

Chapter III

THE NATURE OF MAN

Article IX

OF ORIGINAL OR BIRTH-SIN¹

Original Sin standeth not in the following of *Adam*² (as the *Pelagians* do vainly talk), but it is the fault and corruption of the nature of every man, that naturally is engendered of the offspring of *Adam*; whereby man is very far gone from original righteousness, and is of his own nature inclined to evil, so that the flesh lusteth always contrary to the spirit; and therefore in every person born into this world, it deserveth God's wrath and damnation. And this infection of nature doth remain, yea, in them that are regenerated; whereby the lust of the flesh, called in the Greek *phronema sarkos*, which some do expound the wisdom, some sensuality, some the affection, some the desire, of the flesh, is not subject to the Law of God. And although there is no condemnation for them that believe and are baptized, yet the Apostle doth confess that concupiscence and lust hath of itself the nature of sin.

THIS Article relates to another old error which was revived by the Anabaptists of Reformation times, that of Pelagius (a monk of British origin, A.D. 360–420), who denied any distinction between original or birth sin and actual sin, and taught that we begin life with the nature which Adam had when he was created, that is, a nature without a tendency to do what was contrary to God's commands. The followers of Pelagius, emphasizing the importance of free-will, believed that men are capable by their own efforts of being perfectly righteous;

¹One of the Forty-two Articles of 1553. Some think it is based on the Second Article of the Augsburg Confession (1530) and came through the Thirteen Articles; others, however, consider the resemblance is too slight, and merely indicates the general consensus of Reformed opinion (Gibson, *The Thirty-nine Articles*, p. 358).

²The Article assumes a literal interpretation of Genesis i–iii. Many scholars prefer to regard these chapters as an allegory, but whichever view is taken, the spiritual truth suggested is that no man in known to have lived (save Jesus) who did not manifest a tendency towards sin. The doctrine of Original Sin is an attempt to explain the fact of the universal sinfulness of human nature.

there is nothing in us to prevent natural, spontaneous obedience, but in fact we simply choose to disobey. This view springs from a totally inadequate conception of the nature of sin. To Pelagius, 'sin' was only a name for an act which, once committed, is over and done with and does not affect man's nature. Consequently, he did not believe that men could inherit any inborn tendency to sin. Against this view, the Article asserts that every person '*naturally engendered*'¹ possesses a corrupt nature '*very far gone*' from righteousness and '*inclined to evil*'. This estimate of human nature is fully endorsed by Scripture² and by experience. Our Lord did not explicitly state any doctrine of Original Sin, but He recognized the facts that the doctrine was formulated to express. He always assumed that men are in a state of 'fallenness'; that they are sick and need a physician³ that evil is present in human hearts;⁴ and that men need redemption⁵.

Pagan moralist and Christian Apostle alike testify to the frustrating contradiction which lies at the centre of our personalities. 'I see the better things, and approve them; I follow the worse', says Ovid: 'the good which I would I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I practice', says St. Paul.⁶ What is the cause of this weakness? How is it that if man was made for fellowship with God, and the divine will is the law of his being, obedience is so hard, and the besetting sin so easy? The Article declares that it is the consequence of Original Sin. Instead of being employed in following the course the Creator intended for him, which is the only full and satisfying life possible, man used his capacities for self-centred ends, and they acquired an aberrant rebellious bent, which became hereditary. Our careers do not start on an even keel; urges of self-interest, clamant for expression, have got a start, and

¹Excludes our Lord, whose birth was supernatural (Luke i.34f.).

²Gen. vi.12; Job xiv.4; xv.14; xxv.4; Ps. xiv.1; li.5; Isa. liii.6; Jer. xvii.9 (RV); Mk. vii.21f; x.18 (RV); I Jn. i.8, etc.

³Mtt. ix.12; Mk. ii.7; Lk. v.31.

⁴'If ye then, being evil . . .' Mtt. vii.11; Lk. xi.11.

⁵Mtt. xviii.11; Lk. xix.10.

⁶Rom. vii.19.

consciences and wills, dulled and vitiated by yielding to temptation, are incapable of checking them.

This 'fallen' state is the main practical fact about him in the biblical view of man, and although it is never connected in the Old Testament with Adam's lapse, as it is by St. Paul, much that he says about man's sinful condition has a parallel there. The human heart is 'desperately wicked'¹, and from youth its thoughts are continually evil². 'For from within, out of the heart of man', says our Lord, 'evil thoughts proceed, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, covetings, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, railing, pride, foolishness: all these evil things proceed from within, and defile the man'³. Indeed, our nature is infected with evil from the very beginning⁴. In Romans vii. 7-25 St. Paul gives his classical description of the inner conflict between the impulsion of the flesh ('the law of sin which is in my members') and his moral judgement, which is also the law of God and approves the Commandments. So far as our psychological make-up is concerned, the evil principle dominates. And if a knowledge of the good is not accompanied by the will-power to implement it, the case is rendered worse; for what was formerly innocent becomes sinful⁵. The cry of man in his actual condition is: 'O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me out of this body of death?'⁶. Something must reach us from outside if the deepest human need is to be met. The efficient counteraction to the law of the members is not the law of the mind, but the law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus⁷.

Science has another way of accounting for this fact of the divided self. It would explain the clash of the body's appetites and instincts with the moral sense as due to the difference between life at the animal and human levels. The supreme aim of every animate creature is to survive; all its activity and

¹Jer. xvii.9.

²Gen. vi.5; viii.21.

³Mk. vii.21-23.

⁴Ps. lviii.3; li.5.

⁵Rom. vii.7.

⁶Rom. vii.24 (R.V.)

⁷Rom. viii.12; cf. Phil. iv.13; II Cor. iii.5.

habits are directed to that end, and it develops a structure and economy of organism best suited for success: it lives in the service of its own interest. This is the nature, shaped in the struggle for existence, that man has inherited from his animal ancestry. But a nature determined by the unrestricted pursuit of individual ends was not adapted to life in a community, for which man has a strong tendency. A code of conduct was necessary to protect personal rights against the self-seeking of others, and to maintain a stable order of society. It is obvious that covetousness and stealing, hatred and killing, suspicion, deceit and lying do not favour desirable human relations, and must be denounced and prohibited, while their opposites, justice, truth and kindness are to be inculcated and enjoined. On this theory original sin is not due to the infection of an innocent nature by sin, but to the continuance in us of the law of the jungle; and morality is a rule of behaviour for community life with social requirement for its sanction.

Two comments on this scientific view of man may be made. First, science does not, and properly cannot, say whether pre-human conditions might have been different; but the Bible is also aware of the internecine strife in the animal world¹, and says that it is not a natural state of affairs. A 'Nature red in tooth and claw' is a Nature in 'the bondage of corruption', to which it was reduced to bring it into conformity with fallen humanity; deliverance from it and entrance into ideal conditions will be one result of redemption.² Secondly, while science may offer a plausible description of what has actually happened, the reason lies with Christianity why man, after so long a time in barbarism, should at last reach a communal way of life. A creature formed in the image of the God of love was made for life in a social order; the ultimate foundation of morality is the divine intention for man, and not the rule of convenience. This is evident from the complete failure of the evolutionary theory to explain conscience. Conscience demands a loyalty to what is held to be true and right, which is nothing less than the absolute claim of God

¹Isa. xi.6-9; Ps. civ.21.

²Isa. xi.9; Rom. viii.21; II Pet. iii.13.

upon our allegiance. Only the Pauline doctrine that the moral sense is also the divine law for us¹ provides an adequate reason why a man will give his life for conscience' sake, and thus surrender the very thing the entire struggle for existence was concentrated on preserving.

Experience confirms the biblical estimate of man's fallen condition. 'When we look into ourselves we discover the fact, so mysterious to all who believe in a good God, that we find there evil tendencies and desires, similar to those which result in indulgence in actual sin, but which are prior in time to, and independent of, any such actual sin. . . . They are not simply imperfections; they are positively evil. They are loyalties that conflict with and weaken our loyalty to God. Nor do we show any signs of outgrowing them. They do not disappear when we get older. In other words, our nature, as we receive it, appears to be not merely undeveloped but to possess a bias towards evil, a disunion within itself, *an inability to rise to higher levels.*'² Nor is this estimate of human nature confined to theologians. A Nobel Prize winner who has made a scientific study of man and his life, declares 'The number of people who are interested in science, letters, and art has grown. But most of them are chiefly attracted by the lowest forms of literature and by the imitations of science and of art. It seems that the excellent hygienic conditions in which children are reared, and the care lavished upon them in schools, have not raised their intellectual or moral standards. . . . The environment born of our intelligence and our inventions is adjusted neither to our stature nor to our shape. We are unhappy. *We degenerate morally and mentally.* The groups and the nations in which industrial civilization has attained its highest development are precisely those which are becoming weaker and whose return to barbarism is the most rapid. But they do not realize it.'³ The need for policemen, gaols, and reformatories, and the existence of slave labour camps and 'brainwashing'

¹Rom. vii.24.

²E. J. Bicknell, *Essays Catholic and Critical*, 1926, p. 206.

³Alexis Carrel, *Man the Unknown* (1948 Pelican Edn.), pp. 32, 38. Dr. Carrel, a French research scientist, worked in the Rockefeller Institute.

processes in highly civilized nations; the need for societies for the prevention of cruelty to children, and the abundant evidence of tension and friction between individuals and groups—all testify abundantly that man *'is of his own nature inclined to evil.'*

Whereas the corruption of nature was *'not of its own will'*¹, but was imposed upon it, man's culpable failure diminished the natural disposition to obedience of a being made in the divine image (*'original righteousness'*), and the resulting inclination to evil *'deserveth God's wrath and damnation'*². How could it be otherwise? 'How can we suppose that such a nature looks in the eyes of God according to the standard of perfect righteousness which we also suppose to be God's standard and law? Does it satisfy that standard? Can He look with neutrality on its divergence from His perfect standard? What He may do to cure it, to pardon it, to make allowances for it in known or unknown ways, is another matter about which His known attributes of mercy alone may reassure us; but the question is, How does He look upon the fact of our nature in itself, that without exceptions it has this strong efficacious germ of evil within it, of which He sees all the possibilities and all the consequences? Can He look on it, even in germ, with complacency or indifference? Must He not judge it and condemn it in itself, because evil, deserving condemnation?'³

Common experience, as well as Scripture, teaches that *'this infection of nature doth remain, yea, in them that are regenerated'*⁴. In Baptism the benefits of Christ's atonement begin to be applied to us, and no account is taken by God of this thing in us which is at enmity with God; so *'there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus'*⁵. Baptismal regeneration does not involve a break with the innate proneness to evil; but it does mean our introduction to a new life in the Spirit in which we are equipped with power to strengthen us in the struggle which still goes on.⁶

¹Rom. viii.20.

²Cf. Rom. i.8; Eph. v.6; Col. iii.6.

³Dean Church, *Life and Letters*, p. 295. If this seems a harsh doctrine, it is balanced by God's readiness to justify the sinner (Article XI).

⁴Rom. xiii.14; Gal. v.16, 17; I Pet. ii.11.

⁵Rom. viii.1.

⁶Rom. viii.9, 11, 14; Gal. v.16, 25.

Article X

OF FREE-WILL¹

The condition of man after the fall of Adam is such that he cannot turn and prepare himself, by his own natural strength and good works, to faith, and calling upon God: Wherefore we have no power to do good works, pleasant and acceptable to God, without the grace of God by Christ preventing us, that we may have a good will, and working with us when we have that good will.

It would take a substantial volume to give an account of the opinion and arguments which have appeared on the question raised in this Article. What happens when a man passes from his 'fallen' state into that of salvation? Is the change due entirely to the operation of divine grace or can man find his way to salvation by himself? Or again, is it brought about by God and man working together? The position adopted in our Article is, as usual, a moderate one, and is in line with the great theological tradition which begins with St. Paul. It asserts that in his lapsed condition man is unable to *'turn and prepare himself, by his own natural strength and good works, to faith and calling upon God.'* The good will essential for performing *'works pleasant and acceptable to God'* comes by His prevenient grace, and this aid must remain with us as co-operative or concurrent grace for the continued exercise of the good will. Grace may be defined briefly as *'the power of God that worketh in us'*², or the *'unearned favour'* of God. The Article, in common with the Prayer Book, acknowledges that we need God's help and power to enable us to do His will: *'we have no power of ourselves to help ourselves'*³; *'because through the weakness of our mortal nature we can do no good thing without*

¹The first part of this article was added from the Württemberg Confession in 1563. The second part is taken almost verbatim from Augustine's treatise *De Gratia et Libero Arbitrio*, chap. xvii.

