

CHAPTER III

THE SCHOOL OF THE SPIRIT

It could be said with some reason that Protestantism did not correctly describe its principle of knowledge when it declared the Scriptures to be the source and standard of doctrine. Was not the sovereign authority which it recognised, and to which it bowed, the Holy Spirit? The teaching of the prophets, it was held, had been given by inspiration of the Holy Ghost; the doctrine of the New Testament was derived either directly from Christ, or from the Spirit whom He promised to the disciples to lead them into all the truth. This initial work was believed to have been continued in an inward witness of the Spirit by which an assurance was conveyed that the Scriptures had the character of the Word of God. It was also taught that the assistance of the Holy Spirit was necessary to make the Word efficacious as a means of grace, and to apply to the darkened and sinful soul the enlightening and life-giving energies that made all things new. Why, then, it was natural to ask, should this principle not be frankly acknowledged, instead of veiling its sovereignty by allusions to another supreme standard?¹ And why

¹ 'The Holy Scriptures I esteem above human treasures, but not so highly as the Word of God, which is living, powerful, and eternal, and pure from the elements of this world, since it is God Himself, Spirit and not letter, written without pen and paper, so that it can never be blotted out.'—Denck, quoted by Jones, *Mystical Religion*, 1910, p. 336.

should it not be more fully trusted? If the Spirit could be believed when it vouched for the truth that the Bible is the Word of God, it seemed that it was equally deserving of credence when it vouched as confidently for other convictions that were rooted in or accompanied a regenerate experience. The Spirit of God bloweth as it listeth, and it was not evident why it should be held to have been debarred from continuing to lay hold of and speak through human instruments even as these had been owned and used in the earlier periods of sacred history.

The School of the Spirit is a comprehensive rubric, which might be held to include wide varieties of standpoint—ranging from religious mania to theological liberalism and unchartered freedom of thought, and also including varied types of mysticism.¹ For our present purpose it is desirable to restrict it to those schools and sects which, believing that special revelation is a mode of the divine activity, have held that throughout the Christian dispensation private revelations of a supernatural kind have continued to be given to men, and that the communications thus made take their place alongside of the Scriptures as authoritative Word of God.

This modification of the Protestant principle was so plausible that it must have been propounded in the natural course of reflection, while it could reckon on peculiar sympathy from minds that had been unsettled and excited in the great spiritual upheaval of the Reformation era. The school had its prototype in the

¹ Vaughan regarded it as the distinctive note of mysticism, that it 'mistook for a divine manifestation the operations of a merely human faculty.' But the 'mystic is not, as such, a visionary, nor has he any interest in appealing to a faculty above reason.'—Inge, *Christian Mysticism*, 1899, p. 19.

patristic church in Montanism, which made the same claim to special illumination, and paid the same penalty in ferocious persecution. Its chief representatives were the Anabaptists, who were vehemently repudiated by Luther and Calvin as seeking to degrade the Word of God to the level of their own vain imaginations, and also as giving a pretext to the civil magistrate, by their visionary projects and their turbulence, for opposing the Reformation as a menace to social order and good morals. The principle of the inner light was largely dissociated at a later date from the communions which are identified by their rejection of infant baptism; but it was re-affirmed by the Society of Friends, it passed over to Swedenborgianism, Irvingism, and other modern sects, and it has at least some affinity with the principle which underlies the work of the subjective schools of modern theology.

I

The distinctive position of the School of the Spirit, it has been said, is that private revelations have continued to be given to individuals which are no less authoritative than those recorded in Scripture. But there has been much diversity of opinion upon certain subsidiary points—viz. (i.) as to the persons to whom these communications have been vouchsafed; (ii.) as to the mode of their conveyance; and (iii.) as to the precise relation in which the revelations stand to the canonical Scriptures.

i. It has been common in the school to magnify the revelation which is made inwardly to man as man. The knowledge of God and of duty which can be widely reckoned on in all civilised societies was interpreted, not as a result of reasoning, or of the intuitive powers of the mind, but as a gift of the

illuminating Spirit of God. There was also a disposition to exaggerate the extent and value of this general gift in opposition to the orthodox view that the Fall had reduced man to utter spiritual impotence and blindness. The Anabaptists were wont to emphasise the truth that there is a light which 'lighteneth every man that cometh into the world,' and that the soul naturally bears testimony to the righteousness and the love of God. These religious and moral intuitions make up a considerable part of the revelations which Barclay seeks to vindicate in his *Apology*. There was recognised in addition a richer and more spiritual endowment which is bestowed upon the Christian society and its members. The Christian congregation, in the view of the Friends, is the object of a peculiar care and bounty of the Spirit, which gives liberally of illumination and utterance to the worshippers; and the services of an educated ministry are regarded as at the best a makeshift for tiding over the intervals of divine quiescence and silence. By the same Spirit, assistance is also given to believers in dealing with the problems of the intellectual life and the perplexities of the practical life. In other types of thought the tendency has been to minimise or even surrender the claim of average persons to immediate illumination, and to assert it only in the case of certain individuals marked out by extraordinary gifts. These might be conceived to form a fairly large class of persons who, on the ground of exceptional sanctity and spiritual power, were supposed to have received a special mission and unction from on high. The Montanist prophets and their successors of Zwickau were condemned as false prophets; but when the Church has been thoroughly satisfied with a prophetic message it has often been entirely willing to

