

I

ALBRECHT RITSCHL AND HIS DOCTRINE OF CHRISTIAN PERFECTION

ARTICLE I

RITSCHL THE RATIONALIST¹

THE historical source from which the main streams of Perfectionist doctrine that have invaded modern Protestantism take their origin, is the teaching of John Wesley. But John Wesley did not first introduce Perfectionism into Protestantism, nor can all the Perfectionist tendencies which have shown themselves in Protestantism since his day be traced to him. Such tendencies appear constantly along the courses of two fundamental streams of thought. Wherever Mysticism intrudes, it carries a tendency to Perfectionism with it. On Mystical ground—as, for example, among the Quakers—a Perfectionism has been developed to which that taught by Wesley shows such similarity, even in details and modes of expression, that a mistaken attempt has been made to discover an immediate genetic connection between them. Wherever again men lapse into an essentially Pelagian mode of thinking concerning the endowments of human nature and the conditions of human action, a Perfectionism similar to that taught by Pelagius himself tends to repeat itself. That is to say, history verifies the correlation of Perfectionism and Libertarianism, and wherever Libertarianism rules the thoughts of men, Perfectionism persistently makes its appearance. It is to this stream of influence that Wesleyan Perfectionism owes its own origin. Its roots are set historically in the Semi-Pelagian Perfectionism of the Dutch Remonstrants, although its rise was not unaffected by influences of a very similar character and ultimate source which came to it through the channels of Anglo-Catholicism. Its particular differentiation is determined by the supernaturalization which it shares with the whole body of modifications introduced by Wesley into his fundamental Arminianism, from which Wesleyanism, in distinction from the underlying Remonstrantism, has acquired its Evangelical character.

The Perfectionist teaching of Ritschl presents a highly individual example of a Pelagianizing Perfectionism quite independent of all either Mystical or Wesleyan influences. Mysticism, with all its works, Ritschl heartily hated; Wesleyanism he, with equal cordiality, despised. But he was a Libertarian of the Kantian variety; and, going here beyond Kant—who would allow the existence of a “radical evil” in men—he would not hear of any such thing as a native bias to sin. On the contrary, every man, according

¹ From *The Princeton Theological Review*, xvii. 1919, pp. 533–584. cf. Benjamin B. Warfield, *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield: Perfectionism, Part One*, vol. 7, 1–52. <http://faithsaves.net>.

to him, comes into the world with a bias to good, and with the formation of his developed moral character in his own hands. No doubt he conceived that, in the circumstances in which man lives, the moral character which every man forms for himself is inevitably an evil one. Human society therefore, in point of fact, constitutes with Ritschl too, in its phenomenal existence, a “mass of corruption”; and reacts as such on each individual as he enters it, infecting him by a sort of “social inheritance” with its evil. No actual individual thus escapes a bias to evil. But this bias to evil, as it is the product of his own free activity, is capable of being counteracted by the same power which created it. All that is needed is the formation, under a sufficiently strong inducement, of a dominating motive in the opposite direction. Acting freely under such an inducement, the individual is capable at all times (except possibly when finally hardened) of reversing his activities, revolutionizing his character, and thus, in conjunction with others similarly moved (under the influence of whom, indeed, it is that he acts) building up, in opposition to the kingdom of sin, a Kingdom of God, in which he may be “perfect.”

For “substance of doctrine,” this is just the ordinary Libertarian Perfectionism. But Ritschl is nothing if not original; and the peculiarities of his general system of teaching give to his Libertarian Perfectionism a specific form which presents many points of interest.

Already in his doctrine of the will Ritschl goes his own way. We have spoken of him as a Libertarian of the Kantian variety. But he does not follow Kant without dissidence. In his view of the mechanism of willing, he was as clear a determinist as Kant himself. He speaks without hesitation of “determinants” of the will and enumerates them not only as “purposes” and “intentions” but also as “dispositions,” and “impulses” which he does not scruple to call “coercive” (*nöthigend*).² His son and biographer does not hesitate to use the strongest language in describing the quality of his determinism, outlining it in such crisp sentences as these:³ “In the particular act of the will there is always included a necessitation (*Nöthigung*) by the motive. In case of conflict the determination follows the stronger motive. So far, every action (*Handlung*) is necessary (*nothwendig*.” Despite this clear determinism, however, Ritschl, like Kant, asserts also that the will has power to determine itself, and actually does determine itself, not only apart from but in opposition to its “determinants.” It is precisely in this power that, in his view, the distinction of the human spirit consists, by which it is separated from mere nature.⁴ It is the primary element therefore in that *Selbstgefühl* of which he talks so much, and by which he means not abstract self-consciousness but concrete self-esteem—our sense of our value as a self. “In this self-consciousness, and the estimate we place on self in the exalted moments of our moral willing,” he tells us,⁵ “we experience the might of our self-determination to the good, regardless of every obstacle whether internal or external.” When this almighty self-determination impinges on those coercive determinants, one would think something

² “The Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation,” iii. E. T. 1900, pp. 251, 292. This work will be cited hereafter simply by pages. The quotations, however, it must be added, are sometimes from the German (edition 4, 1895), and hence do not follow the English Translation verbatim.

³ “Albrecht Ritschls Leben,” i. 1892, p. 350.

⁴ So he frequently says; e.g. p. 513.

⁵ P. 283.

would be likely to happen.

Kant sought to escape the contradiction obvious here by removing this undetermined “freedom” into the “intelligible and non-empirical” region. Ritschl will have nothing to do with this evasion. He boldly declares “freedom” to be as much a matter of experience as the determination athwart of which it runs. “Freedom,” he says,⁶ “is not merely an idea, in accordance with which we pass judgment on our conduct, though this conduct be according to experience not free but necessitated in every act; but freedom is itself experience.” Kant’s doctrine, he affirms, is “theoretically unsatisfactory,” because “it leaves unresolved the contradiction between the subjective claim to freedom, and the objective matter of fact of the causal nexus of action.” Each action is no doubt motivated, and is the necessary issue of its motive, and this naturally creates an impression that “freedom” is an illusion. “Yet in varying measures those actions are free, whose motive is a conception of a universal end, which calls a halt to the impulse which is active at the moment.” It is in this formation of a universal end, acting thus as a controlling power over our impulses and inclinations, that Ritschl sees “freedom.” Kant’s doctrine now, he further affirms, “left no possibility open of action’s directing itself according to the law produced by freedom,” and thus was not only “theoretically unsatisfactory” but “practically useless.” It proclaimed a universal empirical determinism. In opposition to this Ritschl asserts an experienced power of the will “to direct itself to the universal moral ultimate end.”

