THE SACRAMENTAL PRINCIPLE

An Anglican Liberal Evangelical scholar, Canon J. G. Simpson, remarks: "It has become almost a commonplace to talk about the sacramental principle, and to argue from it to the Christian Sacraments, as though their meaning, purpose, and value were at once determined by their reference to it, and all differences of opinion concerning them were dependent on its acceptance or rejection", and he goes on to say, "it affords little assistance to the interpretation of the sacred rites of Christianity, if we invert the order of things and apply a principle, the very name of which is derived from the sacraments, to the illumination of the sacraments themselves".[1] Such a judgment seems to rule out as unnecessary an exposition of what is called the sacramental principle as a preliminary to our study of the Christian Sacraments. Whatever may be our personal views respecting the origin, nature, and functions of the Sacraments, we who belong to the Evangelical Tradition are agreed that the significance of these rites does not depend upon any vague principle which may appear operative in the universe at large, but that the significance and value of the Sacraments are derived from their relation to the Gospel which centres in the Person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ. As Dr. Carnegie Simpson puts it: "It is the evangelical in them that makes them sacramental."[2] This is a truth which is either overlooked or minimised by many representatives of the "Catholic" tradition who maintain that sacramentalism is rooted in the constitution of the universe, and who regard the sacramental principle as the determinative factor in religion. Moreover, writers of this school are not always clear and consistent in their definition of the sacramental principle, and they incline to stress analogies which, however interesting in themselves, can scarcely be said to have a direct bearing upon the question of the Christian Sacraments. Even Bishop Paget, a leading exponent of Sacramental theory, declares: "It ought to have been acknowledged

[1] *Catholic Evangelicalism*, 106. [2] *The Evangelical Church Catholic*, 83.

all along that the name was being used with different and shifting meanings."

But despite the objections which might be raised, some consideration of the sacramental principle may not be altogether irrelevant to our special topic. Though the word "sacramental" has been derived from the Christian Sacraments, it has now acquired a wider connotation and application. Therefore, before proceeding to consider Christian Sacramentalism in particular, I want us to look at the subject in its more general aspects.

What then is meant by the sacramental principle, or, as some might prefer to call it, the sacramental idea? Briefly and broadly speaking, it is this: Spiritual realities are mediated through material forms; or, conversely, material forms are the expressions, symbols, and vehicles of spiritual realities. Says Dr. A. J. Tait: "Wherever that which is physical is the instrument whereby there is effected any kind of communication of that which is mental or spiritual, there we are now prepared to find illustration of the working of the sacramental principle. It matters not whether the process takes the form of the expression of mind, or of the revelation of will, or of the imparting of moral energy, or of the communication of spiritual power: that which counts is the fact that in some way and for some purpose that which is physical and material is the instrument of that which is mental and spiritual."[1] He is careful, however, to limit the sphere in which the principle operates, and cannot "recognise any operation of the Sacramental Principle in processes which do not involve personal relationship, but are merely the communication of invisible and impersonal forces through visible means." Thus he would define the Sacramental Principle "as the dependence of mind upon matter for the most part of its contacts, whether of apprehension and reception or of communication and expression." But he insists that the general principle must not be regarded as "determining the purpose and mode of operation in any particular application of it", and especially must this limitation be borne in mind when we seek to relate the Christian Sacraments to the general Sacramental Principle.[2]

Taking the term "Sacramental Principle" in the broadest sense, we may find illustrations of its operation in Nature, in

[1] *The Nature and Functions of the Sacraments*, 1. [2] ibid. 2.

Social Life, and in Religious Beliefs generally. These vary in their significance and value, but they all show that in some way outward things are expressive of spiritual content.