²Eph. iii.7, 20. Oscar Hardman defines grace as God's "radiant adequacy" *The Christian Doctrine of Grace*, p. 30.

³Collect, Lent II; Rom. viii.8.

Thee'. God is the source of all goodness, 'from Whom all holy desires, all good counsels, and all just works do proceed'². Man needs God's grace, not merely because of 'the fall of Adam', but because his whole life—moral and spiritual as well as physical—is entirely sustained by God, 'in Whom we live and move and have our being'.³

The Article mentions two ways in which God's grace acts:

(1) By '*preventing us that we may have a good will*'—usually called 'prevenient grace', which goes before (Latin, *prevenire*) or 'prevents' us⁴, to give us a good will. The term 'prevenient' was probably suggested by the Latin of Psalm lix.10, 'The God of my mercy will prevent me'. We need the prompting of God even to *desire* to do what is right, and this truth is emphasized often in the Bible⁵ and in the Prayer Book⁶.

(2) By '*working with us when we have that good will*'—usually called 'co-operating grace'. Our Lord⁷ and the Apostles⁸ frequently emphasized our need of such grace, and the Prayer Book has many references to our need of 'continual' help⁹. Several Collects mention both 'prevenient' and 'co-operating' grace, such as the Post Communion Collect: 'Prevent us, O Lord, in all our doings with Thy most gracious favour, and further us with Thy continual help . . .'¹⁰.

We shall never reach a conclusion on a subject like this, which will at least leave us easy minds before the mystery of the divine counsels until we stop thinking of God's grace *versus* human freedom, and try to understand them both in relation to God's purpose of love in creation. God is love¹¹, and love seeks to impart itself, to share its blessedness and evoke an answering love in its object. The divine love is the reason and cause of our existence. But it is the nature of love that

¹Trinity I.

²Evg. Prayer, Coll. II., Jas.i.

³Prayer for Recollection of God's Presence.

⁴Hence it does not mean 'hinder'.

⁵Jn. vi.44; xv.5 (RV); Acts xvi.14; Eph. ̄.8; Phil. ii.13 (RV).

⁶Epiphany I, Easter Day, Trinity IX, XVII.

⁷Jn. xv.4f., cf. Mk. xvi.20.

⁸I Cor. xv.10; II Cor. iii.5f.; Gal. ii.20.

⁹Collects, Trinity IX, XIV, XV.

¹⁰Cf. Trinity XVII, and Easter Day Collect I.

¹¹I Jn. iv.8, 16.

it cannot be forced. God wants our responsive love to the love wherein He has created and redeemed us, but it must be freely offered. No matter how deeply we may love our friends, and show it, and desire their affection in return, we cannot compel them to love us. For some selfish end they may pretend to respond; but whether they do so from the heart is their own secret.

The highest form of God's almightiness is the constraining tenderness of His love¹; this is the ultimate power in a moral order. Should the love of God in Christ fail to draw all men unto Him², there is no other way. If love is the nature of the relationship between God and us, then it requires on our part the free and glad dedication of ourselves and our lives to His service in responsive love. We are made for freedom; our wills are the great thing about us that God longs to have: He will ever work to win them, but He will never nullify or destroy them, for that would amount to the defeat of His own purpose. Any interpretation of God's dealings with man which allows no place for a real exercise of moral choice is wrong somewhere.

Man's unregenerate state is nowhere treated in Scripture as one of total depravity; the divine image in him is not utterly obliterated by his 'fall'. Even in heathendom he still has the light of the moral sense and the witness of Nature to its Creator, and therefore is 'without excuse'³. But can the common intellect and moral judgement of the 'natural' man afford fully convincing grounds for believing the Gospel, so that his conduct may be inspired by the Christian motive and '*pleasant and acceptable to God*' in the highest sense? It does not appear that this is possible, and for this reason. Christianity illustrates the principle of the paradox: that is to say, 'things are not what they seem', we see them 'in a riddle', as St. Paul says⁴, and the truth about them is not evident. The world's standards and those of the Christian are poles apart. Christ's idea of greatness is entirely different from the general one⁵; 'the wisdom of

¹II Cor. v.19, 14.

²Jn. xii.32.

³Amos. i.3-ii.3; Rom. i.20; ii.11-16.

⁴I Cor. xiii.12.

⁵Mk. x.42-45.

the world is foolishness with God¹; the meaning of the Cross is so contrary to men's way of thinking that it cannot be preached in terms of what they call wisdom, and keep its saving power². St. Paul is not exaggerating in the sharp contrast he draws between the divine and worldly wisdoms. The reaction of the 'natural' man to the Gospel is vividly expressed in an early pagan representation of the central theme of Christian preaching as a human figure with an ass's head stretched on a gibbet. To the philosopher and those who prided themselves as being versed in the world's wisdom, Christian preaching sounded like fanatical drivel³.

How can one come to accept the contradiction of the Gospel which sees greatness in service, self-fulfilment and abundant life through self-effacement and death, glory through humiliation and shame, God's triumph over the world's evil in spite of His apparent decisive defeat by it? The intellect asks: 'How can these things be?' and has no answer. But Pascal was right; sometimes 'the heart has its reasons which the reason does not understand'. In spite of the vast amount of fear that the history of religion shows, there is a deep-seated feeling in the human breast that the power manifested in the universe is beneficent: there is 'a Friend behind phenomena'. But can the heart's desire be trusted? The intellect suspects and doubts, as well indeed it might; but where the head says of the Gospel, 'it is too good to be true'; grace whispers to the heart: 'nothing is too good to be true; the better it is the truer it is.' At this point faith comes in. Faith is the resolve not only to believe the Christian message as true, but to commit ourselves to it without reserve, to live by it here and now, and to rest our destiny upon it. The teaching of the New Testament is that we are led to belief and trust in the Gospel by the grace of God⁴. At the same time we must make the prompting and encouragement of the Spirit of Grace⁵ our very own; we must *will* to

¹I Cor. iii.19; cf. i.27.

²I Cor. i.17.

³Acts xvii.32.

⁴Jn. vi.44; Eph. ii.8; Phil. i.9.

⁵Heb. x.29.

believe: 'I believe; help thou mine unbelief'¹ is the proper approach to the challenge of the Gospel. Preventing grace is like the helping hand extended to one trying to surmount an obstacle, like getting over a stile; but the point is that he wants, and is attempting to do it himself. Embracing the way of salvation (by preventing grace), and walking worthily therein (by co-operating grace), is a joint achievement in which God and man act together², and since God is no respecter of persons³, it is open to all.

The relationship between God's grace and man's free-will has been the subject of much controversy, and is still widely debated. Some, like the Pelagians, believe that the human will can do what is right without prevenient grace; others, like John Calvin, believe that God's grace cannot be resisted by man's will. The Article takes an intermediate position between these two extremes. A little consideration will show that man's will cannot be completely free without grace⁴, but neither does grace take such control of man's will as to deprive him of free choice. The true relationship has been summed up in the saying, 'Man without God *cannot*; God without man *will not*'. Man cannot save himself without God's grace, but neither does God save any man against his own will. Our salvation depends on our voluntary co-operation with the grace of God.

Article XV

OF CHRIST ALONE WITHOUT SIN⁶

Christ in the truth of our nature was made like unto us in all things, sin only except, from which He was clearly void, both in His flesh and in His spirit. He came to be the Lamb without spot, Who

¹Mk. ix.28.

²Phil. ii.12,13.

³Acts x.34; I Pet. i.17.

⁴St. Paul had the *will* to do good, but was unable to do so (Rom. vii.15).

⁶Composed by the English Reformers in 1552 and, except for minor verbal changes, still in its original form. The original title was 'No one is without sin but Christ alone'.

by sacrifice of Himself once made, should take away the sins of the world, and sin, as St. John saith, was not in Him. But all we the rest, although baptized, and born again in Christ, yet offend in many things; and if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

During the XVIth century the Pelagian view reappeared among some sects that the ideal of Christian perfection was attainable; indeed, a state of sinlessness was to them not merely a possibility, but an actuality. Against this doctrine, the Article asserts that the sole instance of human perfection is Christ; *'all we the rest, although baptized, and born again in Christ, yet offend in many things'*; alleged sinlessness is untruthful self-deception. A feature of the Article is the number of phrases taken from the New Testament, chiefly from the Epistle to the Hebrews: *'made like unto us in all things, sin only except'*¹; *'Lamb without spot'*²; *'by sacrifice of Himself once made'*³; *'all we . . . offend in many things'*⁴, and the last clause is a quotation of I John i.8.

The first part of the Article affirms the perfection of the human nature assumed by our Lord at His Incarnation to be the instrument of redemption. Constitutionally it was humanity as God intended and created it, consisting of a real body of flesh and blood, a true soul and intellect, all of which were unmarred by sin.⁵ *'He was clearly void (from sin), both in His flesh, and in His Spirit'*. This distinction between sin in the flesh and in the spirit comes from II Cor. vii.1. The disordered state of the instincts and appetites which belong to the flesh and blood of our humanity, what in Article II is called 'original guilt', had no place in the physical side of our Lord's incarnate nature; with Him biological urge was subject to his complete obedience to the will of God⁶. But the absence of any innate proneness to sin does not imply that Jesus had no

¹Heb. ii.17; iv.15.

²I Pet. i.19; cf. Heb. ix.14.

³Heb. ix.26; vii.27.

⁴Jas. iii.2.

⁵Jn. viii.46; xiv.30; I Pet. ii.22; II Cor. v.21; Heb. iv.15.

⁶Jn. iv.34; viii.46; II Cor. v.21; I Jn. iii.5.

experience of temptation, and that obedience was easy. Temptation in itself is not a bad thing; rather it is the condition of moral and spiritual achievement; where there is no chance of going wrong, there is no virtue in doing the right. The trouble with temptation lies in yielding to it, for that results in a seared conscience and a weakened will. The source of temptation is too readily identified with bodily demands which belong to our present mode of existence, and are in themselves quite legitimate; what has really happened is that instead of functioning under the control of the good will for right purposes, they have gone off on their own in pursuit of unworthy ends. To use Plato's illustration, our evil affections and passions are like the horses that have got out of the charioteer's control, and are pulling in different directions.

In our Lord's case physical needs cannot have been the most serious form of temptation. He never faltered in resolution; His will remained intact. Nevertheless temptation in His case, too, was real; He was 'in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin'¹. (Failure was with Him a theoretical possibility, but not a practical one because He always lived according to the law of our humanity which is obedience to God.) It was in the region of His deepest spiritual experience that temptation usually took shape for Jesus. He Himself said later in His Ministry that the mark of an evil generation was its demand for a sign². The fact that His own strongest temptation was to look for a sign is one of the essential points in the account of the Temptation³.

By the time that He was about to begin His Ministry at the age of thirty, Jesus must have reflected long on Himself and His mission, and had come to realize that He was in some special sense the Agent of God. The voice at the Baptism confirmed this conviction; He was indeed the Beloved Son⁴. The essence of the Temptation is not in Satan's invitation to satisfy His hunger after the fast in the wilderness, or to accept

¹Heb. iv.15.

²Matt. xii.39.

³Matt. iv.3-11; Lk. iv.3-13.

⁴Mk. i.11; Matt. ii.17; Lk. iii.22.

world-power at his hands; it is in the hypothetical clause, 'If thou art the Son of God'. Was there any question in Jesus' mind concerning the truth of the heavenly declaration at the Baptism that He was God's Son? Did He also require a sign, the evidence of a miracle, to assure Him that His consciousness of God was not deceiving Him? Temptation for Jesus may have assumed the form of misgiving about His trust in God.

His consciousness of His relationship to God included the belief that He was the Messiah or Christ, and for a convenient description of the role of the Messiah, the Benedictus (St. Luke i.68-79) may be read. He was to be the restorer of the throne of David, who in the power of the Lord would deliver and avenge His people, and establish a reign of bliss. It was in this hope of Israel that Jesus was nurtured.