believe that the saintly, fervent and soul-compelling preacher possessed a real measure of miraculous endowment. During the first hundred years of its history the Church accorded to its inspired prophets far greater reverence than it paid to the more sober and prosaic official who was destined to evolve into a diocesan bishop; and popular Protestantism has also occasionally possessed prophetic preachers whom it has honoured with a similar judgment. In some sects and schools the main emphasis has been laid on the work of a single individual of the prophetic type who was believed to have been raised up as a special instrument, furnished with a momentous message, and commissioned to reform the Church or to perfect its doctrine.

ii. There is also considerable difference of experience and of theory as to the manner of the divine revelations. The main distinction is between the type of experience in which the normal conditions of the intellectual life are suspended and supplemented, and that in which the higher illumination is blended with the ordinary processes of thought and will. There is a natural tendency to regard abnormal psychical conditions as the most reliable criterion of the influence of the Divine Spirit upon the finite spirit. In the early history of Israel, it was ecstasy and trance that were the credentials of the prophet; in the Corinthian Church this kind of gift was coveted more than the excellent way of charity; and it is to Montanism that we owe the most thorough-going conception of inspiration as a mechanical process. It is pathetic to read that Edward Irving would pause in the midst of a sublime discourse, in which genius met with holiness, and would keep reverent silence while some ecstatic brother or sister

interrupted the preacher with contributions in an unknown and unknowable tongue. Outward voices, appearances, and dreams are specified by Barclay as trustworthy media. In many cases the revelation is declared to have been received through the agency of other finite spirits, whether angels or fellow-mortals, who have passed into the unseen world. At this point the type of thought runs into spiritualism, and derives from it such support or discredit as may be thought to follow from the alliance. On the other hand it would appear that what was founded on by many of those who affirmed the reality of private revelations was that they had acquired convictions on religious and moral questions which could not be shaken by argument, and that they had formed holy resolutions from which they could not be moved, either by the allurements or by the terrors of the world. It must be this class of experiences, and not voices, visions and the like, that is the basis of the faith of the great multitude of those who have affirmed the fact of private revelations.

iii. As regards the matter of the alleged revelations, a distinction may be drawn according as they have been supposed to be an independent reproduction of biblical doctrines, a supplement to the knowledge conveyed in the Christian revelation, or a revision and amendment of the doctrinal system of Christianity.

In the teaching of the Anabaptists expression was often given to the idea that the private revelations were a republication of the substance of Scripture. They might even advance to the position that the revelations sufficed for salvation, and that Scripture could be dispensed with; but at least in the earlier period they accorded it the tribute of testifying that as a gift of the same Spirit it could not be contradicted

by the private revelations. As a fact, the chief ground of the quarrel with them in the first instance was that they made too much instead of too little of the Bible, that their imagination had been fired by its social gospel and its prophetic visions, and that they thought the ideas of the Kingdom of God and of human brotherhood to be capable of concrete realisation in political institutions and in economic and social life. The position of Barclay is circumspectly chosen. He maintains the principle of his school, by protesting that the revelations may not be subjected to Scripture as a more certain touchstone, and he rules out all mischievous elements of doctrine or ethical ideal by providing that the revealed utterances shall not contradict Scripture.¹ This may well seem to be to reject the biblical touchstone in name and to make reverent use of it in practice.

The view that the original deposit of the biblical revelation has been supplemented by private revelations is met with in many gradations. It would often seem as if the main thing contended for by those who claimed special communications was that they enjoyed the gracious help of the Holy Spirit in thinking out their theological difficulties, in applying Christian principles to the concrete world of politics, business and social intercourse, and in taking the numerous decisions that are called for by the circumstances and the events of the day. Protestant orthodoxy could go even further, and, provided no addition to the stock of doctrine was claimed, could believe in the continuance of the power of prediction. It is stated by Knox, for example, that George Wishart 'fore-spake in the audience of many such things as some towns and the whole realm afterwards

¹ Barclay, *Apology for the True Christian Divinity*, 1676-8. See App. G, Barclay's Propositions.