I

1. *The Sacramental Principle in the Natural Order.*

For convenience we are accustomed to draw a distinction between the " natural world " and the " spiritual world ", but the distinction is not absolute. From the Theistic point of view these terms merely represent two aspects of one Divine Order through which the Creator-Spirit whom we call God expresses Himself and makes Himself known. Christian Theism maintains that the ultimate Reality is God, and it conceives of God as a conscious, intelligent, and purposive Personality who *wills* to express Himself through what we may call the " relative " reality of our universe. It rules out both Deism and Pantheism, and leads to a monistic conception of the universe. God is both transcendent and immanent, neither separated from the universe nor confined within it, God is Spirit—the Source from which all things are derived. Because everything proceeds from God, matter as well as energy must be thought of as spiritual. There can be no sharp cleavage between spirit and matter, between God and the universe. Matter is but the expression and instrument of spirit. As Dr. Leonard Hodgson puts it: " That stream of energy which constitutes the spatial-temporal universe is, *taken as a whole*, a spiritual reality because, in itself and in all its emergent embodiments, sub-human and human, it is the expression of the intelligent purpose of God ",[1] or, to use the striking phrase of Athanasius, the universe is the " Body of God ". There we have expressed the sacramental view of creation. " The material universe (is) not something alien and opposed to the spiritual, to God, but something deliberately brought into being to *express* the *spiritual*."[2] In and through the universe God expresses Himself and makes Himself known. As Paul says: " For the invisible things of him since the creation are clearly seen, being perceived through the things that are made, even his everlasting power and divinity " (Romans i. 20).

This conception of Creation implies that there must be

[1] *Essays in Christian Philosophy*, 107.
[2] T. G. Platten, *Christianity and Mental Healing*, 46.

minds or spirits which can apprehend God's self-revelation, and in man, the crown of creation on earth, we have a being who is also conscious, intelligent, and purposive. On his physical side man is part of the so-called "natural order", but on his, mental and spiritual side he is related to God the Creator-Spirit and is himself an embodiment of God's spiritual purpose. "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. . . . And God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him" (Genesis i. 26-27). Thus man is essentially a spiritual being and his body is the instrument through which he expresses his spiritual character. Says Professor Hodgson: "A man's natural body becomes his spiritual body by being used as the organ for the expression of his intelligently purposive life. The body must be an organ appropriate to the environment in which the life is to be expressed. If God is to fulfil His purpose of communicating to man a share in His own life, that purpose must find an embodiment through which to express itself in this world."[1] We cannot conceive in this life of human personality apart from a body, and the body which God has given him in this world is so wonderfully constituted as to become the means by which man is able to apprehend spiritual realities. Man himself is a sacrament of God.

Now to such a being Nature may become instinct with spiritual meaning. "The universe", says Archbishop Temple, "is a Divine utterance, a form of speech." Through Nature God speaks to man enabling him to understand something of His "everlasting power and divinity", for by "the things that are made" the "invisible things since the creation are clearly seen". Says Dr. Dodd, "There is no other passage where Paul so explicitly recognizes 'natural religion' as a fundamental trait of human nature".[2] Not that all men alike are able to hear and understand the Divine utterance, for much depends upon the degree of culture attained, and still more upon a man's spiritual response. But it remains true that there are men, such as Wordsworth, who through the self-expression of God in Nature attain to a real communion with Him. Wordsworth's appreciation of Nature was not aesthetic but spiritual. His response was the response of faith, and he became conscious of a Presence which enriched his life. "And whoever draws from great Nature her testimony to the living God is

[1] Op. cit., 109. [2] *Romans* (Moffat Commentary), 24.

not simply uplifted by a symbolism which points to a reality that lies outside the limits of the natural order; he is also refreshed and strengthened because, within that order, he meets with God."[1]

2. *The Sacramental Principle in Social Life.*

As we have already observed, man, created in the image of God, is essentially a spiritual being, but his inner life of thought and feeling is conditioned by his material environment. It is from the material world that he derives the organism by which he is enabled to apprehend and establish contacts with what lies outside himself. Moreover, man is a social being, and he can live a full life only in correspondence with his fellows. For such social intercourse he is dependent upon his senses which convey to his brain the impressions received from external objects. Perceptual experience is the foundation of his intellectual life. Through what he sees, hears, touches, feels, he forms his judgments and learns to adapt himself to his environment. Thus the association of mental attitude with physical action is indispensable to human existence such as it is in this life. Man's "mind . . . demands the use of his body for the processes alike of apprehension and of communication".[2]