According to St. Mark ii. 20, He realized at an early stage of the Ministry that it would not take this course; the Suffering Servant of the Lord¹, instead of a conquering prince of the House of David, would be His prototype². Jesus believed He was the Christ³; but could He retain this view in the face of a career which increasingly fulfilled the mission of the Suffering Servant? His fiercest trials and temptations centred in this conflict of conceptions⁴: 'He trusteth on God; let Him deliver Him now, if He desireth Him: for He said, I am the Son of God⁵. This was the taunt of the mocking priests at the Cross, but it went straight to the heart of the struggles of Jesus. His faith never wavered; even with the thought of desertion by God in mind, in a final act of utter commitment, He commended His Spirit to the Father's keeping⁶.

The sinlessness of Christ is a condition of His redemptive work⁷. By it He realizes the Old Testament requirement of unblemished sacrifices⁸; He is 'the lamb without spot'⁹. In

¹Isa. liii.

²Mk. x.45.

³Lk. ix.20; Mk. xiv.61f.

⁴Lk. xxii.28.

⁵Mtt. xxvii.43.

⁶Mk. xv.34; Lk. xxiii.46.

⁷Cf. II Cor. v.21.

⁸Exod. xii.5.

⁹I Pet. i.19; cf. Jn. i.29; Heb. ix.14.

this connection the Epistle to the Hebrews is particularly interesting and suggestive. Its author is a Christian Platonist, the first of a succession of thinkers who have applied Plato's teaching to interpret the Christian Faith. His argument is that earthly things are but copies of heavenly realities, and as such they are necessarily imperfect. This is true of the Levitical system of the Old Testament, with its priesthood and sacrifice. The Aaronic High Priest was a sinner, who entered once a year on the Day of Atonement into the Holy of Holies with the blood of animals, and there offered sacrifices for his own sins and those of the people. But all this was only a 'shadow of the good things to come'¹. In Christ the heavenly substance which cast the shadow had come. He is the perfect High Priest, 'holy, undefiled, separated from sinners', who once for all by the offering of His own blood became the Author of eternal salvation².

Christ's perfection stands by itself; '*all we the rest . . . offend in many things*'. The general assumption of Scripture is the common sinfulness of men, including members of the Church.³ There is no exception; even Apostles admit faults in themselves and in each other⁴. Nor does there occur in the New Testament or early Christian history any indication of the later veneration of our Lord's Mother, which led to the Roman dogma of her Immaculate Conception (1854). Two striking and quite different ideas on our sinfulness have appeared in the history of Christian thought. The first comes from the lives of the saints, and may be called the traditional one. It relates to the fact that progress in sanctification does not bring a weakening of the sense of sin; rather it throws into relief the sin that still remains to be eliminated: the uniform confession of the saints is that they are outstanding sinners. The second idea is that of perfectionism, the belief that it is possible even now to be free of sin, and appeal is made to Isaiah's words about the Suffering

¹Heb. viii.5; x.1.

²Heb. vii.26-28; ix.12.

³Job xv.14; Ps. xiv.3; Jer. ii.35; I Jn. i.8f.; Jas. iii.2.

⁴Gal. ii.11; Phil. iii.12; I Tim. i.15.

Servant as the sin-bearer¹, which are applied to our Lord. The advocates of perfectionism also cite I John iii. 9: 'Who-soever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin because he is born of God'. On the basis of these words it is argued that perfection is a practical possibility. On the other hand, in the same Epistle it is expressly declared that 'if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us'². It has been pointed out, however, that these apparent contradictions can be resolved if due regard is paid to the different tenses used in the original Greek text. In particular, it should be noted that in I John iii. 4-10 the relevant verbs are in the present or imperfect tense and therefore denote 'continuous or habitual action'. Hence on a strict interpretation of the tenses, the author is not affirming that the Christian cannot possibly commit a sin, but he means that it is impossible to conceive of a child of God being *habitually* sinful, though it remains possible for him to fall³ once and again into a single act of sin⁴. It should also be remembered that Christianity inherited from Judaism a pre-Christian belief that in the Age to Come the people of God would be sinless.⁵ Since many of the early Christians believed that 'the Age to Come' had been inaugurated by our Lord, it was very natural for them to expect that sinless perfection might now be possible. Furthermore, in iii.9 and v.18 St. John is speaking ideally, and using the language of anticipation. A central thought with him is that the old world of darkness is passing away; already the light of the New Age is shining, and Christians have been born into the new order⁶. At the climax of this great regenerating movement inaugurated in Christ, the faithful will share His likeness,⁷ but that time is not yet. It is easily intelligible that, in His enthusiasm over such a prospect, St. John forgot about

¹Isa. liii.12; Heb. ix.28.

²I Jn. i.8.

³I Jn.ii.1.

⁴Cf. C. H. Dodd, *The Johannine Epistles*, (Moffatt Com.) p. 78ff.

⁵Enoch v.8ff.; Jubilees v.12.

⁶I Jn. ii.8.

⁷I Jn. iii.2, 3.

consistency, and read into the beginning what properly belonged to the final issue of the process. He knew very well that all men are sinners, and plainly said so.

Article XVI

OF SIN AFTER BAPTISM¹

Not every deadly sin willingly committed after Baptism is sin against the Holy Ghost, and unpardonable. Wherefore the grant of repentance is not to be denied to such as fall into sin after Baptism. After we have received the Holy Ghost, we may depart from grace given, and fall into sin, and by the grace of God we may arise again, and amend our lives. And therefore they are to be condemned, which say, they can no more sin as long as they live here, or deny the place of forgiveness to such as truly repent.

In the previous Article we were considering the declaration that Christ alone is free from sin; '*all we the rest . . . offend in many things*'², and therefore the call to repentance is always relevant to our state. 'Repentance' is a strong term; it goes much deeper than sorrow for particular sins, and a resolve not to repeat them: it means a change of mind, the acquirement of a viewpoint and attitude which are the reverse of those which led to sinning. When the use of 'repentance' and its cognates in the New Testament is studied, it will be found that it seldom occurs with reference to Christians. It appears most frequently in the Gospels and Acts in exhortations to Jews and Gentiles, and is, in fact, an invitation to people to give up their imperfect or idolatrous faiths and embrace the Gospel, 'Repent ye, and believe in the Gospel', that is how Jesus began His preaching³; and St. Paul's message consisted of 'testifying both to Jews and Greeks repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ.'⁴

¹Composed by the English Reformers in 1552 under the title 'Of sin against the Holy Ghost'. The present title was substituted in 1563.

²Cf. Jas. iii.2.

³Mk. i.15.

⁴Acts xx.21.

On the other hand, admonition and exhortation in the Epistles are usually intended to remind believers of their high calling in Christ; they are already children of light and ought to be have as such¹. It is not a matter of renouncing what they are, but one of consistency, of living in keeping with their true status. Hence much modern biblical theology has 'become what you are' as its theme; Christians must become in terms of practical living what they already are in status.

The key to understanding and harmonizing the various statements on this question in the New Testament is the idea of the Church as a divine society, through which the eternal order has been implanted in the world. Its life is 'the Way'², 'the way of salvation'³, the very life of heaven on earth. On their conversion to Christianity men leave a world of darkness and error, and enter the realm of light and truth, and upon the enjoyment of the blessings of their glorious destiny.

To the Jew also, whose faith was based on the divine revelation in the Law, his religion was his most precious and exclusive possession⁴, and Christians inherited from him this religious attitude. From the second century before Christ, when the Jew had to defend his faith against a paganism which sought to destroy and supplant it, the supreme virtue was martyrdom, and the greatest sin conceivable, apostasy; he hated false brethren, traitors to the Law, even more than national enemies; a future of 'shame and everlasting contempt'⁵ was their just desert. Some of the most puzzling sayings in the New Testament on the subject of repentance are found in the Epistle to the Hebrews, which has the threat of apostasy for its background; the writer's aim is to show the ephemeral character of Judaism, with a view to preventing a lapse into Judaism by some Christians.

Although the view of the finality of some sins, notably apostasy, had representatives in every generation in the early

¹I Thess. v.4-8; Ephes. v.8.

²Acts ix.2; xix.9, 23; xxiv.22.

³Acts xvi.17.

⁴Ps. i.2; xix.7, 8; lxxviii.5-7.

⁵Dan. xii.2.

Church, beginning with the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, it was given special prominence when large numbers of Christians abjured the Faith during the sharp Decian persecution in the third century. In this crisis, Novatian, a Roman presbyter, opposed their restoration to the communion of the Church. But at a Synod held at Carthage (A.D. 251), provision was made for the readmission of all offenders after certain intervals and courses of penance, according to the circumstances of their lapse. This rigorist doctrine of Novatian is yet another example of an old extremist belief that was not admitted to the general teaching of the Church, but reappeared in the religious ferment of the Reformation, and is rejected in our Article.

At the Reformation two erroneous views concerning sins committed after Baptism were current: (a) Novatian had held that apostasy was the unpardonable sin, and certain Anabaptists, following his view, held that every mortal sin committed after Baptism is unpardonable. St. John, following Jewish teaching¹, distinguished between 'a sin unto death' (mortal sin) and 'a sin not unto death'. But he seems to have been thinking of a kind of habitual sinning² which merited exclusion from the Christian fellowship. He did not enjoin the Christians to pray for such a sinner, but neither did he forbid prayer for him, or suggest that his sin was utterly unpardonable. On the basis of his words, however, the name 'mortal sin' came to be given to any sin deliberately and wilfully committed with a full consciousness of guilt, as distinct from sins unwittingly committed. The Article declares that not every mortal sin is unpardonable, and makes no attempt to define the unpardonable 'sin against the Holy Ghost'³. The common assumption of the New Testament is that the faithful share in the universal feature of humanity, its sinfulness; they too need to repent and

¹Num. xv.27-31, where distinction is made between the soul that sinneth through ignorance' and the soul that sinneth 'presumptuously': the latter was to be 'cut off', i.e. punished by death. Cf. Num. xviii. 22.

²I Jn. v.16ff. Note R.V. 'sinning a sin' (present participle), and p. 80 above.

³Mk. iii.28-30; Mtt. xii.31f.; Lk. xii.10. Reluctance in 1563 to define the unpardonable sin explains the omission of the 1553 Article on 'Blasphemy against the Holy Ghost'.

amend their lives. Any claim to sinlessness is denied by the fact; but on the acknowledgement and confession of our sins, they are pardoned¹; the spiritually strong are to support their brethren when overtaken in a trespass²; to be inconsiderate towards believers with a tender conscience is to sin against Christ³; 'our Lord's patience with us is our salvation'⁴, and it is not His wish that any should perish, 'because it is not His will for any to be lost, but for all to come to repentance'⁵.

(b) The Article also exposes the opposite error, already denied by Article XV, that it is impossible for the regenerate to sin.⁶ 'After we have received the Holy Ghost, we may depart from grace given, and fall into sin, . . . And therefore they are to be condemned which say, that they can no more sin as long as they live here.'

The Calvinists held that when once a man had received grace, even if he fell away for a time, he *must* in the end arise again and amend his life. But they failed to get this view incorporated into the Article, which merely says, 'by the grace of God we *may* arise again . . .' The opening words 'Not every . . .' also leave open the possibility that *some* deadly sins committed after Baptism may be unpardonable. The Article thus rejects also the Calvinist doctrine that a man cannot finally fall away from grace (technically called 'indefectible grace'). Both Scripture and experience endorse this repudiation. St. Paul had undoubtedly received the Holy Ghost⁷, but he was never presumptuously certain of his final salvation.⁸ Our Lord warned us that even branches of the True Vine may be cut off and perish;⁹ the salt may lose its savour and 'be cast out'¹⁰; the seed may grow for a little but yet die, — 'these are they which *for a while* believe and in time of temptation fall

¹I Jn. i.8–10.

²Gal. vi.1.

³I Cor. viii.12.

⁴II Pet. iii.15 (N.E.B.).

⁵II Pet. iii.9 (N.E.B.).

⁶The idea probably springs from the A.V. of I Jn. iii.9 and v.18.

⁷Acts ix.17.

⁸I Cor. ix.27(RV); Phil. iii.12.

⁹Jn. xv.1–6.