felt.'¹ When the private revelations have been appealed to for instruction in doctrine they have frequently been made use of to discredit positions of orthodox theology. It is noteworthy that they have been specially levelled against articles of the evangelical scheme of Christianity. Among the Anabaptists Schwenkfeld combined the principle of the inner light with violent opposition to the doctrine of justification by faith; and it was characteristic of the school generally that they shifted the emphasis from the Cross to the indwelling Christ as the ground of salvation. There was also much opposition to the predestinarian tenets, with accentuation of the universality of the love of God and of the scope of the Atonement, although there was also a section which realised the close affinity with their fundamental principle of that theological system which depends most entirely upon God. It was an important part of the purpose of the revelations of Swedenborg to correct the errors into which he believed that the Church had been led by Luther and Calvin. Swedenborg's teaching was in the main intended as a deeper and richer interpretation of Scripture, with supplementary information as to the unseen world, and the conditions of existence of departed spirits. In other cases the interest has been, not so much in doctrine, as in moral and social ideals. The burden of the Montanist message was that the Church should return to the purity and the moral rigour of the first age. The Anabaptists dreamed of a millennium, and, failing this, of a political and social order that would be governed more palpably by the principles of Christ.

The theology of the inner light has had still more

¹ *The Reformation in Scotland*, i. 125.

radical developments. The Puritan upheaval gave birth to bands of fanatics, popularly known as Ranters, who professed a pantheistic creed that involved the denial of the personality of God and of the immortality of the soul, and who seem to have conceived that the goal of religious development was reached in emancipation from the demands of the moral law. One division of Quakerism moved in the direction of theological rationalism, and rested in an ethical monotheism which broke more or less with the supernaturalism of the Christian system while it conserved its moral precepts concerning inwardness and meekness.

II

The School of the Spirit, if we may speak of it as a whole, had the merit of perceiving certain facts, and of taking seriously certain truths, to which full justice was not done in orthodox Protestantism.¹

It was right in its explicit affirmation that the one absolute authority is God or the Holy Spirit. It also made the just observation that Christianity is not a religion of the letter, conveying to us in a book a code of elaborated doctrines which it is the sole business of theology to reproduce, and also a collection of divine enactments which furnish guidance in the form of proof texts for most of the capital questions dealt with in Church and State, and in the various relationships of the individual life. It took its own way of expressing the fact that the Christian revelation has imposed grave responsibilities upon the Christian mind in the way of thinking out its intellectual content, and also of

¹ This attitude is well illustrated in a recent notable book—W. B. Ritchie, *Revelation and Religious Certitude*, 1907, ch. iii.

applying its ethical principles to the different spheres of human activity.

What we are now concerned with, however, is the distinctive theory of private revelations, and we have to ask whether there is ground for supposing that subsequently to the apostolic age supernatural communications have been made to saintly or prophetic men which constitute an addition to, or a correction of, the doctrinal knowledge which is bound up with the Christian revelation.

1. The strongest argument which is put forward in support of the general position of the school is that it is justified by the precedent and analogy of the period of Christian origins. It is a curious view of history, it is often said, and an unbelieving view, to suppose that in a past age God held converse with men, but that for well-nigh two thousand years He has kept silence. Is it consistent with the idea of God as the living God that we should think of Him as having passed out of our life, and given us in place of Himself a book which we ominously describe by the name of a Testament? Upon this it is to be observed in the first place that Protestant theology never asserted the thoroughgoing contrast which is imputed to it as between a primitive period when God spake by His Spirit, and the subsequent centuries when He has spoken only through a book. It was never doubted that in the present dispensation the activity of the Spirit is intimate, incessant and necessary in enabling the minds of men to understand and lay hold of divine truth. Nor was it doubted that those who seek counsel of God in their perplexity receive guidance by the gracious operations of the same Spirit on condition that they make use of the Word and of prayer as the appointed means of

grace. The question was not whether the Spirit of God still dwells with men, enlightening their minds in the knowledge of divine things, but whether He continues to do this in the same immediate way which is affirmed of the biblical writers, and with the same result of imparting knowledge which was previously hidden from human eyes. In regard to this, it may be pointed out in the first place that the divine help enjoyed by the sacred writers was to some extent the same which we possess. They drew largely upon the revelation of God in nature and history and in the constitution of man, and formed their reflections upon the same; and they did this with the help of the light which lighteneth every man that cometh into the world. On the other hand it is quite clear that all subsequent Christian literature stands in a derivative and secondary relation to the canonical Scriptures; and it is a most reasonable inference from this contrast that, while theology has done its work with the help of a general assistance of the Spirit, the original period witnessed a special enlightenment which has not been repeated in the same form. When a golden age occurs in literature, philosophy or art, it is customary for many succeeding generations to live upon its wealth, and to be content to value their own achievements as secondary and derivative; and this analogy at least suggests a justification of the view that religious history reached a unique height in the primitive Christian age which contained factors and achievements that have not been repeated, and that will not be eclipsed.