It must be admitted that he merely asserts this power. How, under the determination of ingrained, if not innate, sinful dispositions it can possess it, is left in complete obscurity. It may be allowed that if the will, acting under the sway of sinful dispositions, is nevertheless capable of directing itself “at will” to “the all-embracing end of the Kingdom of heaven” which includes in itself the motive of universal love, and develops out of itself the system of dispositions which involve the moral law—why, then, these dispositions thus formed might act as motives to action, just as the sinful dispositions already holding the field do, and in conflict with them might conceivably overcome them, or might blend with them, as exciting causes, of varying goodness or badness, of action. But how the sinful will can direct itself to its contrary as an end, despite the existing impulses to evil action “determining it at every step,” and form these new dispositions which are to lay a restraining hand on those old dispositions, remains a mystery. It looks as if we were asked to believe that the will, which is at every step determined by dispositions, has in this instance first to create the dispositions by which it is determined, in opposition to the dispositions by which it is at every step determined. This appears to leave something to be desired as an explanation of how a possibility is “left open of action’s guiding itself by the law produced by freedom.” We do not wonder that Otto Pflieger speaks contemptuously of Ritschl’s “abstract rationalistic notion of the moral will,” and laughs at his representation of the human spirit “brooding as an abstract, natureless freedom over the chaos of the natural feelings and appetites—with reference to which, to be sure, it remains incomprehensible how it manages to rule over and to order them.”⁷

Though all explanation of the possibility of the exercise of such an “independent

⁶ P. 514.

⁷ “Die Ritschl’sche Theologie,” 1891, pp. 68, 79.

power” of the will fails, however, the assertion of its reality is persistent. It is to Ritschl the condition of responsibility and the essence of the dignity of spiritual existence. Arguing against the doctrine of “original sin,”⁸ he declares that all ascription to ourselves of responsibility for evil—whether with respect to acts or to habits, or to propensity—depends on our recognition in our several actions of the proof-mark of “the independence of the will.” This, now, he asserts, forbids looking on “the individual action as the dependent accident of a necessary power of inborn propensity.” The scope of this is to assert that we cannot hold ourselves responsible for an inborn disposition which is evil, or for anything that issues from it. We are responsible only for acts of “independent” willing: not then for what we are but only for what we do; or for what we are only so far as it is the result of what we do. And by these acts of “independent willing” for which and for the results of which alone we are responsible, he means very expressly empirical acts of independent willing alone. Kant, he tells us, supposed man to be afflicted with “radical evil”: if we make such an assumption, we cannot ascribe responsibility to ourselves for it “except on the presupposition that it is the result of the empirical determination of the will.” “For,” he adds, giving the reason, “it can be derived neither from the natural origin of every man, nor from a so-called ‘intelligible act of freedom’”—coupling thus Paul and Kant in a common condemnation. So far does Ritschl press this assertion of the “independence” of the will, that, applying it to God, he denies that God’s will is the expression of His nature rather than, say, of His “free” purpose. To say that God wills the good because it is good—seeing that He is good in His own nature—is, he argues, to say that “God as will is subject to this righteousness as to a necessity of nature.”⁹ “The will,” he affirms,¹⁰ “to which its direction is given by the presupposed substantive righteousness, is not the self-determination which is becoming to God.” We could scarcely have a stronger declaration that a will determined by dispositions is no will; that the only will worthy of the name determines itself. It would be unworthy of God to act otherwise than “freely” in this sense. We wonder what has become of Ritschl’s psychological determinism.

We wonder also whence we are to obtain assurance of the existence of this power of “free” willing. If not from consciousness, then surely from nowhere. But Ritschl discredits the witness of consciousness in the matter. He admits that, although the particular impulses operate coercively (*nöthigend*), that does not prevent this, their coercive operation “assuming in the soul the form of conscious self-determination.” He is forced therefore to allow that “conscious self-determination cannot alone be the exhaustive expression of freedom.”¹¹ What is there to supplement it? Ritschl seems to suggest nothing but the assumed requirement of such “freedom” of action as he describes in order to ground responsibility, and the dignity which it confers on spirit as distinguished from “nature,” the sphere of necessary causation. Whether on these grounds or others, however, he asserts its existence; and that with such vigor that, as we have seen, he pushes his psychological determinism in the mechanism of willing completely out of sight, and stands forth as fully fledged a Libertarian as Kant, or even as Pelagius himself.

⁸ P. 337.

⁹ P. 248.

¹⁰ P. 283.

¹¹ P. 292.

We have already had occasion to note that Ritschl joins in a common condemnation Paul's doctrine of original sin and Kant's doctrine of radical evil. He will not have men come into the world with any entail of sin from any source. But he is not satisfied with Pelagius' idea of a will poised in indifference. "We cannot at all conceive," he says,¹² "of a will without definite direction to an end." As then he will not have men come into the world with a bias to evil, he is compelled to teach that they have a bias to good. This he does quite explicitly. All attempts to educate children, he says,¹³ "rest on the presupposition that there exists in them a general, yet still indefinite, inclination to good"—although he adds that this inclination is without the guidance of comprehensive insight into the good and has not yet been tested in the particular relationships of life. "This," he says, making his meaning quite unmistakable, "is the reverse of the inclination of the will of the child to evil and of its necessitating power, which is maintained in the doctrine of original sin."

By this proclamation of the original goodness of children, Ritschl escapes, however, some only, not all, of his difficulties. Among his reasons for rejecting the doctrine of original sin is this one—that it assumes that there is a will previous to its individual acts.¹⁴ Is not the same assumption involved in the doctrine of original goodness? If we are to escape this assumption it would seem that we must revert to Pelagius' absurdity of an abstract will with no determination at all; and how little can be made of that we have only to watch F. A. B. Nietzsche struggling with it to learn.¹⁵ Then, there are the facts to be faced. Do infants, in point of fact, come into the world good? "Assuredly," remarks Pfeleiderer,¹⁶ "our experience with children" gives us no justification for such an affirmation: "unless we are very blind parents indeed, we discover in them, from their tenderest years onward, that self-will which is in very fact the root and kernel of all evil." This remark, which is part of a powerful defence of the reality of original sin in the narrow sense of a native impulse to evil, has made a little amusing history, which may not be without its instructive side. Henri Schoen¹⁷ repeats it with an added French vivacity. Ritschl, says he, has replaced the profound truth "of the innate egoism of the infant with the natural tendency to the good." "Such a theory," he adds, "does great honor to the children which Ritschl has seen grow up around him; we need to confess that those we have known do not confirm it." Constantin von Kügelgen¹⁸ feels it necessary to go out of his way—for he himself agrees with the substance of it—to "brand Schoen's remark, which is more witty than scientific, that such a theory does great honor to Ritschl's children, as of a tone not suitable to a learned investigation." That is as it may be; but we learn meanwhile, somewhat to our surprise, that nobody seems willing to take up with Ritschl's doctrine of the goodness of infancy. Pfeleiderer, Nietzsche, Schoen, von Kügelgen, Wendland,¹⁹ men of very varied theological attitudes, all with one voice repel it. We say

¹² P. 283.

¹³ P. 337.

¹⁴ Pfeleiderer, "Development of Theology," 1890, p. 187.

¹⁵ "Lehrbuch der evangelischen Dogmatik," 1892, pp. 320, 325.

¹⁶ "Die Ritschl'sche Theologie," 1891, pp. 66, 67.