¹⁰Mtt. v.13.

away'¹. The grace of God may be received in vain² and may be resisted³. After Baptism we may by our conduct grieve the Holy Spirit⁴, insult Him⁵, or even quench the Divine fire in our hearts⁶. After escaping the pollutions of the world it is still possible to be 'again entangled therein and *overcome*'⁷. Our final salvation depends upon our willing obedience and constant co-operation with the grace of God. Hence the Prayer Book teaches us to pray that we 'may ever *remain*' faithful⁸ and 'continue in that holy fellowship'⁹. But if it does not encourage presumption, neither does it foster despair, for it declares with the greatest authority it can command that God 'pardoneth and absolveth all them that truly repent and unfeignedly believe His holy Gospel'¹⁰. Repentance and faith are the only conditions of forgiveness to those who have been baptized¹¹.

¹Lk. viii.3.

²II Cor. vi.1; Gal. v.4; Heb. xii.15.

³Acts vii.51; Mtt. xxiii.37.

⁴Ephes. iv.30.

⁵Heb. x.29.

⁶I Thess. v.19.

⁷II Pet. ii.20 (cf. Heb. vi.4–6).

⁸Prayer before Baptism.

⁹Prayer of Thanksgiving after Communion.

¹⁰Absolution in Morning and Evening Prayer; Jn. xx.23; I Jn. ii.1f.

¹¹It is sometimes thought that Heb. vi.4–6, x.26–29, and xii.14–17 exclude the possibility of forgiveness in certain cases. But the Greek tenses bring out the true meaning. Heb. vi.4–6 means that so long as men 'go on crucifying the Son of God afresh and putting Him to an open shame' nothing can be done to bring them to repentance. Failure to find pardon is due to the sinner's wilful refusal to fulfil the conditions necessary for obtaining it; not to God's unwillingness to grant it. The Revised Version of these passages should be studied.

Chapter IV

THE SALVATION OF MAN

Article XI

OF THE JUSTIFICATION OF MAN¹

We are accounted righteous before God only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, by faith, and not for our own works or deservings; Wherefore, that we be justified by faith only is a most wholesome doctrine and very full of comfort, as more largely is expressed in the Homily of Justification.

It was on the subject of this Article that the growing dissatisfaction within the Western Church was at last expressed in the formal protest and challenge of the Reformation.

The question here is whether any merit attaches to our conduct, even if it proceeds from faith, which justifies us before God, or does justification rest entirely on Christ? Sometimes things have been alleged in the heat of controversy against the Roman Church which do not fairly represent her teaching, and are easily rebutted; but she does allow that it is possible to acquire merit by doing more than the commandments of God specifically enjoin. More will be said on this subject under Article XIV *Of Works of Supererogation*; for the present we need only observe that it was flagrant abuse of the doctrine of Merit which provided the spark that gave flame to the smouldering discontent with the corruptions of Western Christendom.

The cardinal doctrine of the reform movement, Justification by Faith, is firmly declared in our Article: *'We are accounted righteous before God, only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, by faith, and not for our own works or deservings'*.

When we turn to the Homily on Justification (Salvation) to which the present Article refers for a fuller statement on the

¹The first part of this Article is adapted from the Württemberg Confession; the second part is an amended form of the XIth Article of 1553. The Article received its present form in 1563.

subject, it is there maintained that the exclusive ground of our acceptance with God is Christ's merit. 'Justification is the office of God only, and it is not a thing which we render unto Him, but which we receive of Him . . . by His free mercy, and by the only merit of His most dearly beloved Son.' Since it is God's 'nature and property ever to have mercy and to forgive', justification is a divine function, and man can have no part in it; not only are works without merit, but there is none even in the faith by which God's grace in Christ is received: Christ's person and work alone have merit.¹

Justification by faith does not dispense with the necessity for Baptism. Hooker condemned those 'who fixing their minds wholly on the known necessity of faith imagine that nothing but faith is necessary for the attainment of all grace. Yet it is a branch of belief that sacraments are in their place no less required than belief itself . . . If Christ himself which giveth salvation do require Baptism, it is not for us who look for salvation to sound and examine Him, whether unbaptized men may be saved, but seriously to do that which is required.'² It has been said that 'Justification through faith might with equal accuracy be styled justification through union with Christ . . . So it is that St. Paul, after dealing with justification in the first chapters of the Epistle to the Romans, passes on to the "mystical union" of the Christian with Christ'.³ Since Baptism

¹This is made clear in the Homily on Salvation (there is no Homily of justification), thus: 'The true understanding of this doctrine, we be justified freely by faith without works, or that we be justified by faith in Christ only, is not, that this our own act to believe in Christ, or this our faith in Christ, which is within us doth justify us, and deserve our justification unto us (for that were to count ourselves to be justified by some act or virtue that is within ourselves) but the true understanding and meaning thereof is, although we have faith, hope, charity, and all other virtues and good deeds, which we either have done, shall do, or can do, as things that be far too weak and insufficient, and unperfect, to deserve remission of our sins, and our justification; and therefore we must trust only in God's mercy, and that sacrifice which our High Priest and Saviour Christ Jesus, the Son of God, once offered for us upon the cross, to obtain thereby God's grace and remission, as well of our original sin in Baptism, as of all actual sins committed by us after our Baptism, if we truly repent, and turn unfeignedly to Him again.'

²*Eccles. Polity*, V.1x.4.

³E. J. Bicknell, *The Thirty-nine Articles*, P. 204.

is the sacrament by which we are incorporated "into Christ"¹, it is not surprising to find the Apostle associating justification and Baptism. 'Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? . . . And such were some of you: but ye were washed, but ye were sanctified², but ye were justified in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God.'³ The three verbs in the same (aorist) tense refer to the same point of time, which is undoubtedly the moment of Baptism.⁴ In Romans vi. the Apostle affirms that being baptized 'into Christ Jesus' means that we have died with Christ, been buried with Him, and been raised up with Him. Hence he proceeds to argue that 'our old man is crucified with Him'⁵, and that we should not therefore serve sin, for 'he that is dead is justified from sin'⁶. We also find justification associated with Baptism in Galatians iii.23-25 and in Titus iii.4-7.

In the Article, to be justified is the equivalent of being 'accounted righteous' (*justi reputamur*); it does not mean that sin in us is removed, and that we are actually made perfect.⁷ 'Justi' (righteous) bears the forensic sense that 'before God' (*coram Deo*) and under the destiny-deciding judgement upon us, we are acceptable to Him 'for the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ' (*propter meritum Domini, ac servatoris nostri Jesu*

¹Gal.iii. 27; Rom. vi.3.

²The Greek verb is *hagiadzo*, which is here used forensically, 'to free from guilt'. It is used in the same sense in Ephes. v.26; Heb. ii.11; x.10, 14, 29; xiii.12. Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament* (1944), p. 5.

³I Cor. vi.9, 11.

⁴Commenting on I Cor. vi.9, 11, W. F. Flemington says 'This passage is important not only because it uses the phrase "in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ" and speaks of the Spirit of our God (both of which recall similar language used about Baptism in Acts), but also because it links Baptism with the great Pauline conceptions of justification and sanctification,' *The New Testament Doctrine of Baptism* (1948), p. 56. Dr. G. W. H. Lampe also takes this view and describes Baptism as "pre-eminently the sacrament of Justification," *The Doctrine of Justification by Faith* (1954), pp. 53-68.

⁵Cp. Baptismal Office, 'Grant that the old Adam in this child may be so buried that the new man may be raised up in him'.

⁶Rom. vi.7 (Greek text).

⁷Some modern biblical scholars say "to justify" means "to make righteous," but hasten to explain that "righteous" does not mean "morally good"; it refers to status rather than character, and means "being in the right" or "having a right relationship to God."

Christi.) The use of the singular 'merit' (*meritum*) may be noted; it reminds us of Hooker's fine phrase, 'the infinite worth of the Son of God'. In considering Christ's merit as the basis or cause (*propter meritum*) of justification, it must be thought of as belonging to the entire Fact of Him, to the truth about His Person, as well as His life of complete obedience to God's will and all that it involved. While the best that men can do is impaired by their general sinful state, and could never avail for justification, there is, on the other hand, more in the merit of Christ than moral perfection; it has also to be asked, Who is this in whom the ideal life is realized?

The description of our virtues in the above quotation from the Homily as 'far too weak and insufficient, and imperfect' implies metaphysical rather than moral defect; yet even were they morally faultless they would still be inadequate for our justification because they belong to creatures. For the doctrine of Christ's merit His sinless life has to be seen as the manifested life of the eternal Son of God. The mind and action in which the merit of Christ consists are well expressed in Philippians ii.5-8. Although a divine Being, having the essence of God and with the dignity and honour pertaining thereto, He had regard for man's need, and willingly came to his aid. This necessitated His entering our situation, and to this end He divested Himself of His heavenly glory and took the role of one whose motive was service¹. Faithfulness to His mission tested His obedience to the uttermost, even to the point of accepting the pain and shame of death on the Cross. In the other passage where St. Paul refers to this self-impoverishment of our Lord, he calls it the 'grace' of Christ.² Our Lord's life on earth was a mission; He was 'sent' by the Father³, and so His whole redemptive action was one of obedience. His choice to become incarnate has in itself the quality of infinite condescension and humble service, and an obedience which accepted the infirmities, sorrow and suffering of our human lot to the point of complete Self-sacrifice is of inestimable moral value. There is

¹Lk. xxii.27.

²II Cor. viii.9.

³Jn. xvii.18, xx.21.

in Christ's saving achievement an inexhaustible source of merit which is the reason of our reconciliation to God, and is available through faith. It is this relationship between our faith and Christ's merit which explains the two statements in the Article that '*we are accounted righteous before God, only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, by faith*', and '*we are justified by faith only*': that is to say, the merit of Christ is the sole basis of our reconciliation to God, and 'faith only' the medium of its reception¹. This is further brought out in one of the post-Communion prayers in the Communion Office, where remission of sins is granted 'by the merits and death' (*propter merita et mortem*) of Christ, and 'through faith' (*per fidem*) in His blood.

Among the New Testament writers it is St. Paul who found most difficulty about the belief he inherited from Judaism, that the righteousness which made a man acceptable with God was possible by keeping the commandments of the Law. Yet his faultless observance of them not only failed to bring the soul-peace which satisfies, but a note of pride in personal achievement seems to attach to his claim of blamelessness by the Law's standard². The fact is that where moral behaviour is the result of human endeavour, as it was in Judaism, rather than the fruit of the Spirit of life in Christ, as in Christianity, it is not possible to avoid a feeling of self-congratulation and pride in independent accomplishment. The legal method of righteousness fails on two counts: (i) no code of commandments can cover all circumstances, and (ii) we require an enabling strength to help us to do what is seen to be right, even more than a knowledge of the right, and this an external rule of conduct cannot supply.³ Justification by faith is St. Paul's interpretation of Christ and His work in view of the failure of righteousness by the Law. After all, the purpose of the Law was that of a 'servant' to lead Israel to Christ⁴ by guarding against idolatry and enjoining moral conduct. It was weak

¹That is, 'by faith without the deeds of the Law', Rom. iii.28.

²Phil. iii.6.

³Rom. viii.3.

⁴Gal. iii.24.

both in content and method, and pointed away from itself to another means of salvation. And so, 'when the fulness of time came, God sent forth His Son . . . that He might redeem them that were under the Law'¹. The aim of the Law to make us righteous was not to be realized in itself, but in Christ, else He 'died for nought'². The perfect obedience of Christ avails for our benefit; He is our 'righteousness and sanctification and redemption'³.

It has often been alleged that the transference to us of Christ's merit is 'a legal fiction'; God regards us as righteous in Him when actually we are not. For St. Paul there are two kinds of righteousness, that which is of the Law, i.e., our present degree of conformity to the commandments of the Law, and the divine righteousness which is 'reckoned' to us by faith in Christ⁴, and by which we are justified. Now the question is: *how* is God's righteousness accounted to us in Christ? The key to understanding St. Paul's thought about this is his great conception of our mystical union with Christ through membership of His Body, the Church. As part of His Body every baptized person is in vital relation with Him and infused with His Spirit⁵; he is 'in Christ' and Christ is in him. The faithful member of the Body is really a composite personality whom St. Paul could never conceive of out of his relationship to his Saviour. For the Apostle there is no such thing as an isolated Christian, standing alone and by himself; by definition he is one whose life is bound up with Christ's as a member of His Body, which is the Church. Our normal status of 'life in Christ' involves a certain identity with Him; an inter-permeation of personalities takes place, whereby we participate in His total worthiness.