The arguments brought to bear in Protestant polemics against the principle of continuous revelations are not all of equal cogency.¹ One is of a kind which is suggestive of a train of reasoning afterwards employed

¹ Calvin, *Institutio*, i. 9.

in a more serious issue by Hume, and is to the effect that, even if private revelations should be received, it would be impossible to prove them to others. The prophet, it was said, may be absolutely assured of his possession of a divine gift, but he is powerless to convince others of the divine origin of his message. He is unable, it was meant, to point to signs of miraculous knowledge or power as accrediting and supporting his claim. But it is conceivable that he might be believed on the strength of a message which conveyed to other minds inherent evidence of its truth; and as a fact the case of Swedenborg, not to speak of that of Mohammed, shows that it is at least possible for a claimant of supernatural illumination to induce a multitude to admit the claim. A second objection which was emphatically urged was that the doctrine of the inner light is discredited by its practical consequences, since it is found to lead to Antinomian practices and to revolutionary projects. This generalisation was mainly founded on the excesses of certain Anabaptists of the sixteenth century, who undoubtedly make an impression of moral as well as intellectual lunacy; but it has been made clear that the Protestant tradition judged this movement by its worst examples, ignored the ethical idealism which entered into their dreams, and passed an anathema on all which was only merited by a few. It is, indeed, one of the tragedies of history that men like Hübmaier and Denck, and a great company of victims who followed them to the slaughter, should have been involved in the same condemnation with Münzer and John of Leyden.¹ In the Puritan period much of the intense moral earnest-

¹ Materials for a more intelligent and sympathetic judgment are supplied by R. M. Jones, *op. cit.*, chs. xvi., xvii. See also Lindsay, *History of the Reformation*, 1907, vol. ii. p. 430 ff.

ness of the time, as well as an Antinomian doctrine, is to be set to the account of the professed adherents of the School of the Spirit. And when the charge of Antinomianism is repeated it ought to be considered that the purity and meekness of Quaker morality have been no mean off-set to the failings of the Anabaptist forerunners.

2. The cardinal question, as has been said, is whether we have ground for supposing that any communications have been immediately made to prophetic men which constitute a real addition to religious knowledge, and which may be regarded as an independent supplement to the knowledge which we possess in the Christian revelation. On the real point at issue—viz. whether there has been an addition made to doctrine, it may be confidently affirmed that there is none among the claimants who can be plausibly regarded as adding to the stock of our knowledge of divine things. To the most remarkable of the group theology owes far less than it owes to the great Christian thinkers who merely claimed that, in dependence on the aid of the Holy Spirit, they laboured at the interpretation and the explication of the records of the Christian revelation, or who meditated on the continued manifestation of Himself which God gives in the supplementary Bible of history, and in the experiences of the individual life. The only cases in which it seems credible that there has been an extension of vision are that, in moments of exaltation, there may have been a dim vision of things to come, and that it may have been permitted to gain some impression of the conditions of the intermediate state over which the apostolic hand has flung a veil. At all events there is certainly no contribution from this quarter which can be set alongside of the commanding books of the New

Testament as an improvement upon, still less as a corrective of, the exposition therein handed on of the essential content of the Christian salvation.

The justification of a theology of the Spirit is proclaimed in the Fourth Gospel in conjunction with its governing conditions. There is the strongest declaration of a destined progress in knowledge under the guidance of the Spirit, and there is no indication that a temporal limit was intended to be set up after which the process would come to an end. But on the other hand it is declared that there is a fixed datum in the revelation and gift of God in Christ, and that progress will bear the character of a fuller manifestation of 'the things of Christ.'¹ In other words, it is only the mind which works on the basis of the revelation of God in Christ, and seeks to know more of the being and the saving works of God through that revelation, which has the promise of increasing enlightenment and of growing fruitfulness. It is not true that the Spirit only acts through the Word in a mechanical way; but it is profoundly true that the condition of spiritual illumination for theoretical thinking or for life is, that the mind should be rooted in the faith, and steeped in the Spirit, which are expressed in the Word of God as uttered in Christ. On the other hand, religious thinking which severs itself from the historical revelation, and which values its speculations and judgments as a revelation that makes the Bible a superfluity, readily falls a prey to the most fantastic illusions, or, finding out its self-deception, seeks some consolation for the humiliation which has overtaken it in an all-lelling Rationalism.