Arising from this necessity, and as the result of social co-operation, there is the development of language which is the medium through which thought works and expresses itself. But this power of speech is dependent upon an adequate physical equipment—the vocal chords, the tongue, the lips. These are the physical media for the utterance of those sounds which communicate ideas. Correspondingly, for the reception of the ideas expressed a man is dependent upon his ears. Thus we see how man's intellectual life is physiologically conditioned. It is by material means he conveys his thoughts, including the highest and most beautiful conceptions, and gives assurances of friendship, love, and fidelity to others; and by material means also he receives the same from others. Moreover, language is primarily symbolic. Its symbols are words, which originally were not abstractions but physical analogues, similes, and metaphors. And words still derive their greatest practical value from their concreteness and figurativeness. Language is the basis of human relationships. Man's power of thought lifts him above the brute creation and enables him to know

[1] J. K. Mozley, *The Gospel Sacraments*, 17. [2] Tait, op. cit., 10.

himself, his fellows, and God, while the ability to communicate his thoughts promotes mutual assistance and edification. Language is sacramental.

But important as language is, the spoken word does not provide an all-sufficient form of self-expression and communication. We know how words and actions are often set over against each other as though they represented different categories and not modes of expression. Actions, it is said, speak louder than words. Words lacking confirmation in action are subject to discount. The senses of sight, touch, feeling may provide assurances more satisfying than hearing. So we find that custom and law decide what physical actions shall be regarded as confirmatory of verbal assurances. In this respect we may instance the kiss as the expression of love, the handshake as the sign of friendship or good-will, the giving of a ring as the token of marriage, the signing of a testament as a proof of intention, the sealing of a document as an attestation of a gift or a contract. Indeed, " This principle of embodying attitudes, mental processes, and words in action (often symbolical in their form) for the purpose of confirmation, and in *ordered* actions for the purpose of social recognition and validity, permeates the whole of human life "[1].

Now while all symbols are not necessarily sacramental, it is not easy to draw a sharp distinction and state precisely when the symbol becomes sacramental. In the instances just cited, the sacramental significance of the acts may be more or less apparent, for the kiss, the handshake, the giving of the marriage-ring, the sealing of a deed, are *effectual* signs, i.e., they are instrumental in producing certain effects upon human character and relationships. On the one side they intensify the attitude or emotion which they express; on the other they produce the assurance of faith.

But objects as well as actions may be symbolic when they are associated with the deep and moving realities of life. These objects may be quite commonplace—a flag, a picture, a portrait, a vestment, etc., but in special circumstances they acquire a value which is sacramental. To the patriot or the soldier the flag of his country is not a variegated piece of cloth, but the symbol of all that his nation stands for, and in times of emergency it calls forth his spirit of devotion and loyalty and stimulates

[1] Tait, op. cit., 11.

him to deeds of self-sacrifice and heroism. Similarly with a portrait or a photograph. During Shackleton's expedition to the Antarctic he and his companions found themselves in such a perilous situation that it became necessary for them to abandon all impedimenta, including a large part of their supplies. Personal possessions were relinquished, but all retained their photographs of dear ones at home. These proved veritable gifts of life, calling forth the energy and determination needed to overcome their peril. Another interesting and apposite illustration is furnished by Harold Begbie. A Salvationist, beset by sudden temptation, found his resistance broken. In shame and penitence he hurried home and donned his red jersey, the symbol of his religious profession. He now felt a different man. He must be true to what that jersey represented. By Divine grace he was henceforth enabled to withstand the allurement which had momentarily caused his defection.