The ritual of Christian Initiation, the cleansing in and rising from the baptismal water, is symbolic of a new religious experience. The crucial events in Christ's historic achievement of salvation, His Death and Resurrection, have a spiritual

¹Gal. iv.4.

²Gal. ii.21; cf. Rom. iii.20; x.4; ix.30-32.

³I Cor. i.30.

⁴Phil. iii.9; Rom. ix.30; II Cor. v.21.

⁵I Cor. xii.12f.; Rom. xii.5; Eph. iv.15f.; Col. ii.19.

counterpart in the meaning of Baptism, according to which the baptizand dies with Christ to his sinful past and sinful self, and rises with Him to a new life.¹ Progress in sanctification, which is the mark of the new life, consists in an enlarging appropriation of Christ's atoning merit under the action of His indwelling Spirit.

Union with Christ is of the first importance for any assessment of the Christian's position in God's sight; no pronouncement can be made which does not take account of it

Look, Father, look on His anointed face,
And only look on us as found in Him.

In virtue of this oneness with Christ we share in the righteousness of His complete obedience, and the relationship has also in it the pledge and potency of that sanctification whereby our immature, undeveloped righteousness eventually becomes what is actual in Him. Discipleship is growth in 'putting on' Christ, and has for its goal the stature of His fulness². Life in Christ here and now, rudimentary though it is, as St. Paul well knew, is nevertheless the hope and guarantee of our final likeness to Him.

St. Paul's conclusion on the ultimate result of God's redemptive intervention in Christ is the unqualified victory of His saving love; Christ's rule must continue to spread until God has brought all things into harmony with His mind and purpose. The Son's supreme offering to the Father is His perfected work, a ransomed creation. The position of Christians is that they are the beginning of the end of this all-inclusive movement of redemption, and, by anticipation, the blessings of the glorious consummation are already theirs³. This is the ground and strength of the Apostle's claim: 'there is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus'⁴.

Life in Christ through His indwelling presence, by which we are acceptable to God, comes of faith, which also determines

¹Rom. vi.3-5; Gal. iii.27; Col. ii.12.

²Ephes. iv.13.

³Rom. viii.19-23; I Cor. xv.23-28.

⁴Rom. viii.1.

the character of Christian righteousness. But what precisely is the nature of the faith that leads through the initiation of Baptism to union with Christ? There is general agreement that the object of faith is the Gospel, the 'good news' of God's saving action in Christ and of His free offer to men of all the benefits of His achievement. And faith itself is the grateful acceptance and commitment to the truth of that message. Yet a further question requires consideration: Is the Christian message addressed to all, is it open to every person to consider it, and adopt it or reject it? Or, on the other hand, is it meant only for those known to God alone and who by His eternal decree on hearing it would inevitably embrace it? In this connection it is necessary to distinguish between divine foreknowledge and decree. It has been said that God's knowledge of what men will do is the same as determining that they will do it, and that therefore divine foreknowledge and human freedom are incompatible. But if psychologists from a limited knowledge of a person's inner make-up and disposition, and without undue influence, can predict with a reasonable degree of accuracy how he will behave in particular circumstances, it is not easy to see why God's foreknowledge should be inconsistent with human freedom. 'Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who it was should betray Him', but Judas was nonetheless held responsible for his actions and his treachery was condemned¹.

The Article, while commending the teaching of the *Homily of Justification* does not explicitly contain it. It merely excludes 'our own works, or deservings' as a reason for being 'accounted righteous before God', whereas the *Homily* allows no place whatever for personal decision in response to the Gospel. This is against the whole motive behind evangelical preaching. Did any missionary ever think that in proclaiming the Christian message he was in a single instance working against God's appointment; that there was one soul divinely intended to refuse his appeal?

Our Lord's frequent demand for faith in His hearers is for

¹Jn. vi.64; xix.11.

something they had a say in and could act upon, and its absence hindered Him¹. The theologians, trying to accommodate the divine attributes to the ruling ideas of their time, have been largely responsible for the confusion surrounding this question. The problem of grace and freedom cannot be met in this way; it has to be viewed within the general context of God's character and relation to the world. That 'God is love'² must be the primary thought about Him; His other qualities, His wisdom, power and justice are subservient, and operate for realizing His purpose of love. If the reason for our existence and redemption is the love of God, and if what He wants from us is responsive love, certain facts follow. Love by its nature cannot be compelled; it must be freely rendered. While He ever seeks to accomplish His ideal for us, God will never force us to be what we do not desire to be, for then He would be working against His whole purpose in creation, the triumph of love. Should we speak at all of God saving 'by love or fear', it ought to be on the understanding that fear must pass into love before it becomes what He requires, for 'there is no fear in love'³. The divine love strives to draw us, to win the concurrence of our wills in pursuance of His beneficent design for us. Herein lies the essence of God's way with men, and a right view of the relation between grace and personal decision in the act of faith depends upon it. However much is due to the movement of the Spirit of grace within the heart and mind, we are still treated as men, not as morons. It is not for us to trace in detail the divine and human elements in the giving and receiving of salvation; yet we have no deeper conviction than that freedom has its latitude, and we are responsible agents—it is a conviction to be trusted. In God's dealings with us a point is reached where His will that we should receive His gift of salvation is accepted and made our own, or rejected: 'our wills are ours to make them Thine'.

The view taken here of God's relation to the world, and to humanity in particular, is that it is one which requires

¹Mk. iv.40; xi.22f.; Lk. xvii.6; Mtt. ix.29; xiii.58.

²I Jn. iv.8, 16.

³I Jn. iv.18.

co-operation between Him and us. While nothing at all could be done by man in providing the means of salvation, that is God's exclusive work and He has performed it in Christ; yet there must also be from our side a real act of resolve to receive the redemption He has wrought. This distinction between the divine and the human in justification is observed and allowed in St. Paul's most direct statement on the subject: 'You must work out your own salvation in fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you, inspiring both the will and the deed, for His chosen purpose'¹.

Article XII

OF GOOD WORKS²

Albeit that Good Works, which are the fruits of Faith, and follow after Justification, cannot put away our sins, and endure the severity of God's Judgement; yet are they pleasing and acceptable to God in Christ, and do spring out necessarily of a true and lively Faith; insomuch that by them a lively Faith may be as evidently known as a tree discerned by the fruit.

The teaching of this Article is aimed against the calumny of the Roman Church on the one hand, that the cardinal reformed doctrine of Justification by Faith left no place for Good Works³, and also at the view of some fanatical sects—a view still current to-day—that belief in Christ's atoning achievement is all there is to faith; conduct does not matter. Here the position of our Church is made plain. Nothing that man may do can contribute anything to his reconciliation to God: the ground on which he is pardoned and brought into harmony with Him, and the divine wrath averted, is Christ's

¹Phil. ii.12 (N.E.B.).

²This Article was added by Archbishop Parker in 1563, derived partly from the Württemberg Confession.

³A technical term for Christian activities.

merit. '*Good Works . . . cannot put away our sins, and endure the severity of God's Judgement.*' The merit of Christ is an objective fact and altogether independent of our attitude to it. To believe this is the first step in the exercise of the faith through which the merit of Christ becomes effective unto Justification. The danger here, and it is a very real one, is to think that faith can be identified with bare intellectual assent to the doctrine of Christ's merit. Almost as soon as it was first preached, justification by faith was misunderstood in this way, and St. James had to write his Epistle to correct such mistaken interpretations. It is easy to say we believe certain facts or statements when we think they are true, especially if they may be neglected as having little interest for us, and with no bearing on our lives. But the merit of Christ is not a fact of this kind; on the contrary, it is of the deepest concern to us, and belief in it must result in a life of responsive devotion and service to Him whose achievement it is. Mere intellectual concurrence, as St. James points out, is a faith that the demons could have; they might acknowledge their Conqueror and tremble before Him, but they remain demons¹; theirs is a 'dead' faith. As the Article says, Good Works are the fruits of faith and follow justification, and they '*do spring out necessarily of a true and lively faith*'. According to the standpoint of the New Testament, it would be nonsense to think of having the justifying righteousness which is of God by faith in Christ, apart from possession of the mind or Spirit of Christ that issues in conduct bringing forth the fruits of the Spirit²; the two are properly inseparable. Christian behaviour is so much the natural outcome of a proper faith that by it '*a lively faith may be as evidently known as a tree discerned by the fruit.*' On this both St. Paul and St. James are in full agreement; a saving faith is one that works through love.

As we have indicated, the Article attempts to strike a mean between extremes. On the one hand, the Roman Church seems to over-estimate the importance of Good Works, as a means of earning justification, increase of grace, eternal life,

¹Jas. ii.19; Mk. i.24.

²Rom. viii.9; Gal. v.22.

and even an increase of glory¹. Against this view, the Article declares that Good Works which follow *after* justification cannot earn justification for us². Note the distinction between 'Works' (Article XIII) and 'Good Works'. The Article follows Augustine's dictum: 'Good Works go not before in him which shall afterward be justified; but Good Works do follow after when a man is first justified'³. Our Lord emphasized that 'the branch cannot bear fruit of itself'⁴, and St. Paul was insistent that works cannot merit justification⁵.

At the other extreme, certain Protestants have so underestimated the importance of Good Works as to encourage 'solifidianism'⁶ and 'antinomianism'⁷. The former places so much emphasis on salvation 'by faith only' as to suggest that Good Works are not only unnecessary but positively evil; the latter encourages lawlessness by saying that because a Christian is 'under grace' and not 'under Law', he is therefore under no obligation to observe even the moral law. The Article emphasizes the importance of Good Works as '*pleasing and acceptable to God*'⁸, and the necessary fruits of a true and lively faith. Our Lord held before us the ideal of perfect holiness⁹, and taught us to regard Good Works as so certainly the product of a living faith¹⁰, that we shall be judged according to our works at the end of life¹¹. St. Paul held the same view, declaring,

¹The Council of Trent affirmed: 'Whosoever shall affirm that the good works of a justified man are in such sense the gifts of God, that they are not also his *worthy merits*, or that *he being justified by his good works*, which are wrought by him through the grace of God, and the merits of Jesus Christ, of whom he is a lively member, does not *really deserve* increase of grace, eternal life, the enjoyment of that eternal life if he dies in a state of grace, and *even an increase of glory*, let him be accursed', cited in Griffith Thomas, *The Principles of Theology*, p. 206.

²Cf. Article XIII. The Article is emphasizing the *imperfection* of our good works. The phrase was taken from the Württemberg Confession: 'For all the good works that we do are imperfect, neither can they bear the severity of the divine judgement.'

³From St. Augustine's '*De Fide et Operibus*'; cited in Homily '*Of Fasting*.'

⁴Jn. xv.4 (RV).

⁵Acts xiii.39; Rom. iii.20; Gal. ii.16; Ephes. ii.8f.; Tit. iii.5.

⁶Latin, '*sola fide*'. 'by faith only'.

⁷Greek, '*anti-nomos* (law)'.
⁸Phil. iv.8; I Pet. ii.5.

⁹Mtt. v.48 (RV).

¹⁰Mtt. vii.16f.; I.k. vi.43.

¹¹Mtt. xvi.27.

'We must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to what he hath done, whether it be good or bad.'¹ The New Testament writers repeatedly emphasize the importance of a practical holiness of life, which may be seen by our good works.² The faithfulness and good works of God's servants forwards His purpose for mankind.³ Confession of Christ is meaningless without obedience to His precepts and example⁴; and keeping His words, as distinct from hearing them and acknowledging their truth, makes all the difference between building on a rock and building on sand.⁵

A 'lively' faith, as opposed to the barren 'dead' faith which St. James describes, passes inevitably into a process of sanctification through the good life. By their Baptism into Christ believers have died to their sinful past, and have risen with Him to a new life of righteousness. Once they yielded their members 'to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity', but now they are to present them 'as servants to righteousness unto sanctification'⁶. Christians were formerly darkness, but are become 'light in the Lord', and ought to 'walk as children of light', which has its fruit 'in all goodness and righteousness and truth'⁷. Christ 'gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity and purify unto Himself a people for His own possession, zealous of good works'⁸.