¹ John xvi. 13, 14.

as the operations of the Holy Spirit. It is also true that these are transmitted by a variety of channels and under a variety of conditions, and that they are often transmitted in ways which make little demand on the understanding, and which sometimes do not seem to operate through the understanding at all. When a man is conscious of a rise or fall in his spiritual temperature or powers which he interprets as an increment or diminution of grace, this is often connected with influences which affect the human constitution as a whole, or affect the spirit through its union with the body, and sometimes no explanation can be given except that a mysterious energy has been at work in the nether-springs of his being. In connection with the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, there is a widespread testimony that it is a signal means of grace, the use of which is often accompanied by a mystic replenishment of the characteristic feelings and energies of the spiritual life. But all this may be granted, and it may yet be unproved—and indeed it may be a serious perversion of Christianity to assert—that the chief agency by which men are made righteous, brought nigh to God, and guided to their eternal destiny is a kind of spiritual substance which has been entrusted in ordered stores to the administration of the Church, and which it infuses into the souls of its members through the fixed channels of the seven sacraments.

(a) The sacramental scheme of salvation derives all its plausibility from the fact that in the perfect religion the conditions of salvation must be readily capable of fulfilment, and must bring the blessings within the reach, not of a small spiritual aristocracy, but of men in the mass. They must be conceived in the spirit of Him who said: 'My yoke is easy and My burden is light.'

The sacramental view conserves the character of Christianity as the religion of universal destination, since no theory could be more level to common apprehension, or more eminently practicable, than that which requires men to submit to certain external observances, and which also makes those available for unconscious beings as they enter or leave the earthly scene. The theory is also reconcilable with the evangelical idea which is a vital note of the Christian religion, since it makes God the first cause of the blessings of which the sacraments are the instrumental cause,¹ while it also presupposes a signal magnanimity on the part of God that He should be thought to have accommodated the Gospel so strikingly to the weakness and the limitations of human nature. It is at other points that objections emerge which discredit this theory of salvation. The Christian religion is based on a lofty estimate of human nature as reflecting the image of God, and it is incredible that its method of salvation should be one which in the main seeks to mould and impress man through the constitution which links him to the animal creation rather than through the spiritual powers of mind and will that evidence his kinship with God. It is a valid objection which is discussed but not met by Thomas Aquinas that that which acts must be more honourable than that which is acted upon, and that contact with the body cannot purify the heart.² Nor does the theory consist with the genius of Christianity as the supremely ethical religion. Ethical perfection is the goal to which the individual is destined in Christ, and the balance of the evidence does not support the proposition that

¹ *Summa*, iii. 62, 1.

² *Ibid.* His chief argument is that as we chiefly sin because of the body we must be saved through the body.—iii. 61, 1.

where the saving provisions of Christianity are thought to consist essentially of a system of sacramental observances which infuse grace, ethical progress is most assured, and that there the ethical outcome is the most rich and fruitful. Rather is the observation repeated which was made by the Old Testament prophets, that mankind is prone to value ceremonial observances not as a means to, but as a substitute for, personal righteousness. In short, the regulated administration of grace attempted by the Church in the sacramental system largely fails to produce, and even hinders the production of, the fruits of the Spirit, while on the other hand these moral fruits are gathered largely outside of its administrative pale. It is also a weighty consideration that our knowledge of God as the Holy Spirit includes an incalculable as well as an assured element, and that it is a usurpation upon a realm of mystery to claim for the Church that it is entrusted with the power of discriminating between special kinds of grace, and of dispensing the gifts according to the kinds and degrees for which appeal is made by man.

(b) It would hardly occur to the unprepossessed reader of the New Testament records that the elaborated sacramental system of the Roman Church was a central feature of primitive Christianity. The records ascribe to Christ the institution of the two sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, and these certainly filled a large place in the missionary work and in the worship of the primitive Church. But it is also certain that they were administered on the footing that there had been an antecedent hearing of the word, and a previous response of the soul in repentance and faith, and that the efficacy which they possessed as a means of grace was conditioned by the attitude that had

already been taken up towards Christ and His salvation. The whole perspective and tenor of the New Testament would need to be recast in order to give colour to the idea that appropriation of the chief blessings of salvation takes place through rites performed on the body. It is inconceivable that the work of our Lord would so largely have taken the form of a ministry of teaching if it had been His design that in the religion which He founded the gifts of God should be chiefly mediated through external observances. One large topic embraced in His public teaching was the conditions of entrance into the Kingdom; another was the conditions of growth in the righteousness of the Kingdom; and while something was said to the people about the need of disciplining the body, no hint was given them that practically everything would depend on the way in which they used it as a channel of sacramental grace. The passage in which Jesus, according to St. John, discoursed on this aspect of the matter was one whose whole point was that the conception of a literal eating of the flesh of Christ is a gross and unspiritual error.¹ St. Paul recorded his judgment of the perspective of the Christian system when he said that Christ sent him, not to baptise, but to preach the Gospel.² The Apostle certainly believed that a divine life and energy passed into the soul in communion with the risen and glorified Lord, but this conception stands at a wide remove from the notion of the infusion of grace *ex opere operato*. The Roman scheme, in short, is not a legitimate extension of the two simple and spiritual rites of the new covenant, but a reversion to the phase of the Old Testament religion, which attached pre-eminent importance to religious

¹ Ch. vi. 58-68.