¹⁷ "Les origines historiques de la théologie de Ritschl," 1893, p. 151.

¹⁸ "Grundriss der Ritschlschen Dogmatik," 1903, p. 34.

¹⁹ J. Wendland, "Albrecht Ritschl und seine Schüler," 1899, pp. 107–108.

we learn this with some surprise, for the goodness of childhood has not only long held the place of a fundamental dogma among the sentimentalists, but has invaded the formal teaching of more than one type of religious thought.²⁰

The greatest difficulty with which Ritschl, with his doctrine of the native goodness of man, finds himself confronted arises from the fact of man's universal sinfulness. For Ritschl fully recognizes the universality of sin and is concerned only to assert that it is the product, in every several individual, of his own voluntary action. He is constrained to admit, of course,²¹ that as sin enters his life thus only by his own volition, a sinless life-development is a possibility for everyone. But this possibility is actually realized, he asserts, by no one. This is certainly a most remarkable fact for Ritschl to be compelled to recognize. We should on his ground have *a priori* expected it to be realized by most. Pfleiderer indeed declares,²² justly enough, that "Ritschl has not ... shown how any selfish determinations of the will at all can be explained, if there exists in the child by nature only an indefinite impulse towards good." But Ritschl asserts, as we have seen, the possession by every spiritual being of a power of quite arbitrary willing, in the teeth of any actual inclination. And there is no reason why he should not appeal to it here. Appeal to the possession of this power, however, while it may be thought to justify the assertion of the possibility, can scarcely be considered to justify the assertion of the inevitableness, of its exercise for sinning. It is not enough to account for all men without exception sinning to say that they are all able to sin. We need some account of their using their ability without exception in this particular direction. It is the duty of providing this account which is imposed on Ritschl by his teaching that all men come into the world with a bias to good and yet all men without exception sin.

The strength of Ritschl's assertion that the universality of sin is only an empirical fact, does not vacate, and is not treated by him as vacating, this duty. If he declares that "it is only by summarizing all experiences that we attain the conviction of the universal sway of sin,"²³ he yet represents this universal sway of sin as something which could have been forecast not only as "possible," but even as "probable,"²⁴ and indeed as "apparently inevitable,"²⁵ "under the given conditions of the development of the human will." These are most astonishing representations, and seem to throw into grave doubt the primary declaration that every man comes into the world not only without impulse to evil, but with an impulse to good. The justification which is offered for them turns on further representations with regard, on the one hand, to the condition of man when he enters the world, and, on the other, to the conditions into which he enters in the world. To put it

²⁰ Cf. a somewhat instructive column in Hastings' "Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics," x. 513b (H. G. Wood, article on "Puritanism"), and observe the violence with which R. H. Coats ("Types of English Piety," 1912, p. 140) assaults Evangelicals because by them "blithe and happy children are scowled on in their play as being radically evil," on the ground of an innocent observation of David Brainerd's which does not go beyond Pfleiderer's.

²¹ P. 378.

²² "Development of Theology," p. 187.

²³ P. 378; "Unterricht in der christlichen Religion," §28 (ed. 3, p. 26).

²⁴ "Unterricht," § 28.

²⁵ P. 380.

broadly, man enters the world preëminently a willing being, and, though inclined to good, too immature to be able to guide his willing wisely. And the world which he enters meets him in his immaturity with manifold temptations. The consequence is that he sins. He sins, of course, voluntarily: sin finds a necessitating (*nöthigend*) ground neither in the divine world-order, nor in man's endowment of freedom. But, so far as we can see, says Ritschl, he sins inevitably; certainly sin extends over the whole human race alike as a mode of action and a habitual propensity.²⁶

The particular form which Ritschl gives this general doctrine calls for some remark. In the "Instruction in the Christian Religion,"²⁷ he explains that the factors which bring the universality of sin about, are "the fact that the impulse (*Trieb*) to the unrestrained (*schränkenlos*) use of freedom, with which every man comes into the world, meets with the manifold enticements to selfishness which arise out of the sins of society." Thus it comes about, says Ritschl, that some degree of selfishness takes form in every one "even before the clearness of common self-consciousness is awakened in him." It has very naturally been pointed out²⁸ that the condition in which man is here represented as coming into the world is scarcely consistent with that which Ritschl ascribes to him when he represents him as endowed with an impulse (*Trieb*) to good. An impulse (*Trieb*) to good and an impulse (*Trieb*) to the unrestricted (*schränkenlos*) use of freedom are not only not the same thing; they are not even capable of conciliation. He whose action is ruled by an impulse to an unlimited use of freedom is so little the same as he whose action is ruled by an impulse to the good, that he must rather be pronounced to be without moral character altogether. Clearly, when so described, man is conceived as coming into the world merely a willing machine; will has absorbed all other faculties. And it throws a lurid light on Ritschl's real conception of the will, when we observe him, despite his expressed doctrine of psychological determinism, representing every man as beginning life as mere will, operating in a boundless manner. It sounds very well, no doubt, to hear of that high power of the spirit by which in moments of moral exaltation it can set itself to a good end, and by the sheer force of its moral energy break through the trammels of impulses and habits of evil and do the right. It has a different sound when we hear that this boasted spiritual endowment is merely our natural mode of action, without moral quality; and that all ethical development consists in curbing and shackling it in its vagrant activities. Certainly if this be the condition in which man comes into the world, he is in no sense the architect of his own fortunes. He is the helpless creature of his environment, which constitutes the mould into which, will he, nill he, he runs.

This is, in point of fact, what Ritschl's teaching comes to. According to him the universality of sin is due to the reaction of the uninformed will to the temptations of

²⁶ P. 383. This teaching is fundamentally indistinguishable from that of the old Rationalism (Charles Hodge, "Systematic Theology," ii. p. 239, par. 3) and continually finds new representatives, as e.g. Miss E. M. Caillard, "Progressive Revelation," p. 77, who thinks the Fall accounted for by the fact that the self-conscious will was "newly-born and feeble," while the "animal appetites and impulses were stronger in proportion, and the will succumbed before them, becoming their slave, instead of their master."

²⁷ § 28; E. T. in "The Theology of Albrecht Ritschl" by Albert Temple Swing, 1901, p. 204.

