

PASTORAL OFFICES

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Pastoral Offices by W. H. Furness

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W. H. FURNESS

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OFFICES**

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BY
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INTRODUCTION

THE distinguishing power, the life and soul of the Religion of Christ, as I make bold to define it, is the spirit of a profound and divine Humanity, which, expressed not in his words alone, but chiefly in his personal, divinely human character, he breathes into the world, and which is manifested more or less impressively in all the different forms that the Religion springing from him has been made to assume.

Jesus neither instituted any religious forms nor, it is important to observe, did he forbid any. Modes of thought and observance were left to appear, and to vary, as they needs must in different times and places, only they were not to be put above or on a level with the first two great commandments. Whatever doctrines or rituals, however they may differ, tend to enlarge the heart towards God and Man, are all equally invested with Christian authority.

BAPTISM

is universally regarded as an initiatory rite. But no word of Christ's authorizes this view of it. He never baptized any one; nor in the particular instructions he gave to his disciples as to their offices as heralds of the kingdom of heaven is there any mention of Baptism. Once only, in the last chapter of Mark, he is said to have declared that whosoever believeth *and is baptized* shall be saved. But, not to mention that the closing verses of the second Gospel are of doubtful authenticity, it is surely far more probable that the words "*and is baptized*" have crept from the margin into the text than that only on this one occasion Jesus required baptism. John the Baptizer said that, while his own influence was symbolized by water which cleanses only the outward man, the influence of him who was to come would be signified by the more searching, penetrating power of wind and fire, separating the good from the evil, even as these elements separate the chaff from the wheat, destroying the evil and garnering the good. John's heart had burned within him in communion with his great kinsman.

Baptism of infants and of adults may yet be used as a recognition of the sacred relationship of man to the Infinite Father of all.

THE LORD'S SUPPER

So also this Commemorative Service is held to be of an initiatory character. Of the four Gospels, only one contains any word of its being enjoined as a formal observance. In Luke's Gospel alone do we read, "This do in remembrance of me." Were it deliberately designed by Jesus as a religious form, it is unaccountable that not a hint of his so intending it is to be found elsewhere in the Gospels.

My conviction is that, as a purely commemorative service, it has a deeper foundation than formal institution. It sprang from the very heart of human nature. Bear in mind how instinctively men are prompted to cherish and commemorate remarkable events, and you will see that it could not have been otherwise than that the last time that the disciples of Jesus ate and drank with him, and his startling allusion to his body to be broken like the bread of which they were partaking, and to his blood to be