Good Works are 'pleasing and acceptable to God' because of their relation to Christ. They are done by those who are 'in Christ'⁹, who have His mind and live by His Spirit¹⁰. St. Paul prays for the saints in Christ at Philippi that they may be 'filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are through Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God'¹¹; behaviour

¹I Cor. v.10; Rom. ii.6.

²Rom. vi.22 (RV); Eph. ii.10; Tit. ii.7, 14; Jas. ii.17f., 26; I Jn. ii.5 (RV).

³I Cor. xii.26ff.; Jas. v.16.

⁴Lk. vi.46; Jn. xiii.15.

⁵Mtt. vii.24-27.

⁶Rom. vi.19.

⁷Eph. v.8f.

⁸Tit. ii.14; cf. Eph. v.9; Phil. i.11.

⁹Jn. xv.4f.

¹⁰I Cor. ii.16; Gal. v.25.

¹¹Phil. i.11.

becoming to believers is 'well-pleasing unto the Lord'¹; to suffer patiently for righteousness' sake after Christ's example is 'acceptable with God'²

Article XIII

OF WORKS BEFORE JUSTIFICATION³

Works done before the grace of Christ, and the Inspiration of His Spirit, are not pleasant to God, forasmuch as they spring not of faith in Jesus Christ, neither do they make men meet to receive grace, or (as the School-authors say) deserve grace of congruity; yea, rather, for that they are not done as God hath willed and commanded them to be done, we doubt not but they have the nature of sin.

The presupposition of the teaching of this Article is the severe contrast which is drawn in the New Testament and primitive Christianity between the state of the world outside Christ and the order of things under the New Covenant founded by Him. 'The whole world lieth in the evil one,' says St. John⁴; the purpose of redemption is that men might be delivered 'out of this present evil world'⁵. Until Christ's coming mankind was in darkness, but now 'the darkness is passing away and the true light already shineth'⁶. By the Incarnation the original act of creation is repeated; God has commanded His light to shine in Christ on the chaotic darkness of the world⁷.

The question proposed in the Article might be stated thus: 'Is it possible for the natural man, who is under the domination of 'the world-rulers of this darkness'⁸, to do anything that is

¹Eph. v.9.

²I Pet. ii.19f.

³This Article seems to have been composed by the English Reformers as one of the Forty-two Articles of 1553, for it has no close parallel elsewhere. The title is derived from an early draft in which the first clause ran: 'Works that are done before Justification'.

⁴I Jn. v.19.

⁵Gal. i.4.

⁶I Jn. ii.8.

⁷II Cor. iv.6.

⁸Eph. vi.12.

pleasing to God or render himself worthy of receiving grace? And the answer given is a clear negative. To be 'in Christ' is the pre-requisite of all conduct acceptable to God, so that '*works done before the grace of Christ, and the Inspiration of His Spirit, are not pleasant to God*', since they do not spring from faith in Christ, '*neither do they make man meet to receive grace, or deserve grace of congruity*'. The Article was composed by the English Reformers in 1552 with the object of repudiating the teaching of the Schoolmen¹ that men may merit God's favour by actions done in their own strength without prevenient grace.² The Schoolmen distinguished between two forms of merit: (i) Arguing from the case of Cornelius, they said that men may turn towards God of their own unaided strength, and although such actions do not *deserve* a reward, yet it is *fitting* that God out of generosity should reward them: they earn merit *de congruo* ('of fitness'). (ii) But good works done with the help of God's grace deserve a reward: they earn merit *de condigno* ('as a matter of debt'). Article XII repudiates the idea of merit *de condigno* by saying that good works, far from earning merit, deserve '*the severity of God's judgement*' because of their imperfections³. Article XIII condemns the doctrine of merit *de congruo*. The scholastic theory is semi-Pelagian, for it suggests that we earn God's grace by 'making a good start' on our own. Such an idea is contradicted by the teaching of St. Paul⁴, and is not supported by the case of Cornelius.⁵

The Article is relevant to the current opinion, so oft repeated, that 'it doesn't matter what a man believes so long as he leads a decent life'—the inference being that actions are more important than beliefs. But Scripture and experience alike teach us that *motives* are most important of all⁶. Deeds of mercy may

¹The School-men were the theologians of the Middle Ages who tried to reconcile faith and reason by reducing theology to a philosophical system. St. Anselm (d. 1109) is regarded as the first of the School-men; others well known were Albertus Magnus (d. 1280), St. Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274) and Duns Scotus (d. 1308).

²Cf. Article X., p. 71.

³Cf. p. 98 above, footnote 2.

⁴Rom. iv.1-4; ix.11-13; cf. Tit. iii.5.

⁵God clearly took the first step in bringing about Cornelius' conversion; it is an example of prevenient grace (Acts x.3f.).

⁶Cf. I Sam. xvi.7.

be done from selfish motives, pride, self-righteousness, or a desire to win the praise of men. Only good motives can produce good deeds, and only spiritual motives can produce deeds of spiritual force. Though a man may give away all that he has, he may even sacrifice his life, yet unless his action springs from a *Christian* motive it is worthless¹; and a Christian motive cannot exist apart from 'the grace of Christ'². Good works, in the full Christian meaning, can only be done by those who are in Christ and share His mind; all other actions are defective in motive and fall short of this, and hence '*have the nature of sin*'³.

Now if the moral value of our actions depends on their motive, on the reason why we do them, then it may be confidently contended that Christian belief provides the highest conceivable motive, and conduct inspired by it is most pleasing to God.

But were there no lives, in Israel or in heathendom, before Christ came, that presented features approved by God? There is evidence in the New Testament for the view that there were. Enoch was assured that 'he had been well-pleasing unto God'⁴; the Old Testament prophets were inspired by the Spirit of Christ⁵, and our Lord found more commendable faith among pagans and converts to Judaism, than among His Jewish contemporaries⁶. The commandments of the Law are 'holy, and righteous, and good', wrote St. Paul⁷, and in Romans ii he argues that by following their moral sense Gentiles kept the Law, and became a law unto themselves. In spite of the depths of depravity to which paganism had descended, the indications are that an earnest seeking after God was by no means wanting⁸, and that it did not go unsatisfied. The case of Cornelius (Acts x) is an example of this tendency. Although of

¹I Cor. xiii.3 (RV), cf. Gal. v.22.

²Jn. xv. 5 (RV).

³A technical phrase based on Article IX (cf. Rom. xiv.23; Heb. xi.6). The Article does not go as far as the Calvinists who regarded such works as wholly sinful.

⁴Heb. xi.5.

⁵I Pet. i.11.

⁶Mk. vii.29; Mtt. viii.10.

⁷Rom. vii.12.

⁸Acts xvii.28.

Gentile origin, a knowledge of the true God and a desire for the good life were his principal concern, and for the time being he found the answer in the religion of the Jewish synagogue, in which he worshipped and lived acceptably to God¹. But his adopted Judaism was only a stage on his way to Christianity. It was, in fact, among people who had made the same spiritual pilgrimage as Cornelius, from paganism to Judaism, i.e. proselytes, that the Gospel first secured a firm footing in the world. Later some important Church writers pointed out that Greek moralists and philosophers did for paganism what the Law did for the Jew; it served as a 'tutor (*paidagogos*) unto Christ'². It is difficult not to believe that in this great trend of preparation for the Gospel, in Jewish Law and Prophets and Greek philosophy alike, there were many worthy souls whose work and influence were pleasing to God.

If, however, we are thinking of moral virtue not in a relative, preliminary way, but in its highest form, then the central doctrine of the Article is sound: only works which express the mind of Christ and are inspired by His Spirit can have the motive which renders them acceptable to God in the fullest sense; for He is the Beloved in whom the Father is well-pleased, and in Whom also the divine grace is bestowed upon us.³ Christian morality consists in the imitation of Christ, and the love which it manifests is not comparable with the instinctive parental affection and care so important in biological evolution, or with the outward regard for the rights of others that communal life demands. In the New Testament it is not even because they are made in the Divine image that we are to love our fellowmen. There the ultimate fact in the evaluation of the individual is that he is a 'brother for whose sake Christ died'⁴. Christian love, *Agape*, to use the New Testament term, is no humanist esteem for persons as such; it is attitude and action towards the objects of God's reconciling work in Christ. The motive of the Christian way of life is to return the divine love in meeting our deepest need, redemption;

¹Acts x.4.

²Gal. iii.24.

³Eph. i.6.

⁴I Cor. viii.11.

and we do this by treating others as God hath dealt with us and them: 'we love (both God and man), because He first loved us'¹. Christian behaviour is not even formal conformity to our Lord's sayings and example; it is the expression of His mind, which the believer has through union with Him by the indwelling of His Spirit².

This basis of Christian living is unique both in content and method; there is nothing like it elsewhere in the history of religions. It lies in a spiritual experience which is only possible in virtue of the new relation of God to man in Christ. Thus our Article is strictly correct in stating that works done outside this relation '*are not pleasant to God, forasmuch as they spring not out of faith in Jesus Christ.*' And this is the viewpoint of the New Testament. It is from the heart that evil thoughts and actions proceed³, and similarly the opposite qualities. The important thing is that the tree should be good, for then good fruit is the inevitable product.⁴ The order here is the point to be noted: the good fruit is the evidence of the tree's condition, not its cause; the tree is not made good by bearing good fruit, rather the fruit is good because it comes from a good tree.

Article XIV

OF WORKS OF SUPEREROGATION⁵

Voluntary works besides, over and above God's commandments, which they call Works of Supererogation, cannot be taught without arrogancy and impiety; for by them men do declare, that they do not only render unto God as much as they are bound to do, but that they do more for His sake, than of bounden duty is required;

¹I Jn. iv.19.

²I Cor. ii.16; Gal. iv.6.

³Mk. vii.21-23.

⁴Mtt. vii.17-20.

⁵This is another of the Forty-two Articles of 1553, and an original composition of the English Reformers, the only subsequent change being the substitution of 'impiety' for 'iniquity'.

whereas Christ saith plainly, When ye have done all that are commanded you, say, We be unprofitable servants.

A work of supererogation is, literally, some act which is over and above what is required by the explicit commandments of God. To avoid coveting, theft, murder, and lying, to honour one's parents, is obedience to definite demands; but there are other worthy decisions and deeds which are not enjoined, like renunciation of the world, and the embracing of poverty or celibacy, as well as innumerable pious practices and exercises of self-denial, and it is alleged that in this way there can be a surplus of merit.

The Church of Rome distinguishes between 'precepts' (commandments binding upon everyone), and 'counsels' (recommendations which are desirable, but not binding upon everyone). In I Corinthians vii, St. Paul, discussing the relative merits of marriage and celibacy, says, 'Now concerning virgins, I have no commandment (*praeceptum*, 'precept') of the Lord, but I give my judgement (*consilium*, 'counsel').' On the basis of such passages it is argued that those who observe the 'counsels' by taking vows of poverty, chastity, and the monastic life, perform thereby works of supererogation¹. The excess of merit earned by such works is alleged to belong to the whole Church, so that a sort of 'Treasury of Merit' is supposed to exist, from which the Church can draw to help sinners, not only in this life, but also hereafter.²

But the whole doctrine of merit is as irrational as it is unscriptural. 'For our whole life, for every power that we possess as well as for every opportunity of exercising it, we are utterly dependent upon God. He has an absolute claim upon all our life. Nothing we can do can give us a claim against Him. Hence, not only is the "reward" that we receive from Him non-transferable, but from the nature of the case even the holiest saint can never possess any "merit" that belongs to

¹The Latin *rogare* meant 'to propose a law' or 'bring in a Bill' as we would say; *erogare* meant to propose a law dealing with money matters; and *supererogare* meant to 'pay out more than was necessary'. Thence *supererogatio* in ecclesiastical usage meant doing more than God required.

²Hence the practice of selling Indulgences to help souls in purgatory.

him, as it were, in his own right and can be transferred to another's account. Our personal relationship to our Heavenly Father cannot be expressed in terms of arithmetic.¹ The Article, in effect, says that no man can do *more* than his duty. Since nothing less than perfection is required of us,² and all our works, as we saw,³ are imperfect, it is impossible for any man to attain to God's standard, much less to exceed it. There can be no exception to our Lord's verdict: 'When ye have done all that are commanded to you, say, We be unprofitable servants.'⁴ If the best of service is 'unprofitable,' there can be no excess of merit.