²⁸ Nietzsche, as cited, p. 320; Wendland, as cited, pp. 107, 108.

social life. In the intercourse of life man, under the temptations acting on his immaturity, becomes sinful before he knows any better. It is the temptations of human society which play here the determining rôle, and Ritschl does not scruple to say that in the environment into which man is thrust he cannot avoid sinning. Sin is “inevitable,” he says, though he does not affirm this dogmatically: sin, says he,²⁹ is “an apparently inevitable product of the human will under the given conditions of its development.” A. E. Garvie³⁰ seizes upon the “apparently” here with a view to breaking the force of the statement. Wrongly: it is inserted, no doubt, in order to soften the admission, but it softens it only to the ear. Dealing with the matter of original sin from the purely empirical standpoint, Ritschl declares that we observe sin to be in point of fact universal, and that this its universality, so far as he can tell, is inevitable. Its inevitableness, he further affirms, is due to the conditions under which the human will develops. These conditions he sums up in the comprehensive term “the kingdom of sin,” which is his name for human society as organized in its sinful development. This kingdom of sin, he says, extends over the whole human race and binds all men together in the incalculable interplay of sinful action.³¹ The conception is with him an important one, and he develops it with great fulness, and paints in very black colors the baleful influences derived from one another and from the mass, which interact on the individuals, in this evil organism. It is nevertheless just human society under the dominion of sin that he means. Into this evil social environment every man is thrust at birth, and by it he is, in his immaturity, moulded to its own nature. No wonder he becomes at once, with his impulse to unlimited use of his freedom, sinful. It is just a matter of “social inheritance,” which Ritschl substitutes for the idea of natural inheritance. In the old antithesis of nature and nurture, he takes the alternative of nurture; in the old antithesis of heredity and environment, he takes the alternative of environment. His formula for universal sin is just universal freedom plus universal temptation, with the decisive emphasis on the temptation. So decisive indeed is the emphasis on the temptation that the suggestion is even let fall that no resistance is made to it at all. Every man, we are told, is at birth “put into connection with evil, against which his natural will does not contend” at all.³²

One of the reasons why we recoil from this explanation of human sinfulness is that it suffers from the ugly logical disease called by the appropriately ugly name of hysteronproteron. This malignant “kingdom of sin,” whence came it? It is itself the creation of human sin. How can it, then, be the creator of human sin? Unless men had sinned before there was any kingdom of sin to infect them with its corruption, there never would have been any kingdom of sin. The kingdom of sin is simply the *congregatio peccatorum*, and sinners must exist before they can congregate. They bring sin into the congregation, not take it out of it. And that means in the end that the cause of sin must be found in something in the sinner rather than in something in his environment. We shall have to urge, then, still, that the formula of universal freedom plus universal temptation is

²⁹ P. 380: “ein scheinbar unvermeidliches Erzeugniss des menschlichen Willens unter den gegebenen Bedingungen seiner Entwicklung.”

³⁰ “The Ritschlian Theology,” 1899, p. 300; contrast James Orr, “Ritschlianism,” 1903, p. 99, note 2.

³¹ P. 383.

³² “Unterricht,” § 27 (ed. 3, p. 25); E. T. p. 203.

not adequate to account for universal sin. Freedom plus temptation may be a good average receipt for sinning: that it may be made infallible, something more is needed. That all men are able to sin offers no sufficient account of the use of this ability by them all without exception, under the solicitation of temptation, for sinning. The invariability of the result demands something else than ability to sin in them to account for it. Ritschl, of course, could not fail to recognize so obvious a demand. He meets it by teaching that men come into the world not merely endowed with a freedom of which they have the impulse to make an unlimited use, but terribly handicapped by ignorance of the good—that good to which they have a natural inclination and to which they no doubt would therefore turn if they only knew it. “Ignorance,” writes Ritschl,³³ “as experience with children teaches us, is a very important factor in the origination and development of sin. Children, when they enter into the common spirit and life, are not equipped with a knowledge of the good, or of the moral law whether as a whole or in its details.... Rather must they learn the value of the good only in particulars and in the special relations in which they live, since they are quite incapable of comprehending the universal good.... But most precisely in the case of children, the will enters into activity with the clear expectation of an unlimited effectiveness on surrounding objects and relations. In these circumstances, ignorance is the essential condition of the conflict of the will with the order of society as the rule of the good; it is also the condition of the will’s setting itself in revolt against this order.” ... We perceive that from Ritschl’s standpoint it is ignorance which is the true *fomes peccati*. Men do not become sinners fundamentally because they are free, though they are incredibly free; nor because they are tempted, though they are overwhelmingly tempted; but because they are ignorant.

Otto Ritschl repels the representation that all sin is to Ritschl mere ignorance.³⁴ Ritschl teaches, only, he says, that God regards pardonable sin as ignorance.³⁵ Whether there actually exists any such thing as unpardonable sin, however, Ritschl leaves an open question: he can conceive of, but will not affirm, its existence. It is not becoming in us to suppose of any of our fellow men that they have passed in their sin beyond the possibility of salvation. Some may have done so, but “whether there are such, and who they are, lies equally outside of our practical judgment and our theoretical knowledge.”³⁶ We must therefore act on the supposition that all actual sin is in the judgment of God just ignorance.³⁷ Sin thus not only has its origin in ignorance, but always retains its quality as ignorance,³⁸ until—if it ever does so—having become invincible ignorance, it becomes also unpardonable. But though Ritschl seems thus to minimize the ethical evil of sin and

³³ Pp. 377, 378.

³⁴ “Leben,” ii. pp. 199–200: “die Sünde sei überhaupt nur Unwissenheit.”

³⁵ “Dass lediglich Gott die vergebbare Sünde als Unwissenheit beurtheilt.”

³⁶ P. 383.

³⁷ Pp. 379 ff.

³⁸ Pfleiderer, “Die Ritschl’sche Theologie,” 1891, p. 68, very properly says: “It is noteworthy that Ritschl in his theory of sin, places himself wholly on the ground of the Greek intellectualism which is elsewhere so sharply condemned by him. It was Socrates, of course, who identified the evil with ignorance and therefore logically represented virtue as teachable.” We shall see that to Ritschl, too, as sin is ignorance, so knowledge is the only remedy for sin.

the idea of its guilt evaporates in his hands, he yet deals seriously with its moral effects. He paints the moral condition of the kingdom of sin—sin in the mass, as it manifests itself in humanity at large—in sufficiently black colors. With respect to the individual, the sinful act by no means ends with itself;³⁹ it reacts on the will which produces it and creates a sinful propensity.⁴⁰ Thus the man who came into the world with a bias to good, acquires by his sinning a bias to evil. Ritschl explains⁴¹ that, although sin is “no original law of the human will,” it yet—“fixing itself as the resultant of particular cravings and inclinations—becomes in the individual man the principle of the will’s regulation.” He therefore proceeds to speak of sin as “a personal bias (*Hang*) in the life of every individual,” and is only concerned to assert that it originates as such not from our generation from a sinning ancestor, but, “so far as our observation reaches”—a rather unexpected reassertion of his empirical standpoint here—“in sinful desire and action, which, as such, finds its sufficient ground in the self-determination of the individual will.”