3. *The Sacramental Principle in Religion.*

The origins of religion as a matter of History are lost in obscurity, but from the beginnings of his conscious life man has faced the problem of relating himself to his environment —a world not only of visible and tangible objects, but also of mysterious powers which he could not explain but which he felt to be very real. Dr. John Murphy considers from an evolutionary standpoint that the first observable form of religion is found in the tendency of primitive man " to see life or something analogous to it in all things around him "—" the dim sense of a ' life ' like his own, a ' power ' like his own, a ' will ' like his own, in things outside himself." He quotes Dr. Washburn Hopkins: " There can be no clear understanding of the foundation of religion without the recognition of the fact that man has passed through a stage where he fails to discriminate between matter and spirit. . . . In the thought of the lowest savage, matter and spiritual power are so interrelated that there is no body without conscious power and no spirit without body (History of Religions, 17)."[1] On a higher level of thought we have what anthropologists call Animism in which man has learned to distinguish between matter and spirit, body and soul. Here spirits are conceived as existing apart from objects, but they may still inhabit them and are able to enter and leave

[1] *Primitive Man*, 145, 146.

them at will. But whether permanently or intermittently possessed by spirits these material objects are regarded as powerful, and as such are able to influence human life either for good or ill. Hence primitive man felt the necessity of establishing good relations with the "powers that be".

It has been said that "the variety of living and inanimate objects in which man has from time to time detected the super-natural is positively bewildering"[1]. The object may be a particular animal or species of animal, a tree or a river; or again, a stone or a piece of wood, to which the sacred life is supposed to be transferred; but whatever it is, the object is venerated on account of the supernatural power or personality indwelling it. Much scorn has been poured out on the heathen who "bows down to wood or stone", but as a matter of fact the object is not wood or stone to the worshipper: he regards it as living—a Real Presence. The fetish is in his esteem both a symbol and a vehicle of spiritual vitality and power. The savage who carries it wherever he goes believes its presence is a source of strength to himself.

In these beliefs we may have a source of sacrificial and ceremonial rites which have characterized religion in its higher as well as lower forms. Sacrifices of all kinds, blood-covenants, lustral washings, sacred meals, and ritual worship, seem to have one underlying purpose—to ensure the presence and interest of the supernatural Power or Deity, to enter into communion with the deity and receive power from him. And in so far as these acts bring to the worshipper a consciousness of union and strength they may be called sacramental.

II

The illustrations drawn from Nature, Social Life, and Low-grade Religion show how widespread is the application of a Sacramental principle, but as already indicated the general principle is not determinative as far as the purpose and mode of operation in a particular application are concerned. Christian Sacramentalism cannot be regarded as merely a sequence in the development of human culture. But admitted that in the Divine Order spiritual things are expressed and mediated through material channels and that sacramentalism meets a deep need of human life, it would be surprising if when we

[1] D. C. Owen, *The Infancy of Religion*, 30.

come to the highest form of religion no provision were made to meet this need and that the sacramental had no place in Christianity. The purpose of Christianity is to make God known to men, so that they may realize communion with Him under the conditions of ordinary life. When we look at the Christian Revelation we see that it is shot through and through with the sacramental. In the economy of Divine Grace there is something corresponding to what we have called Sacramentalism in Nature, Society, and Religious Cultus.

1 *The Sacramental Man Christ Jesus.*

Christianity is Christocentric. Everything in it derives its significance and value from its relation to Jesus Christ in Whom God has been pleased to reveal Himself. In Christ we have the final and complete self-revelation of God. He is the Incarnate Word of God: " In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God . . . And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld his glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father), full of grace and truth " (John i. 1, 14). Before the advent of Christ God had spoken in many forms and fashions, but in the " fulness of time " He spoke to mankind in a unique way through His Son born of a woman. What does this mean ? " There are to-day", says A. G. Hebert, " two quite different views of the Incarnation: the one that while there was a preparation for the Incarnation in history, the Incarnation itself is the breaking-in of the transcendent God on the course of history, or in eschatological language the coming of the Son of Man to judge and save; the other that the whole process can be described in evolutionary terms, as a progressive illumination of mankind which reaches its highest level in Jesus Christ."[1] Which is right ? Unhesitatingly I would say, the former. The Incarnation marks a Divine intervention—the breaking-in of the Eternal and Infinite Spirit into the natural order, so that He might reveal His own character and purpose and make it possible for man made in His image to enjoy unhindered fellowship with Him. As Dr. Peake says: " In Jesus Christ we have a revelation of the inmost nature of God. If Jesus is the Son of God, then in His earthly life we have a translation of God's moral and spiritual character out of the speech