² 1 Corinthians i. 17.

ceremonies. Its fundamental idea is at least related to the notion of magical efficacy which governs the lower religions. In this connection it is surprising to notice the welcome which has been given by some advocates of the sacramental scheme of salvation to the discovery of the anthropologists—that on the animistic plane of thought there is a conception of sacrifice which connects its efficacy with the eating of a sacred animal.¹ This conception of the crudest heathenism is not likely to have anticipated the deepest thought of Christianity.

III

The third distinctive feature of Roman Catholicism is its attempt to find a place within the evangelical scheme of Christianity for the idea of human merit. The foundation of the system is indeed laid in the undeserved favour and initiative of 'a merciful God who washes and sanctifies gratuitously.' It is also treated as axiomatic that what conditioned and rendered available for man the Gospel dispensation was the work of Christ, 'who merited justification for us by His most holy Passion on the wood of the cross, and made satisfaction for us unto God the Father.'² It is because of the merit of His Passion that the economy has been established under which sinners are made just by the infusion of grace.³ But while the realm of Christian thought is thus bounded by an evangelical horizon, the particular provisions as to the appropriation of salvation are worked out in the interest of a

¹ Frazer, *Golden Bough*, 1890; W. R. Smith, *Religion of the Semites*, 1889.

² *Conc. Trid.*, sess. vi. 7.

³ 'Cum ea renascentia per meritum passionis ejus gratia, qua justi fiunt, illis tribuatur.'—*Ibid.*, 3.

different theory. The governing conception at this point is that God receives sinners to the adoption of sons, and grants them remission of sins, on the condition that they have been made just by the infusion of 'the grace and the charity which are poured forth in their hearts by the Holy Ghost.'¹ It is explained that justification includes both the remission of sins and the sanctification and renewal of the inward man²; but when the question is more precisely formulated, it appears that it is the sanctification and renewal which are wrought by the Holy Spirit through the means of grace that are the real ground of the forgiveness of sins. The condition of the sinner's acceptance with God, in short, is that he has been made righteous through the influences brought to bear upon him in the gracious economy of the Gospel. The inherent personal righteousness which has been wrought in him, and the good works in which it finds expression, are properly meritorious, and merit further increments of grace, and at the last eternal life.³ Further, acceptance with God, as expressed in the forgiveness of sins, is proportionate to the progress that has been made in righteousness. As justification in the sense of sanctification is partial and progressive, so are also acceptance and forgiveness partial and progressive. For the average Christian man, now, this entails disquieting consequences. It is possible for the saints to keep perfectly the commandments of God, and even to perform works of supererogation that constitute a fund of

¹ *Conc. Trid.*, sess. vi. canon 11.

² *Ibid.*, cap. 7.

³ 'Si quis dixerit justificatum bonis operibus, quae ab eo per Dei gratiam et Jesu Christi meritum, cujus vivum membrum est, fiunt, non vere mereri augmentum gratiae, vitam aeternam, et ipsius vitae aeternae, si tamen in gratia decesserit, consecutionem atque etiam gloriae augmentum, anathema sit.'—*Ibid.*, canon 32.

merit which ensures their easy entrance to heaven, and is also vicariously available to secure blessings for others. But in most cases the merits fall far short of qualifying for a full forgiveness. The process of becoming just is slow and is accompanied by frequent sin and backsliding; and there remains the expectation of a heavy load of punishment, whether in this world or in Purgatory, before admission can be gained to the Kingdom of Heaven.¹

In opposition to this whole conception we may urge the Pauline criticism of the similar strain of the legalism of the Old Testament. The Apostle's criticism of that system was that, inasmuch as it made acceptance with God dependent upon the rendering of a perfect obedience, it did not create or warrant the sense of peace with God.² Roman Catholicism, it is true, does not base salvation upon a righteousness which is man's independent attainment, while, by carrying all back to the grace of God, it at least seeks to satisfy the apostolic test that 'boasting' is excluded.³ But it is in the same condemnation in that it prescribes as the condition of a full salvation the performance of a task which no mere man has accomplished, and which is only credited by a stretch of magnanimity to the greatest of the saints. It does injustice, in short, to an essential moment of the perfect religion by representing it as the vehicle of an incomplete and insecure salvation. It so far bases salvation upon merit as to issue in the offer of a

¹ 'Si quis post acceptam justificationis gratiam cuilibet peccatori poenitenti ita culpam remitti et reatum aeternae poenae deleri dixerit, ut nullus remaneat reatus poenae temporalis exsolvendae vel in hoc seculo, vel in futuro in purgatorio, antequam ad regna coelorum aditus patere possit, anathema sit.'—*Conc. Trid.*, sess. vi. canon 30.