There is such a thing then as a “law of sin” in the will, a law of sin which is nothing less than “an ungodly and selfish propensity”; and this propensity has taken possession of the “whole human race.”⁴² It is the result of “the necessary (*nothwendig*) reaction of every act of the will on the bent (*Richtung*) of the faculty of volition (*Willenskraft*)”; our actions being evil we could not fail through our “unrestrained repetition of selfish decisions of will” to produce “an ungodly and selfish bias.” This bias may not be so strong as that which is postulated in the doctrine of “original sin”; but it is equally real, and by means of his doctrine of the kingdom of sin, with its involved interaction of sinners, consciously and unconsciously, upon one another, Ritschl labors to show that it is very strong indeed, and may conceivably become, in extreme instances, so strong that all power to the contrary is lost and man becomes in consequence incapable of salvation, since salvation in his view is the effect of free action.⁴³ Whether such men actually exist, as we have already noted, Ritschl declines to decide; but by declining to decide the question of fact he allows that in theory they may very well exist. And this carries with it the recognition of the possibility of sin, acting as a bias, becoming so strong as to exclude all power to the contrary. It is not altogether easy to comprehend how Ritschl, with his descriptions of the depth of the evil which pervades the kingdom of sin, preserves any individual from the full strength of this bias to evil. It must be that, after all, he thinks of sin lightly.

The same ground which we have just run over on the basis of the discussion in

³⁹ We are using here the language of Orr, “The Ritschlian Theology,” 1897, p. 145. When Orr says; “Sin, in his view, not only originates in will, but consists only in acts of will,” he must be interpreted in consistency with what is said in the text, and “acts of will” must include “intentions, habitual inclinations and dispositions” (“Unterricht,” § 27).

⁴⁰ This is in accordance with Ritschl’s general doctrine of the will—e.g. pp. 336–337: “The will, in the individual actions which are traced back to it as their ground, does not have phenomena which can exist or not exist without change in its nature; but through these actions, according to their tendency, the will acquires its kind and develops itself to a good or to a bad character.”

⁴¹ Pp. 348–349.

⁴² P. 383.

⁴³ Pp. 379–383.

“Justification and Reconciliation” is traversed by Ritschl again in the “Instruction in the Christian Religion”⁴⁴ and naturally to the same effect. “Sins,” we are told here, are fundamentally “evil volitions”; but it is added, “also the corresponding intentions, habitual inclinations and dispositions.” None of these come into the world with us; they are all self-formed. We come into the world sinless and pick up sin in the process of living. It is a social fact; and from all that appears we would not become sinners, if we could be born and reared in a sinless society. That, however, is the case with none of us. Even he who is “born of Christian parents into the community of Christ” is “at the same time put into connection with evil, against which his natural will as such does not contend.” This is a statement which sets us furiously to thinking. We wish to know why we do not contend against the evil of the world—if we are born with a bias to good. And we wish very much to know why, if it is our environment which moulds us, the good environment in the “community of Christ” does not protect us from the bad environment of the kingdom of sin—especially if our native impulse is to good. Ritschl, however, closes his eyes to these things, and tells us flatly that “in every one some degree of self-seeking takes form, even before the clearness of common self-consciousness is awakened in him.” Thus all men, without exception, become sinners, and this means not only that they share in sinful practices, but that they are infected with a sinful bias, which conditions their whole activity. “Even the single sinful act does not by any means come to an end with the act, but continues to work as a disordering or perversion of moral freedom.”⁴⁵ And no one has committed only a single sinful act; and to the multitude of his acts is added the baleful power of the community’s sin. For “united sin, the opposite to the Kingdom of God, rests upon all as a power, which at least limits the freedom of the individual to good.” From our own sinning, reinforced by the influence of the sinful community, there thus arises a condition of will which suggests the description of an inability to good. Ritschl himself phrases it thus: “This limitation of the freedom [of the individual] by his own sin and by connection with the common condition of the world is, taken strictly, a lack of freedom to good.”⁴⁶ He will not allow, however, that this “lack of freedom to good” amounts to “the absolute inability to good which the Reformers” taught: though he is able to speak of sin “dominating” the individual. A. E. Garvie is therefore so far wrong when he writes⁴⁷ that Ritschl, by his denial of original sin, “does not minimise the extent or the potency of sin, but seeks to explain it by an acquired tendency instead of an inherited bias.” It may seem to us that his limitation of the “potency” of sin is illogical; it does so seem to us; but he does so far limit it as to refuse to admit that it ever in fact (he allows it in theory) wholly destroys the power to will the good.

Certainly it very greatly behooved Ritschl, at the cost of whatever inconsequence, to preserve to sinful men as large an ability to good as possible. For, in his rigorous anti-supernaturalism, he has nothing to appeal to for their salvation from sin except their own wills. In the Augustinian system—which gave law to the Reformation—the depths of sin are matched by the heights of grace: by the recreation of the Holy Spirit men dead in sin

⁴⁴ §§ 27 ff.

⁴⁵ § 31.

⁴⁶ § 30.

⁴⁷ As cited, p. 306.

are raised into newness of life. Johannes Wendland strangely fancies that he is urging a valid criticism against the Reformation doctrine of sin when he asks,⁴⁸ “Is the moral freedom of man really completely lost?” and answers, “Then there would be no possibility of deliverance; for there would be then nothing for deliverance to take hold of.” The Reformation doctrine not only entails but strenuously asserts that there is nothing in sinful man on which deliverance can “take hold,” and that he is therefore incapable of deliverance save by the recreation of his dead soul by the almighty power of the Holy Spirit. But Ritschl knows no soul to be recreated; and knows no Holy Spirit to recreate it; and in his anti-mystical zeal knows no immediate Divine action of any kind on the human will. What the human will itself in its own unaided powers cannot do for its own recovery from sin, cannot in his view be done at all.

It is Ritschl’s teaching that the soul subsists only in its functions. “We know nothing,” he says,⁴⁹ “of an in-itself of the soul”; and he explains his meaning by the addition of the words—“of a life of the spirit enclosed in itself, over or behind the functions in which it is active, living and present to itself as a particular entity (*Werthgrösse*).” This is not a mere *obiter dictum* but a deliberately announced doctrine, valued precisely because it excludes all talk of “mysticism” in the relations of God to man. Pfleiderer⁵⁰ charitably supposes that “when he blew this trumpet blast against all ‘mysticism,’ ” Ritschl could scarcely have realized the radical character of the pronouncement he was making; and then draws out its consequences. It makes the unity of the soul an illusion, dissolved into the multiplicity of its functions. And it renders the hope of immortality a delusion. How can there be talk of the immortality of the soul on the basis of a doctrine which allows for the existence of no soul? What is there to hold these functions together when the body decays?⁵¹ Garvie brings together what is the gist of these criticisms, in one comprehensive sentence. Ritschl, says he,⁵² “in his denial of the metaphysical existence of the soul, and his restriction of personal life to the spiritual activities,” “implicitly contradicts the unity and identity of the ‘self,’ the possibility of character, the certainty of immortality.” In Ritschl’s teaching, says Garvie again,⁵³ sweeping a circle with a wider radius, “God is, so to speak, lost in His kingdom, Christ in His vocation, the soul in its activities.”

How Ritschl applies this doctrine of the non-substantiality of the soul, may be observed as well as elsewhere, in a very characteristic passage in which his immediate object is to defend his doctrine of the “Godhead” of Christ from the reproach that it ascribes divinity only to His will and not to His nature.⁵⁴ Ritschl replies that there is no

⁴⁸ “Albrecht Ritschl und seine Schüler,” 1899, p. 104.