[1] *Memorandum on the Archbishops' Commission on Christian Doctrine*, 20.

of eternity into the speech of time. We no longer have a mere description of God with all the inadequacy of human language, but we are face to face with God Himself living within the limits of our humanity His own perfect life."[1] Our Lord's humanity was real, not a semblance; His body was of flesh and blood like that of every other son of man. "The Word became *flesh*." Professor G. H. C. Macgregor emphasizes the use of σάρξ (flesh) instead of σῶμα (body). σῶμα "means merely a 'body' tangible to sense: σάρξ for John is always that realm of the material, opposed to that of the spirit, into which the Logos descended to raise men to Himself," so that through union with Himself they might attain to "eternal life"[2]. Like other New Testament writers John regards Christ's Mission as redemptive, but to him the Incarnation is the pivotal fact of the Gospel.

But the point which now concerns us is that in the highest and greatest of God's revelations of Himself the medium of the spiritual was physical. In the Incarnation we see the supreme example of the sacramental principle that the spiritual finds expression through the material. Jesus Christ, our Incarnate Saviour and Lord, is the supreme Sacrament. Through Him God makes known and conveys His redemptive grace and love. He is "the image of the invisible God" through Whom God is made manifest. "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." It was for us men and for our salvation that Christ became man, and in His Life and Work consummated on the Cross we see God's purpose. "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself." Says Canon Quick: "To interpret the life of Jesus as the supreme sacrament is to show that in this outward, historical life lived in space and time there is both uniquely expressed and uniquely operative the highest purpose of goodness which all life and all nature are destined to fulfil. That purpose is in its origin and ultimate reality divine. Its self-revelation or expression in Christ is affirmed by the doctrine of the Incarnation; its instrumental operation in Christ towards the attainment of its end is affirmed by the doctrine of the Atonement."[3]

2. *The Sacramental Society: The Church.*

In the "days of His flesh" Jesus gathered a company of disciples to carry on His work after His departure and

[1] *Christianity—Its Nature and Truth*, 209. [2] *Eucharistic Origins*, 238.
[3] *The Christian Sacraments*, 57.

promised His continued Presence by the Holy Spirit. This apostolic fellowship was the nucleus of the Church which Paul describes as the Body of Christ. The Church is a Divine Society which owes its existence not to any human agency, but to the creative will of the Living Christ. It is this fact which differentiates the Church from every other institution or association of men. "The Church", says Dr. Forsyth, "is not made by man. It is no creature either of human sympathy, or of voluntary association, even though these give it a local and practical form. It is not put together by consents, contracts, or affinities. It is a new creation of God in the Holy Spirit, a spiritual organism in which we find our soul".[1] The Church was born from above not from below, not of the will of man but of the will of God, not of human convenience but of Divine purpose. In this Divine Fellowship the Holy Spirit, the Source of grace and power is permanently immanent. That is surely the meaning of Pentecost! "At Pentecost, the Divine Life, the Spirit of God, actually passed in a supreme degree into those who, because all the conditions of knowledge, of forgiveness, of faith, had been fulfilled, were now capable of receiving that Life and entering into fellowship with God and with one another."[2]

Sometimes the Church is spoken of as "the extension of the Incarnation". It is a term beloved by sacerdotalists and consequently held in suspicion if not dislike by many evangelicals. Yet the phrase does represent a great truth. It reminds us that the Christ who was born in Bethlehem and crucified under Pontius Pilate also rose again from the dead and ever lives as our Kinsman Redeemer. We do not worship a dead Christ but a Living Christ who by His Spirit indwells His Church and bestows upon the members of His Body the riches of His grace. The Pauline description of the Church as the Body of Christ is more than a mere metaphor: it expresses a spiritual reality—the Oneness of Christ and His Church. "It represents, so far as a concrete and visible thing can represent the abstract and the invisible, the relations and functions of the community alike within itself and in relation to its Invisible Head."[3] For the Church is a moral creation, a redeemed fellowship, sustaining a vital union with Christ. It is this union which gives the Church its essential character as a Divine

[1] *The Church and the Sacraments*, 31. [2] H. S. Gooding in *Liberal Evangelicalism*, 149. [3] C. Anderson Scott.