² Romans iii. 20 ff.

³ i. 16.

mutilated salvation, and to open up a gloomy and depressing outlook upon the future. It is the boast of Rome that it alone gives intellectual assurance to minds perplexed by modern doubts and questionings; but in regard to the no less important question of religious assurance—the question as to whether it is well with a man here and hereafter—it is itself responsible for an addition of oppressive doubts and fears. In the case of the Christian who is not of the number of the saints, there is—except after baptism—an outstanding balance of sins; this is reduced by masses, penances, and good deeds, but it is not extinguished; and at death the soul of the faithful, though to some extent purified and fortified by the last sacrament, journeys onward into the unseen—knowing, indeed, that it has escaped the portion of Hell, but not knowing what precise claim it will have on the divine clemency, or what agonies it may have to endure before it passes from Purgatory into the Paradise of the blessed. In its failure to proclaim the gospel of a present and full forgiveness of sin to those who repent and believe, and in withholding the sense of religious security attested by peace and joy, which is a legitimate demand of the religious nature of man, Roman Catholicism takes back the comfort which it promised in the easy and wrong way of sacramentalism, and makes a grave and harmful deduction from the principles which give Christianity its claim to rank as the religion of perfect deliverance.

IV

Roman Catholicism is a very complex phenomenon which is not sufficiently accounted for by the explana-

tions which are usually offered by its adherents or its opponents. It is not explained by the theory that it is the one true and authorised expression of the revelation of God through Christ, and still less is it disposed of by the theory that it is a great apostasy to which the Christian Church was seduced by the powers of darkness. As a system of faith, morals and discipline it has many different roots. It claims to be apostolic; and it remains faithful, as has been said, to the fundamental ideas of the Christian religion in respect of the nature and the source of salvation, and also in respect of its basis of divine grace and its ethical demand. But a variety of other factors have asserted themselves in the course of its development which have left a deep impress upon the system.

(1) There is an element of truth in what has often been said in recent times as to the influence upon it of racial genius. The same type of mind that created and shaped the Roman Empire had to do with the creation of the Roman Catholic Church, which, as a fact, succeeded to some extent to the aims and the power of the Empire. To the same influence we may also partly trace the formation of the religious ideal which imposed a rigid law of faith and morals upon mind and conscience, and which exalted obedience to ecclesiastical authority into a pre-eminent place among the virtues and the graces.

(2) Further, the dominant position which was given to the Church and its organisation in the Latin form of Christianity led to important consequences. When Christianity became institutional, it inevitably became possessed by a spirit which animates all institutions, and which up to a certain point is legitimate as well as natural. Every institution is bound to believe that its work is worth doing, and, as a means to getting it better

done, it pardonably welcomes whatever is calculated to protect its interests and to increase its influence and its efficiency. The rule of the celibacy of the clergy at least promised to give the Church a more devoted and obedient instrument; and it could not be regarded as a serious objection when, as in the practice of confession and of masses for the dead, a supposed religious or moral advantage was accompanied by an increase of the influence of the priesthood or of the wealth of the Church.

(3) The peculiar features of Roman Catholicism may also be explained in part by a law of survival and recrudescence. Reference has already been made to the modern analysis of the Roman system which finds in its provisions a synthesis of genuine Christianity with paganising and Judaising elements. 'Christianity,' says Schweizer, 'in making its way against Judaism and heathenism, had to make some transforming use of Jewish and pagan ideas and institutions—and it could do so because these were on the whole innocuous in the period of its victorious energy. As the Church developed in power and in worldliness, it admitted more and more of these elements, and brought them less and less under the influence of the Gospel, until in the age of the Reformation the traditional Church was full of elements which were intolerable to the reawakened Christian consciousness.'¹ That a law of reversion is operative in the religious sphere is undeniable. The old which has been displaced and seemingly overcome collects its forces with a view to issue a fresh

¹ *Die Christliche Glaubenslehre*, i. p. 7. The currency of this criticism is due to Schweizer, who had previously worked it out and defended it in his *Glaubenslehre der reformierten Kirche*, 1844. For other important contributions to the discussion see Baur, *Theologische Jahrbücher*, 1848 ff.; Schneckenburger, *Comparative Dogmatik*; Hastie, *Theology of the Reformed Church*, 1904, ch. i. ii.

challenge; and in the first encounters of the renewed struggle it often reasserts itself with success, and regains much of the lost ground. It is a familiar fact of individual experience which is typified in Lazarus coming forth from the tomb in his grave-clothes, with the difference that, instead of being laid aside, the grave-clothes may even be treasured and renewed. On the large scale the law is illustrated in the history of every great religion, and it might even have been predicted of the historical development of Christianity in so far as the responsibility for the custody of the heavenly treasure was entrusted to human agents.

