

**A LETTER TO THE  
ARCHBISHOP  
OF CANTERBURY**

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A Letter to the Archbishop of Canterbury by Henry Phillpotts

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**HENRY PHILLPOTTS**

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A L E T T E R

TO THE

ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY.

BY THE

BISHOP OF EXETER.

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LONDON:

JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET.

1850.

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## A L E T T E R,

§c. §c.

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MY LORD ARCHBISHOP,

I ADDRESS your Grace under circumstances the most unusual, and with feelings the most painful. In the whole history of the Church of England I am not aware that anything of a similar kind has ever before occurred;—that the Primate of all England has ever before thrown himself upon the judgment of the world as the writer of a controversial book: if he have, the statements contained in it must have been so manifestly accordant with the doctrines of the Church, that they carried with them the universal assent of Churchmen. Your Grace has been pleased to descend from the exalted position in which your predecessors were wisely, I think, content to stand. You have deemed it your duty to deal publicly with “a subject,” of “which” you say that it “has recently become a matter of distressing controversy”—and you will not think it strange if one of the parties in that controversy shall animadvert on the manner in which you deal with it. Furthermore you say that you “think it right, *therefore*, to call attention to what you have written concerning the grace of Baptism.”

My Lord, I obey your call. I am about to give my atten-

tion to what you have written on this great subject—and as, in executing your purpose, you have detailed only certain statements “concerning the grace of Baptism,” which are to be found in a single book—the book recently republished by you—not including statements on the same subject made by you in other works, since you have been a Bishop—I shall endeavour in part to supply this deficiency: but, meanwhile, I shall give my first attention to those matters to which your Grace specially invites it—the statements contained in your new book from p. 150 to p. 165. They are indeed statements not new to me. For more than thirty years I have been accustomed to regard them not only with full assent—but also with great, though of late melancholy, gratification—melancholy gratification, I say, for they present a noble contrast to the lower views on the same high subject which your Grace has for some years adopted.

Of this change your Grace does not seem to be conscious; and so I may hope, that although you have been in some way led to use uncertain and perplexing language on this great doctrine, you still hold the same faith which you once enunciated in such clear and instructive statements. I say that your Grace does not seem *conscious* of any change. For you make no allusion, in your new edition, to the additions and omissions which render the general tone of the chapter “on Grace,” in which these statements occur, very different from that which it exhibited in your original work. That work, when it first came out in the year 1815, excited very general attention, and obtained not less general applause. But no part of it gave more general satisfaction than this very chapter iv. “on Grace”—because in it you presented the Church with



certain plain, strong, and edifying declarations of your sentiments on Holy Baptism. Some of those statements, I repeat, still remain: but others of them are, in this new edition, materially altered—others altogether omitted—so that of the whole, the effect is greatly impaired, not only by these omissions, but far more by the insertion of much additional matter, whose whole tendency unhappily is, to dilute and weaken what was originally a strong and uniform expression of Catholic Truth. I cannot adequately express my regret, that now, in your advanced years, and exalted station, you should materially impair and almost contradict the sounder teaching of your earlier years—teaching, through which your Grace's name would have gone down as a benefactor to the Church. The change must have been unconscious; else, with your Grace's known candour, you would have noticed it. If it be said that five and thirty years are a very long time for the opinions of any man to remain altogether unchanged on any subject, I would readily assent—excepting only one single subject—the fundamental articles of his creed. The efficacy of Baptism is such an article.

In your preface to this new edition of your old work, you speak of it as if it were still substantially the same as when it first came from your pen. It will be my painful duty to remark on some most important changes, which, had your Grace been conscious of it, you could not but yourself have pointed to your reader's notice.

And yet I rejoice to begin my extracts with a most valuable passage, which still remains nearly as it stood at first:—

“It is indeed a sufficient confutation of *the doctrine of special grace*, that it [*absolutely nullifies the Sacrament of Baptism*.”]—(These last words are

omitted in 1850—still we continue to read—and rejoice to read—what follows.) “It reduces Baptism to an empty rite, an external mark of admission into the visible Church, attended with no real grace, and therefore conveying no real benefit, nor advancing a person one step towards salvation. But if Baptism is not accompanied with such an effusion of the Holy Spirit towards the inward renewing of the heart, that the person baptized, who, of himself, and of his own nature, could ‘do no good thing,’ by this amendment or regeneration of his nature is enabled to bring forth ‘thirty, or sixty, or a hundred fold,’ ‘giving all diligence to make his calling and election sure,’—if the effect, I say, of Baptism is less than this, what becomes of the distinction made by John, ‘I indeed baptize with water, but He who comes after me shall baptize with the Holy Ghost?’ What becomes of the example of Christ Himself? After his Baptism, *the descent of the Holy Spirit* in a visible form was surely intended to confirm His followers in a belief, that their Baptism would confer upon them a similar gift: and, besides the washing away of their sins, and the remission of the penalty entailed upon the posterity of Adam, would bestow upon them a power enabling them to fulfil the covenant laws of their religion.”

Now here we have a goodly array of catholic truths on the efficacy of this blessed Sacrament.

1. Its *distinctive* blessing, that which separates it from all preceding Baptisms—even that of John, which was a Baptism unto repentance—namely, that it is accompanied with such an *effusion of the Holy Spirit towards the inward renewing of the heart*—that the baptized person has *his nature amended*—that he is *regenerated by the Spirit*.

2. The *evidence* afforded of this great truth by the Baptism of our Lord Himself: for the descent of the Holy Spirit upon Him, after His Baptism, was intended to confirm our belief in this great article of our Faith, that *Baptism confers on us a similar gift*—and bestows on us a power enabling us to fulfil the covenant laws of our religion.

3. Baptism gives [though not as its principal gift] the washing away of our sins, and deliverance from that wrath of God to which, as descendants of Adam, we are all liable by our natural birth—in other words, it gives us justification.

These truths, in full accordance with the teaching of the Catholic Church from St. Paul's days to the present, and in particular of our own Church, as a most pure and apostolic branch of the Catholic—these precious truths, I say, we rejoice still to see thus plainly, clearly, strongly enunciated by your Grace.

We rejoice also to see your Grace state these truths, not merely as held and maintained by yourself, but likewise as required by the Church to be held and maintained by all her ministers and all her sons.

Thus we read at p. 160—

“On the authority of this example (that of St. Paul, Rom. vi. 3, viii. 15; Gal. iii. 26), and of the undeniable practice of the first ages of Christianity, *our Church considers Baptism as conveying Regeneration, instructing us to pray, before Baptism, that the infant ‘may be born again, and made an heir of everlasting salvation;’ and to return thanks, after Baptism, that it hath pleased God to regenerate this infant with his Holy Spirit, and receive him for his own child by adoption.*”

At page 179, after citing, “Go ye and teach all nations, baptizing them,” &c.—

“No preacher, therefore, is authorized either by our Church, or by St. Paul, to leave a doubt on the minds of his hearers, whether they are within the pale of God's favour; but, on the contrary, is bound to enjoin them to seek ‘boldly at the throne of grace’ for power to confirm their faith, and work out their repentance, and live worthily of their high calling.”

At page 183, after citing certain texts from St. Paul—

“I do not pretend, that these passages are strong, or clear, or numerous enough to decide the question; and even if they were more in number, or clearer to the point, it might still be argued, that such exertion or co-operation was the effect of the renewed will. The matter is of less conse-