Society distinguished from all other societies. The Church is not a mere institution but a spiritual organism in which Christ dwells and through which He continues His work. As members of this Church believers share a common life, are energised by one Spirit, and are called to a common service. It is the Presence of Christ which sustains, quickens, and empowers the Church which is His Body. No Christian can live his life in isolation, but only in the Christian Community created by the Spirit and sustained by the Spirit. This is the sacramental conception of the Church. Christ is God's sacramental gift to His Church, and the Presence of Christ makes the fellowship sacramental.

3. *The Sacramental Cultus: The Christian Sacraments.*

The history of religions shows that man's religious feelings and beliefs find embodiment in outward rites and ceremonies. This is to be explained by man's constitution as both a physical and a spiritual being. These external rites do not themselves constitute religion any more than the physical body constitutes the man, but they are the expressions of man's deepest thoughts and emotions. In themselves they are useless performances, but when suffused with spiritual meaning they not only promote but also safeguard religion. When the forms of religion perish, religion itself is imperilled, for it can never exist on a purely subjective basis. Even among those groups which make little of external rites we find that they are compelled to formulate practices which are ritualistic. Says Professor A. E. Taylor: " The curious thing is that, after every reaction towards simplification, the same development seems regularly to begin again. The ' reform ' which started as a ' return to nature ' commonly ends in the adoption of a new conventional ceremonial, often less complex and usually less aesthetically rich than the old, but equally rigid and as little spontaneous. . . . Ritual as such is neither beautiful, nor pompous, nor glowing; it may be bald, ugly, drab, without ceasing to be ritual. . . . Every human social activity inevitably tends to develop its own conventions, and so to create a ritual for itself."[1] This applies to religion as to any other form of social activity. From this tendency the Salvationist or the Quaker is no more exempt than the Romanist.

Christianity, like other positive religions, has its institutional life which is embodied in the Church, the fellowship of

[1] *The Faith of a Moralist*, II, 246, 247.

persons living in a material world and limited by physical conditions. If it is to maintain correspondence with its earthly environment it must have its outward forms. Christianity is a sacramental religion and all its institutions and rites have a sacramental character as expressing the corporate life, worship, and service of the Christian community. Prayer, Praise, Preaching, Sacred Rites, Ministry, are all sacramental acts intended to express and convey the grace of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Different Christian groups have their special emphases, but all are united in their desire to glorify God and to realise His Presence and Grace.

Most groups within the Church ascribe spiritual significance and value to sacramental ordinances. In "Catholic"[1] circles stress is laid upon the Seven Sacraments, viz., Baptism, the Eucharist, Confirmation, Holy Orders, Penance, Matrimony, and Extreme Unction, while Protestants generally regard the first two only as specifically the Sacraments of the Gospel, because they believe them to be Dominically instituted, deriving their significance and value from their relation to the Gospel of God's Redemptive Purpose and Work. Article XXV of the Church of England states: "There are two Sacraments ordained of Christ our Lord in the Gospel, that is to say, Baptism, and the Supper of the Lord. Those five commonly called Sacraments, that is to say, Confirmation, Penance, Orders, Matrimony, and Extreme Unction, are not to be counted Sacraments of the Gospel, being such as have grown partly of the corrupt following of the Apostles, partly are states of life allowed in the Scriptures; but yet have not like nature of Sacraments with Baptism, and the Lord's Supper, for that they have not any visible sign or ceremony ordained of God."