(4) The deepest explanation of the peculiarities of the Roman Catholic system probably is that it was an attempt, partly conscious, partly unconscious, and on the whole an honest attempt, to make Christianity more effective and useful as a working religion. Paradoxical as it sounds, there is a large element in Roman Catholicism which can be traced to a root of Rationalism. The rationalistic note is the effort to accommodate the Christian religion more closely to the supposed dictates of the facts of the world and of common-sense; and there are many features of the Roman Catholic system which suggest an attempt so to modify revealed religion as to make it respond better to the wants of average human nature, and to constitute it a more satisfactory engine for the promotion of spiritual and moral well-being. In its peculiar features it is largely intelligible as an adaptation of Christianity to the very real limitations of the ordinary man. He welcomes the note of authority in religious teaching, and the Roman Church meets him with the claim of the infallible Church and its infallible organ. The paganising element in the doctrine of God has its explanation in the fact that monotheism

is too abstract, the Trinitarian dogma too abstruse, for the common people; and it was felt to be useful that their religious feelings should have more concrete and familiar objects in the Virgin Mother and in patron saints. It is an obvious fact, again, that normally the mind of the multitude is not much moved by ideas—it is much more easily interested in and stirred by pictures, symbols and sacred actions; and for this reason it might well seem that the sacramental system and the cognate ceremonies were a much more powerful religious instrument than the read and spoken Word, since language largely fails to make ideas understood, and fails still more generally when it seeks to effect persuasion by argument. And yet again, it is a supremely natural idea that our salvation to God depends in some way upon our merits. It seems, moreover, that the best prospect of making religion a real working force in human life is that it should operate with the principle, so widely effectual in the work of the world, that reward should be apportioned to effort and success, and that shortcoming should be punished in strict proportion to demerit. This may well explain why the Roman Church modified the simplicity of the evangelical idea; while its addition of Purgatory, whatever may be said on other grounds in support of the doctrine, at least appears to be demanded by the common-sense view that at death the fewest are meet for heaven, and that all but the best deserve a measure of punishment. In brief, the specific features in question are to be regarded, less as a selfish attempt to exploit human nature, combined with indulgent concessions to its weakness, than as modifications inspired by a sincere belief that, human nature being what it is, it was possible to make the Christian religion at once more energising

and more coercive as an engine for the promotion of purity and righteousness.

The observation that Roman Catholicism has close affinities with the legalism and sacerdotalism of the Old Testament religion enables us to understand how, in spite of its limitations and errors, it could serve a temporary use in the religious education of the race, and could be comprehended in the divine purpose. The account given by St. Paul of the Law, by which he described the essence of the Old Testament religion, was that it was an imperfect and transitory dispensation, but that nevertheless its peculiar features constituted a discipline which in its place and time was salutary and even necessary. Similarly it may well be believed that the Church which during many centuries was the chief representative of the cause of the Kingdom of God on earth had its providential place in the spiritual education of the race. In particular, when the western European races that were destined to lead the van of a later age were still in their intellectual and religious childhood, it may appear to have been an advantage that they were placed under the control of a powerful institution which dealt with them as a schoolmaster with children—demanding to be believed with implicit trust, and obeyed with unquestioning submission, and also seeking to make religion more level to their apprehension, more engaging to their affections, and more influential in the regulation of conduct. ‘No modern Church,’ says Flint, ‘is yet great enough to despise the mediæval Church—the Church which, with all its faults, was by far the mightiest and most beneficent agent in the formation of Christendom out of barbarism and confusion.’¹ It may also be regarded as a lesson of the

¹ *Agnosticism*, p. 483.

Old Testament dispensation that there is a stage of immaturity at which human nature is unfitted to appreciate the grandeur of a system of pure grace, and when it is necessary to bring it under the pressure of a scheme of rewards and punishments. But the parallel with the Old Testament also suggests that the function of Roman Catholicism was to educate civilised mankind up to the point of discovering its own insufficiency, of rebelling against its claim of authority, and of welcoming a restatement of the provisions of the Christian religion which should operate with more spiritual conceptions, give a better grounded assurance of acceptance with God, and also prove a source of deeper and stronger ethical inspiration.