose ineffable grace the Father gathers these little ones to the home he has prepared for them.





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