⁴⁹ P. 21: “von einem Ansich der Seele.” D. W. Simon (in his E. T. of Stählin’s “Kant, Lotze, and Ritschl,” p. 168, note 2) proposes to render the awkward term *Ansichsein* by the equally awkward equivalent “inseity.”

⁵⁰ “Die Ritschl’sche Theologie,” pp. 10 ff.

⁵¹ We are always directed to Fr. Traub, *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*, 1894, p. 101, for a reply to Pfleiderer’s strictures here. But Traub does not meet Pfleiderer’s criticisms; he only asserts the right of Ritschl to his views.

⁵² *Op. cit.*, contents of chap. V. sect. iii. cited by Orr, “Ritschlianism,” p. 84.

⁵³ *Op. cit.*, p. 62.

⁵⁴ Pp. 466 f.

such distinction: the will is the nature. When we speak of a person's character, we mean nothing except the state of his will. A good character is a particular state of the will—this state of the will, to wit, the bending of the will to a good and unselfish end with sufficient decision to restrain and govern the natural impulses, which work, presumably, for immoral or at least unmoral ends. When the will forms and pursues a good and unselfish end so as to subordinate and subject the natural impulses to it—then the person is of good character. Whence, now, the will obtains the ability thus to subordinate and subject the natural impulses to itself, or rather to a good and unselfish end formed by itself, we are not told. That there are such impulses requiring thus to be reduced to subjection is itself a notable fact. Ritschl speaks of them as “the predispositions (*Anlagen*) of the soul.” He tells us that they “correspond in some way to our bodily equipment”; and further that they are “given to us”; and still further that they are “designated as our nature (*Naturell*).” But now he somewhat strangely adds that it is the allotted task of the created spirit to transform these “predispositions of the soul” into its “obedient instruments.” We speak of this statement as strange, for surely the whole drift of these remarks suggests that we are here contemplating “the created spirit” as such, that is, as it comes into existence, and not only after it has formed for itself a character, and that an evil character. And as it comes into existence, it is in Ritschl's teaching good, and inclines to good—to become evil only by the action of this very will which we are here told has as its task to obtain the mastery over these dispositions in order that thus a good character may be framed. Let that, however, pass. What Ritschl is teaching here primarily is that our character at any given moment is just the state of our will in that particular stage of the prosecution of this task. In proportion as we have the mastery over our predispositions and are governing them in the interests of a good end—we are good. Who or what, however, is this “we”—“the created spirit”—who thus dominates over the predispositions of the soul? Do not these “predispositions (*Anlagen*) of the soul” really constitute all the “we” that exists? Must we not have another “we,” with another equipment of dispositions, before we can form a purpose antagonistic to it and dominate it in its interests? We are lost in wonder as to what it is that forms this purpose and dominates the predispositions which are “given” to us, and which are properly called our “nature.” So little can Ritschl get along without a soul that he cannot conduct his discussion a single step without presupposing it.

It will have been already observed that it is not the soul of man alone which is dissolved in the acid of Ritschl's non-substantial metaphysics.⁵⁵ The being of God is dissolved in it also. As a matter of course Ritschl knows nothing of a Trinity in the Godhead. And where there is no Trinity, there can be no preexistent Divine Christ, and no personal Holy Spirit. A. E. Garvie, who always gives Ritschl the benefit of a benevolent interpretation, whenever a benevolent interpretation can by any means be made possible, is compelled to allow that with Ritschl “the doctrine of the Trinity does not find any recognition whatever.”⁵⁶ And Gustav Ecke, whose attitude toward Ritschl is

⁵⁵ For an admirable summary statement of the matter see Orr, “The Ritschlian Theology,” pp. 61–65.

⁵⁶ *Op. cit.*, p. 343. The defence which von Kügelgen (*op. cit.*, p. 137) offers for Ritschl is only an admission—the “Trinity” means the successive manifestations of Love in several modes of operation: “With reference to the ‘denial of the dogma of the Trinity’ (so Haack) this reproach is invalidated, since the Holy Trinity, of course not simultaneously,

as benevolent as Garvie's, is equally compelled to aver that we find as little recognition in him of a personal Holy Spirit. "According to Ritschl," he expounds,⁵⁷ "by the Holy Spirit there cannot at all be understood a kind of 'irresistible natural force' which traverses the regular course of knowledge and the normal exercise of the will... When Paul makes use of the conception, he designates by it the knowledge of God as Father common to Christian believers and the knowledge of His Son as our Lord; and further the power of right conduct and self-sanctification or the formation of moral character. If the whole ethical praxis is thus deduced from the Holy Spirit, what this means is that the knowledge of God as our Father motives the disposition out of which righteousness and sanctification are produced."⁵⁸ The particular passage of Ritschl's⁵⁹ which Ecke makes use of here is a fair representative of his customary mode of speech on the subject. He is never weary of asserting that the Holy Spirit is no "stuff" and is not to be conceived in its action after the analogy of a "natural force," producing effects by its own power. And he as repeatedly explains that it is, in its real nature, just the "knowledge" which is common to the Christian community, and under the influence of which as a motive, the individual Christian sanctifies *himself*—as is particularly clearly declared in the passage expounded by Ecke. In it we are told that what Paul calls the Holy Spirit is the "power, common to Christians, of righteous conduct and of self-sanctification or moral character-formation, which finds its motive in that complete knowledge of God."⁶⁰

In another typical passage⁶¹ it is emphatically denied not only that the Holy Spirit is to be conceived as a "stuff"—which is Ritschl's way of saying a substantial entity—but equally that He is to be thought of as the "Divine means" (*göttliche Mittel*) of the regeneration of the individual. The state of regeneration or the new life may be placed in close relation to the Holy Spirit, says he; but that "is not to be understood in the sense that each individual is changed by the specific power of God after the fashion of a natural force, but that he is set in motion towards patience and humility as well as to moral activity in the service of the Kingdom of God by the trust in God as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ which is common to all Christians." Here it is explicitly denied that it is the Holy Spirit which works that change by which we become Christians and our own trust in God is invoked in His stead. As to the Holy Spirit itself, what is meant by it is "in reference to God Himself," just "the knowledge which God has of Himself"; and with reference to the Christian community the common "knowledge of God and His counsel

but certainly successively, comes to manifestation in the self-revelation of God as will of love through the man Jesus, and in divine self-communication as power of God through the Holy Spirit,—wherefore naturally the immanent side of the Trinity gives way to the economical side on the ground of religious value-judgment."

⁵⁷ "Die theologische Schule Albrecht Ritschls," 1897, p. 293.

⁵⁸ C. von Kügelgen, as cited, pp. 114 ff., seeks to defend Ritschl against the charge—as made by Grau—that he reduces the Holy Spirit "to a function of knowledge." He is effectively answered by Leonhard Stählin in the *Neue Kirchliche Zeitschrift* for 1898 (ix. p. 506). "In spite of all his employment of the terminology which belongs to the church doctrine of the Trinity," says Stählin, "Ritschl remains a Unitarian."