The distinction between 'precepts' and 'counsels' is not absolute. For instance, if God calls a man to the Ministry, he does not earn extra merit by obeying; but he would be committing a sin if he disobeyed; the 'counsel' has become for him a 'precept.' The same applies to those who are called to a life of poverty or chastity. The Rich Young Ruler was asked to become poor as a condition of discipleship, not as a work of supererogation. By refusing, he did not simply fail to earn merit; he endangered his entrance into the Kingdom of God.⁵ God does not, however, call all men to make the same sacrifices, or to serve Him in the same way.⁶

As Christians we hold that God is the source of all good, and that His commandments are good because He is good. We confidently ask with Abraham: 'Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right'?⁷ This is a religious conviction, and the moral sense obliges us to be loyal to it. It also means that the moral judgement itself may not always contain the reason for accepting the commandment, although generally the commandments make a moral appeal and evoke a similar response: 'the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy, and righteous, and good'⁸. The important thing is to see that the commandments

¹Bicknell, *Op. cit.* p. 218f.

²Matt. v.27; Luke x.27.

³Article XII, footnote 2, p. 98.

⁴Luke xvii.10.

⁵Mark x.23.

⁶Cf. Article XXXVIII.

⁷Gen. xviii.25.

⁸Rom. vii.12.

are received and acted upon because we believe, either on religious authority, or moral sanction, that they are right. And it is not different with regard to conduct which is not formally enjoined. Everyone would not agree that for progress in the spiritual life celibacy is superior to the married state; but whoever thinks it is, is morally bound to adopt it. Conscience commits us to honour the best we know; it is our duty, something we owe to ourselves as well as to God. On whatever ground a course of action is decided to be right, there is no escape from moral obligation to pursue it. It matters not at all whether it is prescribed by a code or chosen freely; its moral worth is the same. Since this is so, special merit can never attach to 'voluntary works'; there is strictly no such thing as a work of supererogation. As moral agents we stand under an uncompromising obligation to follow the best we know. This moral sense, with its supreme claim upon us, is the law of our being; to obey its direction is the way to the full free life; to violate it leads to decline and death. To think of merit and reward for observing the law of our being is out of place; it is our primary *duty* to do so. Even when the moral requirement takes the form of a religious commandment, conformity does not earn merit: 'When ye have done all . . . say, We are unprofitable servants; we have done that which it was our duty to do'¹ Throughout Scripture all men are regarded as sinners; there is no overplus of merit. Before God 'shall no man living be justified'²; there is none that doeth good'³; 'in many things we all stumble'⁴; 'If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us'⁵.

¹Lk. xvii.10.

²Ps. cxliii.2.

³Ps. xiv.3.

⁴Jas. iii.2.

⁵I Jn. i.8.

Article XVII

OF PREDESTINATION AND ELECTION¹

Predestination to Life is the everlasting purpose of God, whereby (before the foundations of the world were laid) He hath constantly decreed by His counsel secret to us, to deliver from curse and damnation those whom He hath chosen in Christ out of mankind, and to bring them by Christ to everlasting salvation, as vessels made to honour. Wherefore, they which be endued with so excellent a benefit of God be called according to God's purpose by His Spirit working in due season; they through Grace obey the calling; they be justified freely; they be made sons of God by adoption; they be made like the image of His only-begotten Son Jesus Christ; they walk religiously in good works, and at length by God's mercy, they attain to everlasting felicity.

As the godly consideration of Predestination, and our Election in Christ, is full of sweet, pleasant, and unspeakable comfort to godly persons, and such as feel in themselves the working of the Spirit of Christ, mortifying the works of the flesh, and their earthly members, and drawing up their mind to high and heavenly things, as well because it doth greatly establish and confirm their faith of eternal Salvation to be enjoyed through Christ, as because it doth fervently kindle their love towards God: So, for curious and carnal persons, lacking the Spirit of Christ, to have continually before their eyes the sentence of God's Predestination, is a most dangerous downfall, whereby the Devil doth thrust them either into desperation, or into wretchedness of most unclean living, no less perilous than desperation.

Furthermore, we must receive God's promises in such wise, as they be generally set forth to us in Holy Scripture: and, in our doings, that Will of God is to be followed, which we have expressly declared unto us in the Word of God.

A study of Scripture and experience of life present us with certain facts—the existence of evil; the salvation of some people, and the condemnation of others; the circumstances which often seem to place one person on the road to salvation, and another on the road to condemnation. These facts have

¹One of the Forty-two Articles of 1553, which suffered only slight verbal changes in 1563 and 1571.

led most theologians to believe in an 'election' of 'grace' based on certain statements in Scripture; but the majority of them do not suggest that this election of grace, the free and special manifestation of God's goodness, implies election to death of all who are not elected to life. The problem was much debated at the Reformation. John Calvin declared 'By predestination we mean the eternal decree of God, by which He determined with Himself whatever He wished to happen with regard to every man. All are not created on equal terms, but some are preordained to eternal life, others to eternal damnation; and accordingly, as each has been created for *one or other* of these ends, we say that he has been predestinated to life or to death.'¹ It will be noted that the Article does not follow Calvin to such an extreme conclusion. He clearly taught that God, in the fulness of His sovereignty by 'His eternal and immutable counsel,' has decreed some to salvation, others to damnation, and as He owes nothing to either, the elect have to bless Him everlastingly, and the reprobate have no right to complain. Such a harsh conclusion may be the logical one. But Calvin forgot that God is love, not pure logic. He forgot, too, that even logic is human. Logic is reason arrogating to itself the right of judging alone, supremely, and without appeal. But we should not presume to impose upon God our conclusions, however unanswerable, however clear they may seem to our intellect.

This whole subject of Predestination must be viewed in the light of one of the basic principles clearly enunciated in Scripture.

God loves all mankind, and His eternal purpose for men is good. He 'desireth not the death of a sinner, but rather that he may turn from his wickedness, and live.'² It is significant that in His teaching about the Final Judgement, our Lord made important distinctions between the sentences passed:

¹*Institutes*, Book III, chap. xxi, sect. 5.

²Absolution in Morning and Evening Prayer, cf. Ezek. xxxiii.11; II Pet. iii.9.

He said:—

To those on the left hand:

'Depart from Me, ye cursed,
unto everlasting fire, prepared
for the devil and his angels.

To those on the right hand:

'Come, ye blessed of my Father,
inherit the kingdom prepared
for you from the foundation of
the world.

Thus, some are blessed by God, but the others are not cursed by Him, —the curse seems to be of themselves. The kingdom is prepared 'for you'; but the 'everlasting fire' is 'for the devil and his angels.' The Article follows this principle in affirming that *Predestination to Life is the everlasting purpose of God*,¹ and declares that it is *the Devil* who thrusts 'curious and carnal persons' into desperation or 'wretchlessness' (i.e. recklessness²).

The love of God has two aspects, creative and saving. It is in the creative side that the divine love appears in the original, absolute and uncovenanted form. The only reason for the world's existence at all is that the Creator desired to make something as like Himself as possible. So man was made in God's image, that is, with a capacity for enjoying the blessedness of a life in communion with Him; such is the divine intention for every soul without exception. In this action of pure creative love man has no part; his being, its nature and meaning, are determined by the will of God. It also belongs to the divine purpose for man that he can accept or refuse his role in its realization. And in fact he has refused on the largest scale; mankind is in a fallen state and requires redemption. It is in the application of the same divine love in which it was created to a world which needs saving, that particular arbitrary choices are seen.

Israel is selected from among the nations of the earth³ to be God's peculiar people⁴, and the instrument of His redeeming action⁵, and within Israel He raises up Moses and calls the prophets: the whole history of salvation is one of special choices and appointments. There is no difficulty about such

¹It is God's 'good pleasure,' Ephes. i.5, 9; Phil. ii.13; II Thess. i.11.

²Latin, *securitatem*.

³Amos iii.2.

⁴Deut. iv.2.

⁵Isa. xlix.6.

a process of election, provided it is understood not to be an end in itself, but the means of universal salvation. The greatest tragedy that ever befell a nation was Israel's failure to appreciate this. The aim of God's redemptive action in history is to accomplish the purpose of His love in creation, to bring all men to the blessed life of fellowship with Himself.

The doctrine of predestination has two roots: one is ideal, the conception of the majesty and omnipotence of God, and the other is empirical, derived from experience and history. Against the sovereign power with which God pursues His purpose, the lives of individuals and the fortunes of the nations are reduced to insignificance¹; they have no independent meaning, but are part of a predetermined plan; history is an exhibition of puppetry, and the feeling of freedom and responsibility is an illusion.

A less rigid view of predestination is connected with the sense of vocation or mission which some of the great makers of history have had, of whom our Lord and St. Paul are conspicuous examples.²

History is not the mechanical unfolding of the divine counsel; within the framework of God's purpose much happens which need not or should not have happened, and His ultimate control of events is seen in how evil is made to contribute to the good. Were Israel's disobedience and rejection of Jesus an integral part of God's plan for His ancient people? The prophets and St. Paul answer, No; yet for the Apostle the latter event leads directly to the preaching to the Gentiles, and indirectly to Israel's conversion. His reflections on God's ways with His People created in St. Paul's mind overwhelming conviction concerning His Wisdom and power in the overruling of history, and it is this idea of complete divine supremacy that lies behind his reference to vessels of honour and dishonour in Romans ix.21. But he says much besides which it is quite impossible to reconcile with potter-and-clay predestinarianism.

As the clauses immediately following it show, the opening sentence of the Article: '*Predestination to life is the everlasting*

¹Isa. xl.12-17; Ps. cxliv.3, 4.

²Jn. xii.27; xviii.37; Gal. i.15f.

purpose of God', refers to the scheme of salvation. It is rather remarkable that no motive for creation is mentioned in Scripture; the world is never traced to the love of God. The divine love is always thought of in biblical theology from the standpoint of redemption; God is pre-eminently the God of saving love. The plan of salvation was conceived in the divine council before creation, and believers are chosen in Christ from all eternity¹.

After this general statement of the purpose of predestination the Article mentions the several steps in the implementing of it under the influence of the Holy Spirit. Those '*endued with so excellent a benefit*' as election respond to the Gospel²; they are freely justified³; and in virtue of the New Covenant in Christ they become sons of God by adoption⁴. By the process of sanctification believers are transformed into Christ's likeness; following their high calling they bring forth the fruits of the Spirit, and by grace continuing in the same they at last receive their heavenly inheritance.⁵

If those who answer the call of the Gospel are like '*vessels made to honour*', what is the position of those who refuse? Was their rejection of it predetermined because it was not meant for them? Were they by arbitrary divine decree outside the scope of salvation? These questions were vigorously debated, especially among Protestants, in the controversies of the Reformation, and we must be grateful for the moderation of our Article. As we have seen, Calvin's doctrine of predestination included election to eternal life, and reprobation, or election to perdition. Christ died for the chosen few only; the vast majority of the race were foreordained to everlasting punishment. Romans ix.14-24 was chiefly appealed to in support of this 'terrible truth', as Calvin himself called it. What appeared to him the incredible spiritual blindness and obduracy of his own people, the Jews, was a distressing problem to St. Paul. As in Pharaoh's case, he thought it must be owing

¹Rom. viii.30; Eph. iv.4-6; I Pet. i.1f.

²Jn. vi.37; x.27; Acts xiii.48; Rom. viii.29f.; x.17; I Thess. ii.12.

³Rom. iii.24; v.1, 9; viii.30; I Cor. vi.11.

⁴Rom. viii.15f.; Gal. iv.5; Eph. i.5.

⁵Rom. viii.29; II Cor. iii.18; I Jn. iii.2; Eph. i.9-11; I Pet. i.4, 5.

to God's hardening of their hearts, so he concluded: 'He hath mercy on whom He will, and whom He will He hardeneth'¹.

But in neither case is the enforced disobedience God's real purpose; on the contrary, in both it is the prelude to a typical mighty act for His people's salvation. Israel's rejection of the Apostle's message opened the door of the Gospel to the Gentiles², and the success of his Gentile mission would at last move the Jews to join them³, that they might receive their inheritance of the promises in the New Israel, 'and so all Israel shall be saved'⁴. Gentile disobedience in the past, and Israel's disobedience in the present, find their meaning in the divine purpose of universal mercy: 'For God hath shut up all unto disobedience, that He might have mercy upon all'⁵.

