

**AN ATTEMPT TO ANSWER
THE QUESTION
WHOSE CHILDREN ARE
ENTITLED TO BAPTISM?**

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An Attempt to Answer the Question Whose Children are Entitled to Baptism? by S. A. Van Vranken

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WHOSE CHILDREN ARE EN-
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BY

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PREFATORY REMARKS.

THE importance of the subject discussed in the following chapters will hardly be denied. If it be important that our children be baptized at all, it is important that *all* should be, that are entitled to the ordinance. The question of right has greatly agitated our churches, and notwithstanding the signal defeat that was sustained by the advocates of the exclusive system, in the decision of the Synod of '34, opinions remain unchanged. Many are still grieved that their children are refused a place in the church, while they consider them entitled to that privilege. On the other hand, conscience is pleaded for rejecting them, as if it would be a profanation of holy things to receive them. Nothing can produce uniformity of practice, but uniformity in the principles adopted; and any thing that looks like an approximation to this, must be the result, not of Synodical decisions, but of free and friendly discussion.

Under this conviction, the writer was disposed to commence such a discussion in the columns of the *Christian Intelligencer*. But the *prudent* Editors, fearful of the strife of pens, apprehended inconvenience from the design, and it was abandoned. The subject, however, continued to occupy a portion of attention, and the following essay is the result. It would perhaps be a piece of vanity to anticipate more from its publication, than the calling of the minds of our ministers and people in some degree to the claims of our children. The truth lies somewhere, and although we have no reason to look for entire uniformity of opinion on any subject, yet I see nothing to forbid the hope, that candour, judgment, and the love of truth, applied to the investigation, may do much towards effecting a greater degree of unity on this question, than at present exists.

It is somewhat surprising, that on a subject so important, and on which so much feeling has been enlisted, so little should have been written. It has so happened, that nothing has come under my observation on that side of the

question which I advocate, besides what is contained in the "Magnalia." I have consequently been compelled to pursue my way, without the benefit of those helps, which result to writers from the labours of predecessors in the same cause. This remark is submitted to the consideration of those who may feel the desirableness of greater fulness of argument and illustration, than they will find in the essay. I have done the best I could in the circumstances; and if some one, or more, better qualified to do justice to the cause, should give that completeness to the discussion, which it may be thought I have failed to give, I shall be content to be forgotten; and shall cheerfully join with others in a vote of thanks, to whomsoever shall so defend the cause of our children, that the injustice of refusing them a place in the congregation of the Lord, shall be universally felt, and the practice of rejecting them shall cease from the church.

In support of the opposite view of the question, more has been written. But even here, the great mass of writers on the general subject of infant baptism, appear to have

taken for granted, that none but the children of the truly pious were entitled to be received into the church. This has not been the case with all; and to two of this class I have paid some attention. The high character of the Doctors Wardlaw and Cuyler, entitle them to the unqualified respect and affection of the Christian public. The former I know only from his writings: the latter I know personally, and I esteem it a privilege thus to know him. Placed by the providence of God in a situation to trace his footsteps as a man and a minister, I have more than his public reputation to inspire my affection. He would rebuke me for saying more, and I cannot be satisfied with saying less, than that I could hardly respect myself if I did not love him.

Still, I have spoken of the sentiments of these standard-bearers, as I should have spoken of them, had they proceeded from the mere rank and file of the host of God. And is not this right? Sentiments in philosophy or politics, in morals or religion, are distinct from their authors. They must exist by their own principle of vitality, or die. Their pro-

perties too, are just what they are, beautiful or deformed, wholesome or pernicious, true or erroneous ; and as they are, so should their treatment be.

These remarks are offered in place of an apology, for any thing that might appear too free, in the manner in which I have spoken of the sentiments of others. I have spoken after my own way, which it would have cost me an unpleasant effort to avoid. If the reader cannot justify, he may forgive. If he cannot forgive, he may condemn. I shall not appeal from his judgment. No one can ask more than to have his own way. This I am willing to grant ; and with such a feeling, in connection with an earnest prayer and hope, that some good may be done, I submit what I have written to the judgment of the Christian public.

CHAPTER I.

OF THE VISIBLE CHURCH.

THE foundation of the visible church is laid in the promise, "I will be a God to thee, and to thy seed after thee in their generations, for an everlasting covenant." By this promise, a peculiar relation was established between God and the family of the Patriarch. Circumcision was established as a sign, token, or seal of the covenant; and those who received it, were henceforward to be considered as in the enjoyment of church privileges. The family of Abraham was organized into a *church*.

What is the nature of the relation implied in the promise, "I will be a God to thee?" This promise, if it stood alone, would very naturally be understood to express the relation, which is established in the regeneration of the soul to God. But in the first place, it is to be observed, that the promise is made with direct reference to the establishment of