With the exception of the Society of Friends, the Salvation Army, and a few small groups, Evangelical Christians have accepted and observed the two Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper as of Divine institution. Into the vexed question whether or not our Lord Himself ordained these rites as of permanent obligation I am not now concerned. Sufficient to say with Dr. James Denney, "There is nothing in Christianity more primitive than the sacraments". From Apostolic times these have had a place in the economy and practice of the Church, and experience has proved their value for faith and

[1] In the Eastern Church the Seven Sacraments were not definitely recognised until the sixteenth century, and even to-day some "Orthodox" theologians are doubtful of those other than Baptism and the Eucharist.

devotion. Says Emil Brunner: "Without the Sacraments the Church would long ago have disappeared, and with the passing of the Church would have gone also Christian faith and the Bible. The Sacraments are the Divinely given flying buttresses which save the Church from collapse."[1]

But while most Evangelical Christians have included the Sacraments in their *cultus* they have differed widely in the significance they have attached to them. Some retain them as rites but allow them little value either objective or subjective. Others regard *them as useful reminders of central Gospel truths but deny that* their effect is more than psychological, inducing a certain frame of mind in the worshipper. Others, again, believe that they are real channels of grace to the devout recipient. Here we come up against the distinction between rite and symbol on the one hand and sacrament on the other. A rite or symbol derives its significance from the human agents who take part in its performance or recognition, but a sacrament implies that something is conveyed—that "God offers something to man"—something which is received by faith on the part of the responsive participant. "It speaks not to the imagination but to faith; and the faith to which it speaks is faith in God, that He is true to His own appointment, and that what by the symbol He indicates Himself as doing, that He does. . . . The sacrament is not only significant—it is also efficacious."[2] Through the material sign God bestows grace on the believing soul. The Sacraments are God's acts not man's—not magical effects produced by human agents but means whereby God takes action upon the created spirit. As The Westminster Confession declares: "There is in every sacrament a spiritual relation, or sacramental union, between the sign and the thing signified; whence it comes to pass, that the name and effects of the one are attributed to the other."[3] The elements themselves, the water, and the bread and the wine, are not sacraments. These have no intrinsic efficacy to produce spiritual effects; they are but instruments. Nevertheless these material elements are necessary to the sacramental act. The spiritual effect is conditioned by faith on the part of the recipient, but where there is faith they are efficacious means of grace. "When the Sacraments are rightly observed

[1] *Our Faith*, 127–128.
[2] H. J. Wotherspoon, *Religious Values in the Sacraments*, 21.
[3] Cap. xxvii. 2. Cf. *Larger Catechism*, 163.

by believers in Christ in the exercise of faith, love, and devotion, then they receive and enjoy not only the outward sign, but also the grace signified by it; and in all cases that grace is really offered to all who receive the sacraments."[1] God's grace is not limited by the sacraments, but it is given through them. There is nothing unethical in this positive conception of sacramentalism. Such sacramentalism, as Professor H. A. A. Kennedy says, " is ethical to the core, having its foundations laid in a genuine religious faith. It is no excrescence of primitive superstition, but corresponds to a permanent demand of the human consciousness, the demand that the visible and tangible should be a seal to faith of that which is unseen and eternal "[2]. We cannot separate the Word from the Sacraments, for as Dr. Forsyth puts it, they " are the two great expressions of the Gospel in worship". In the former by audible or written signs, in the latter by visible and tangible signs, God reveals and conveys the power of that Gospel of His redemptive grace and love in Jesus Christ who is our Incarnate Saviour and the Head of that Body which is His Church. As long as the Church endures the Sacraments, like the Word of which they are the complement, will have an abiding value, and according to our faith shall it be done unto us.

Let me close with these significant words of Principal Forsyth, who represents the highest type of Evangelical Sacramentalism: " The Sacraments are not only signs or symbols, but deliberate seals of the loving will and work of Christ for us . . . They not only suggest Him, but they convey Himself to the Church. They deepen the relation between them. They have a positive meaning which He intended. They are not accidental suggestions. They are connected with Him by much more than association. They are more than souvenirs, keepsakes. They are bequests. They are conveyances. And what they mean and bring is of the very essence of what He was and is and willed to be to the Church—its Redeemer and Sanctifier. These love-tokens, these heirlooms, the Church has to guard and use. She has to keep them bright, and not by care only but by use. She must so use them that they shine with their message and not merely by a polish. Like rails, they gleam with traffic which carries value to the soul."[3]

Edinburgh. J. T. HORNSBY.

[1] J. S. Candlish, *The Sacraments*, 25. [2] *St. Paul and the Mystery Religions*, 263.
[3] *The Church and the Sacraments*, 165–166.