⁵⁹ Pp. 533 f.

⁶⁰ P. 533.

⁶¹ Pp. 605 f.

towards men in the world,” which is the possession of the Christian community, and which, so far as it is true knowledge, of course “corresponds with God’s knowledge of Himself.” This last fact, namely, that the knowledge which the Christian community has of God corresponds with the knowledge that God has of Himself, is the justification of the common name given to the two knowledges—the “Holy Spirit.”⁶² The Holy Spirit in the meantime is defined baldly as just a “knowledge”: a knowledge *of God*, no doubt, but just a *knowledge* of God. This knowledge may exist in God as subject; or in the Christian community as subject. The individual member of the community, so far as he shares in this knowledge, is affected by it in his feelings and in his acts: it becomes to him a source in him of specific emotions and activities. This is what is meant by “having the Holy Spirit.” The Holy Spirit is just the spirit of the community conceived as an influence, swaying the individual; that and nothing more.⁶³

Commenting on the passage which has just been engaging our attention,⁶⁴ Garvie⁶⁵ seizes hold of this sentence: “As the power of the exhaustive knowledge of God common to Christian believers, the Holy Spirit is, however, at the same time the motive of the life of all Christians, which as such is necessarily directed to the common end of the Kingdom of God.” On the ground of this sentence he represents Ritschl as teaching that “the Spirit is in the Christian community not only as *knowledge*, but also as the *motive* of action”; and that he explains to mean that “the *will* as well as the *mind* of God is in the community.” This is quite unjustified. What Ritschl says is that “the Holy Spirit” is the motive of the life of Christians “as the power of the common exhaustive knowledge of God belonging to the believers in Christ.” There is no such thing as a “Holy Spirit” conceived as will, according to Ritschl: in his view the “Holy Spirit” is only a knowledge. And it is, in any case, “knowledge” alone which can act as a “motive”; that is a thing will cannot do. Ritschl makes his meaning particularly clear in the summary paragraph in which he brings the discussion in this place to a close. Nothing objective, he says,⁶⁶ can

⁶² Cf. the statement on p. 471. “The Spirit of God is the knowledge which God has of Himself, as of His self-end. The Holy Spirit denotes in the New Testament the Spirit of God so far as He is the ground of the knowledge of God and of the specific religious-moral life in the community.”

⁶³ Near the close of this passage in the earlier editions (ed. 1, p. 534; ed. 2, pp. 561 f.) there were some words which have dropped out in the rewriting of the passage for the third edition, of such clearness that they naturally were much quoted by earlier writers (e.g. Hermann Weiss, *Theologische Studien und Kritiken*, 1881, p. 412; Fr. Luther, “Die Theologie Ritschl’s,” 1887, p. 27). It runs in ed. 2 as follows: “The Holy Spirit designates, metaphysically speaking, a *Formbestimmtheit* like justification, reconciliation and childship to God.” Weiss comments: “The Holy Spirit is therefore in no way anything real or substantial, but is simply the specific form of the Christian consciousness, so far as this cherishes precisely as consciousness the specific thought of God as Father, bringing it into practice, as guiding thought, over against the conceptions and moods which arise out of the world,—as dominating motive over against the natural instincts.”

⁶⁴ P. 605.

⁶⁵ *Op. cit.*, pp. 338 f.

⁶⁶ P. 607.

be taught about justification and regeneration except this—“that it” (these two things are so one with Ritschl that he uses a singular pronoun and verb) “takes place within the community of believers in accordance with the propagation of the Gospel and the specific onworking of the personal peculiarity of Christ in the community.” These are its productive causes—the proclamation of the Gospel and especially the impression made by the unique personality of Christ. How these causes work the result Ritschl now proceeds to tell us: it takes place, he says, “seeing that there is awakened in the individual faith in Christ, as trust in God the Father of all, and a sense of union rooted in the Holy Spirit—by which the entire world-view and self-judgment in the continuance of the sense of guilt for sin are dominated.” That is to say the proclamation of the gospel and the impression made on men by the personality of Christ bring about their justification and regeneration, briefly, by awakening faith in them.⁶⁷

Of course this is not to eliminate all “mystery” from the process: it is only to eliminate all that is supernatural. The words in which Ritschl says this have, it is true, been now and then gravely misunderstood—as, for example, by Garvie.⁶⁸ “How this state is brought about,” Ritschl remarks, “eludes all observation, like the development of the individual spiritual life in general.” He does not mean by this to suggest that there is, or may be, something more at work here than is merely human—something more than knowledge acting as motive. He means only that the manner of working by which this knowledge produces faith, and faith justification and regeneration is, like all other operations of the human spirit, as he expressly says, something which withdraws itself from observation. Accordingly Otto Ritschl, expounding his father’s doctrine of the origin of faith, declares⁶⁹ that what he emphasizes is that all faith, whether the one becoming a Christian is aware of the connection or not, is called out by impulses which proceed from the Christian community as the vehicle of the Christian proclamation. “How these influences work in individual cases” he continues, “‘eludes all observation precisely like the development of the individual spiritual life in general’”—quoting our present passage. Thus it appears that this famous sentence does not, in the view of

⁶⁷ Cf. “Unterricht,” § 5, note 3 (E. T. pp. 174 f.):—“The parables (Mark 4), which set forth the mysteries of the kingdom in figures of the growth of grain, etc., always signify by ‘fruit’ a human product, springing out of an individual activity called forth by the divine ‘seed,’ i.e., by the impulse of the divine word of revelation.” The sole divine element is the “word of revelation.” In “Justification and Reconciliation,” iii. p. 175, Ritschl seeks to defend his doctrine of justification from the charge of Pelagianism; but his only weapon is a not altogether unjustified *tu quoque*. What interests us here is that here again he repudiates the conception of an action on the human spirit by the Holy Ghost as the account of the rise of faith in the soul. There is no such thing as a “soul” in the sense of a kind of *Natur*, that is, except as the activities of feeling, knowing, willing themselves; and grace does not act in this fashion, on a passive recipient. When it is said that the Holy Spirit acts upon us, what is meant, according to “Unterricht,” § 46 (E. T. p. 226) is that “the impulse to right conduct,” etc., “have their criterion in the knowledge of God as our Father which is given us in Christianity.”

⁶⁸ *Op. cit.*, pp. 339, 344. Also by Gustav Ecke, “Die theologische Schule Albrecht Ritschls,” 1897, p. 63.

⁶⁹ “Leben,” ii. p. 227.

Ritschl's son, any more than in its own apparent bearing, refer obscurely to the possibility of some direct action of the Holy Spirit taking place in the origin of faith; but only to the operation of influences coming out of the community as "bearer of the word." It is this that seems to Ritschl mysterious.