The real view of St. Paul is that God's purpose of salvation, which includes the entire creation⁶, is assured of achievement; Christ must reign till God has brought all things into subjection to Him⁷. In another important passage, II Corinthians iv.3, 4, the Apostle accounts for the spiritual apathy and opposition he has encountered as due, not to human perversion, and still less to the divine counsel, but to the action of 'the god of this world' in blinding the eyes of the unbelieving. The conception of the divine purpose in the New Testament is determined by the doctrine that God is love, and hence is that of predestination to life in the widest sense.⁸

Much anxiety has been caused by the question of assurance of election. The position taken in our Article is that those chosen out of the world for salvation are known to God alone. It is to be noted that nothing is said about the election of the lost. There is only personal conviction to go on here, and it is necessary to guard against identifying such inner feeling with divine decree. The knowledge that we 'daily endeavour ourselves to follow the blessed steps of (Christ's) most holy

¹Rom. ix.18.

²Acts xiv.27; xiii.46.

³Rom. xi.14f.

⁴Rom. xi.26.

⁵Rom. xi.32 (R.V.)

⁶Rom. viii.20f.

⁷I Cor. xv.25-28; Eph. i.22.

⁸Jn. iii.17f.; Eph. i.10f.; I Tim. ii.4; Tit. ii.11.

life' by walking in the Spirit, thus 'mortifying the works of the flesh' and bringing forth the fruits of the same Spirit¹, —this is the only guarantee of our calling in Christ that we can have or need. Belief in one's election on these grounds is of immense psychological value; pre-destination then is indeed '*full of most pleasant, and unspeakable comfort*'². And just as the doctrine of election is for the earnest believer a source of encouragement and inspiration to increasing effort in the Christian life, so where there is morbid obsession with our sinfulness it may induce belief in reprobation, and lead to abandonment to wickedness³.

As we saw when considering Article XVI, our final salvation depends on our willing obedience and constant co-operation with the grace of God. This Article also emphasizes both aspects, the Divine and the human in salvation. On God's part, there is the calling, the working of the Spirit, the free justification, the adoption as sons, and the attainment of everlasting felicity. On man's part, the obedience to the calling, conformity to the image of Christ, and religious walking in good works.

God achieves His purpose for mankind through human instruments. He chose Abraham that through him 'all the families of the earth might be blessed'⁴. The nation of Israel was chosen as God's People so that they might work for the salvation of all mankind⁵. Our Lord sanctified Himself for the sake of others⁶, and the Church as the Body of Christ is God's instrument for the redemption of the world⁷, its members being 'the elect'⁸.

Thus we see that God elects, or selects, some men through whom His purposes are worked out for the benefit of mankind, and voluntary co-operation is required on the part of those elected. But the election of some does not imply the rejection

¹Rom. viii.13f.; Gal. v.16, 22-24.

²Rom. viii.33, 38f.

³Cf. II Tim. ii.24-26.

⁴Gen. xii.3.

⁵Isa. xlix.6; lx.

⁶Jn. xvii.19.

⁷Eph. iii.8.11; cf. Gal. i.15f.

⁸I Pet. i.2.

of all others, as Calvin erroneously supposed. Whatever opinions may be held on this high theme, we are reminded in the concluding paragraph of the Article that the important thing for us is to receive the general teaching of Scripture on God's will that all men should be saved, that His reconciling work in Christ has all creation for its object¹ and also in our conduct to observe that same will by obedience to His clearly declared commandments².

Article XVIII

OF OBTAINING ETERNAL SALVATION ONLY BY THE NAME OF CHRIST³

They also are to be had accused that presume to say, that every man shall be saved by the Law or Sect which he profeseth, so that he be diligent to frame his life according to that Law, and the light of Nature. For Holy Scripture doth set out unto us only the Name of Jesus, whereby men must be saved.

The error denounced in this Article is one which Newman regarded as especially insidious and dangerous, because it was fostered by the modern spirit of toleration and *laissez-faire*, and he devoted his life to combating it. He named it 'liberalism' in religion, and defined it as the view that one faith, or any form of the same faith, was as good as another. Such a view is widespread to-day and leads to the conclusion that religious beliefs must be indifferent, for they have no finality; that they are all relative to the culture in which they obtain, and vary from age to age and from place to place. The important thing, it is suggested, is that a man should be consistent, and behave

¹Cf. I Tim. ii.4; II Cor. v.19; Eph. i.10f.

²Lk. x.25-28; Mtt. vii.21, 24f.

³Composed for the Forty-two Articles. The original Article had 'They also are to be had accused *and abhorred*', but the latter expression was dropped in 1571.

according to his creed; that is the most that should be expected of him, and would meet God's demands.

It will be agreed that God's justice will never ask of anyone a better life than his circumstances permit; but that is not to say that the best under any conditions is the divine ideal for him. For Christianity too, consistency is a primary virtue. But only consistency at the highest level results in character and conduct which correspond to the divine standard for humanity. A good Christian is a better type than a good Jew or Stoic, because his conception of God and reality is truer. In other words, consistency in itself is not sufficient; it must be a consistency in which expression is given to true thinking. This is the point in our Lord's saying in St. John iii.23, 24, about worshipping God 'in spirit and in truth'. Sincerity ('in spirit') in our approach to God must be accompanied by right ideas on His nature and character ('in truth') for the kind of worship He desires, and the guide here is the mind of Christ.¹

Jesus claimed an exclusive role in the establishing of right relations between God and man: He is the way of access to Him, the teacher of divine truth, and the great Exemplar². Leadership of mankind is His prerogative; He comes among men as the rightful Shepherd to His flock, and all that preceded Him are 'thieves and robbers'³. He is the Light of the world, and men pass judgement on themselves by their reaction to His message⁴. This unique place of Jesus in the scheme of redemption is endorsed in the apostolic preaching: 'And in none other is there salvation: for neither is there any other name under heaven that is given among men, wherein we must be saved'⁵. He is the sole Mediator between God and men⁶.

If God has revealed one particular way of salvation, we neglect or ignore that way at our peril, and we are in duty bound to proclaim that Way to all mankind. We cannot leave men utterly dependent upon '*the light of Nature*'. At best, 'the

¹Cf. I Cor. ii.16; Phil. ii.5.

²Jn. xiv.6; Rom. v.2; Heb. x.20.

³Jn. x.1-15.

⁴Jn. i.4-9; iii.19; viii.12.

⁵Acts iv.12.

⁶I Tim. ii.5.

knowledge of God to be gained from Nature is only partial. To put it metaphorically: from Nature we know the hands and feet but not the heart of God. We can know His wisdom and omnipotence, also His justice and even His goodness, but not His forgiving mercy, His absolute will to bring about a communion between man and Himself¹. The Church has been 'sent' by God to be His instrument in bringing men into communion with Him². It is her duty 'so to present Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit, that men shall come to put their trust in God through Him, to accept Him as their Saviour, and serve Him as their King in the fellowship of His Church'³.

The Article does not justify any presentation of the Gospel that has the effect of persuading men to renounce their allegiance to the Church in order to join some novel sect. Nor does it repudiate the principle '*Extra ecclesiam nulla salus*' (Outside the Church there is no salvation). The Archbishops' Commission on Evangelism emphasizes 'When the Gospel was first proclaimed, the fellowship of the Church was also proclaimed as an essential element of God's Good News: "They then that received His word were baptized . . . And they continued steadfastly in the Apostles' teaching and the fellowship, in the breaking of bread and in the prayers."⁴ To have claimed to be able to live the Christian life apart from the Christian community would have passed the comprehension of the New Testament'⁵.

A representative group of Protestant theologians recently described the individualistic view of salvation (characteristic of some of the sects) which ignores the doctrine of the Church as 'a lapse from the Gospel, from which we have largely recovered, and we assert to-day the faith of the Reformers

¹Emil Brunner, in *Natural Theology* (1946), p. 38. Cp. Robert Boyle (1627-1691): 'those attributes of God . . . visibly displayed in the fabric of the world . . . are His power, His wisdom, and His goodness', cited in *Anglicanism*, More and Cross, p. 203.

²Hence the Church is described as 'Apostolic' (Gk. apostellein, to send, cf. Jn. xx.21).

³*Towards the Conversion of England*, p. 00.

⁴Acts ii.41f. (RV).

⁵Op. cit. p. 92; cf. Acts ii.47.

that outside the Church there is no salvation'.¹ In support of their assertion they quote Luther's words: 'I believe that no one can be saved who is not found in this congregation (that is, the congregation of the saints, or the Church) holding with it to one faith, word, sacraments, hope and love;' 'I believe that in this congregation and nowhere else, there is forgiveness of sins.' They also quote Calvin, speaking of the visible Church: 'Outside her bosom no forgiveness of sins, no salvation can be hoped for.'²

Pagan history is called in the New Testament 'the times of ignorance'³. Reason and conscience were inadequate means to a knowledge of God; philosophy led to delusion, and conscience became insensitive in the unequal moral struggle⁴. Paganism appears in the most favourable light in the New Testament references to proselytes, i.e., converts from heathenism to Judaism. St. Paul paints a frightful picture of the pagan world⁵; but we know that even in this welter of wickedness there were noble souls that longed after higher things, and minds devoted to the search for spiritual truth. And many of them found them, at any rate for the time being, in the religion of the synagogue. Among such was Cornelius⁶ 'a devout man, and one that, feared God with all his house', whose account of his vision drew from St. Peter the comment: 'I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth Him, and worketh righteousness, is acceptable to Him'. The Apostle's experience convinced him that Gentiles, even a Roman soldier, should be accepted in the Christian fellowship. Cornelius had done all he could; he had sought and embraced the best that was open to him, and met with divine approval. But his spiritual quest did not end in Judaism; the faith of the synagogue was for him, and for many like him, a stage on the

¹*The Catholicity of Protestantism*, A Report to the Archbishop of Canterbury by a group of Free Churchmen (1950), p. 91f.

²Op. cit. p. 92.

³Acts xvii. 30; cf. xvii.23; Eph. iv.8; I Pet. i.14.

⁴Rom. i.20-25, 32.

⁵Rom. i.24-32; Col. iii.5-7; I Thess. iv.5.

⁶Acts x: I k vii.2-10.

way to Christ. Proselytism¹, in fact, was to prove the very seedplot for the Gospel. Judaism was an imperfect religion; it needed fulfilment, and our Lord saw in His own revelation the accomplishment of this.² The fulfilment, however, took a form which no Jew could recognize and remain loyal to his ancestral faith. Jesus brought together in His own Person great figures, institutions and prophecies of the Old Testament, which were quite distinct and independent in the Jewish religion, and from their union in Him there emerged an original and unpredictable religious conception. Even in relation to its parent Judaism, Christianity is something new.

According to the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, Judaism stands to Christianity as the shadow to the substance; to say that they are equally true would be to admit no difference between a reflection and the thing which casts it.

The Church has always strenuously maintained that she is the custodian of an unique knowledge of God. Indeed, in early times, points of resemblance between its system and pagan cults were explained as due to the deceitful imitation of demons. The only other special revelation, that to Israel, was incomplete; the final word of God to man was spoken in His Son³. The exercise of reason and moral earnestness was a tendency towards the truth they could never reach unaided in this paradoxical world. Ultimate religious truth is for us revealed truth, 'even as it is in Jesus'.⁴

It will be observed that the Article, while affirming that Christ is the only Saviour, says nothing of those heathen who have had no opportunity of hearing the Gospel. Doubtless they will be judged according to the light they have had and the use they have made of it⁵. But missionary work does not therefore become unnecessary; evangelism at home and abroad is a 'must' for the Church and all her members⁶.

¹Proselytism is here used as a general term to indicate attachment to Judaism, of which there were various degrees Cf. *The Beginnings of Christianity*, vol. V. Additional Note VIII, p. 74ff.

²Mtt. v.17.

³Heb. i.2.

⁴Eph. iv.21.

⁵Jn. i.9; I k. xii.48; Acts x.34f.; Rom. ii.12-16; I Tim. iv.10.

⁶Mtt. xxviii.19f.; Mk. xvi.15; I k. xxiv.47; Jn. xv.16.