It ought perhaps to be added that although Garvie argues here that Ritschl means to posit an operation of God as will on the soul in regeneration, he nevertheless proceeds at once⁷⁰ to rebuke him precisely because he does not do this, but seeks all the causes of the transformation wrought in what we call regeneration in the subject of it. Garvie himself does not believe that "in the spiritual sphere" causes produce their effects unmodified by the intrusion of free will; a mode of statement which can mean only that he supposes that God the Holy Spirit, operating as will, produces the effects He aims at, in the spiritual sphere, only by the permission of the will on which He operates. "There is a new factor," he says, "personal freedom, which either coöperates with or opposes itself to the operative cause, and thus decisively modifies the effect"—a remarkable assertion when we reflect that the "other factor" under consideration is Almighty God, and note that what is asserted is that the human will not only modifies but "decisively modifies" the effect which Almighty God attempts to produce. Nevertheless Garvie against Ritschl's account of the matter argues that "we are not giving a complete account of even spiritual facts, if, because of the importance of this new factor, we recognize only the effects, and refuse to inquire into the causes." "Yet this," he says, "is Ritschl's method." Surely this is to acknowledge that in his account of "regeneration" Ritschl indicates no "transcendent" cause of the effects observed; and that, in the circumstances, means that he explains the effects wholly within the sphere of human action. The phrase is now let fall⁷¹ that in his further remarks Ritschl has no intention of "abandon[ing] this method of exclusive attention to the human activity in the spiritual life"; and the companion phrases occur,⁷² that Ritschl "appear[s], at least, to deny the indwelling and inworking of the Spirit," and "in his language at least, fails to recognize the Presence and Power of God's Spirit in the individual Christian experience." Surely this is to say that so far as Ritschl has expressed himself he allows for no divine factor in the Christian life. We have nothing to go on, after all, except what he tells us. And surely he must be presumed to mean what he says.

This negative representation, however, instructive as it is in itself, yet falls unhappily short of the truth of the matter. Ritschl not only fails to mention a divine factor in regeneration; he definitely excludes it. R. A. Lipsius speaks not a bit too strongly, despite Ecke's protest,⁷³ when he declares⁷⁴ that "the whole course of the Christian life is explained" by Ritschl "psychologically," that is, empirically, without the entrance of a supernatural factor." Fr. Luther expounds the matter more fully: "There is no question in the Ritschlian theology ...," says he,⁷⁵ "of a new creation through the Holy Spirit. The Ritschlian system has no place for a Triune personal God, and knows nothing of a salvation resting on the saving operation of this Triune God. Everything in it derives

⁷⁰ *Op. cit.*, p. 340.

⁷¹ P. 341.

⁷² P. 349.

⁷³ As cited, p. 64.

⁷⁴ "Die Ritschl'sche Theologie," 1888, p. 21.

⁷⁵ Fr. Luther, "Die Theologie Ritschl's," 1887, pp. 27–28.

ultimately from human action. Everything is effectuated by a self-activity of a humanity associated in an ethical kingdom and abiding in the condition of nature.⁷⁶ Everything here is nature, nothing grace, everything man-work, or as the Scriptures call it, ‘law-work,’ nothing the work of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ, really and creatively delivering us.” There is nothing on which Ritschl more insists than on what he calls the freedom of faith, by which is meant what we might rather speak of as its absolute arbitrariness. “Faith begins,” says he,⁷⁷ “in harmony with the law of freedom”—and therefore its coming, he at once adds, is incapable of being predicted or foreseen. It comes, in other words, so far independently of conditions that it cannot be inferred from them. “The change of heart which is to be brought about by God’s love towards sinners,” he says again,⁷⁸ “must be conceived under the form of freedom of the will”—and then he immediately adds that it cannot take place therefore “when sin, regarded as enmity against God, has reached that degree of self-determination at which the will has deliberately chosen evil as its end.” That is to say, man is salvable only when he is in a position to save himself. So zealous is he for this absolutely arbitrary action of the will that he even tells us⁷⁹ that “there is in no case either a mechanical or a logical necessity laid upon individuals to join themselves in faith to the existing Christian community.” The language is exaggerated for effect in both members of the sentence. In excluding what he calls a “mechanical necessity” of believing, Ritschl means really to exclude the recreative operation of the Spirit, of which he always speaks in this depreciatory language.⁸⁰ In excluding what he calls “a logical necessity,” he may appear to be setting aside only such an inducement to believing as will leave open no rational way of escape from it; but he is actually shutting out all really determining inducements whatever. Hermann Weiss is therefore quite right when he says⁸¹ that with Ritschl “faith is and remains so exclusively the act of freedom of the subject that the dependence of the Christian on God and Christ becomes a purely external one or an imaginary one.”

We may indeed challenge the possibility—even on Ritschl’s postulates—of such an arbitrary act of faith as, he asserts, takes place. For Ritschl himself, as we have seen, represents the will of sinful man as biased to evil; as so strongly biased to evil, in itself and in its conditioning in the kingdom of sin, as would lead us to suppose it incapable of the act of faith attributed to it. Ritschl himself describes the condition in which man finds himself as one of “unresolved guilt,” “separation from God,” “slavery to the world”—against which combination, he says,⁸² we “cannot assert ourselves with our own abilities (*Mitteln*) since it is from it that we receive all the motives to our action and effort.” This

⁷⁶ Accordingly Fr. Luther remarks a little later (p. 29): “It is the Kingdom of God which, by the ethical communion established in it, calls out the religious-moral renewal of the heart; this is not done by the Holy Spirit.”

⁷⁷ P. 577.

⁷⁸ P. 383.

⁷⁹ P. 577.

⁸⁰ Cf. e.g. p. 529: “A material, mechanical change of the sinner is altogether unthinkable,” in which “the sinner is made righteous mechanically—that is, say, through the infusion of love,” instancing the Roman Catholic doctrine.

⁸¹ As cited, p. 391.

⁸² P. 529.

certainly appears to attribute to sinful man an inability to good. But we are bound to bear in mind that Ritschl constantly asserts that this inability is not absolute; and that it finally emerges that what is left to man by it is not broken fragments of ability to good but a power of willing which can be called nothing less than plenary. Freedom in this sense is the prerogative of a man as personal spirit.

Ritschl nevertheless recognizes the duty and undertakes the task of making it intelligible how sinful man performs the act which is attributed to him. Naturally a number of modes of expression are employed. What is said reduces ultimately, however, to an appeal to the impression made on him by the personality of Christ and the influence exerted upon him by the Christian community, "the kingdom of God"; and as the former operates only through the latter, in the last analysis his appeal is solely to the influences brought to bear on sinful man in the Kingdom of God. Here too, then, as in the matter of the origin of sin in the individual Ritschl's recourse is to "social inheritance." As there man, coming into the world with a bias to good, becomes sinful through association with those who were sinners before him; so here men living in sin and with a bias to evil become righteous through the influence of those who were righteous before them. A difficulty no doubt faces us arising from this very parallel. We have seen that, according to Ritschl, every man comes into the world inclined to good, but, even though he may be born into the Christian community, this inclination to good is invariably and "apparently inevitably" overcome by the evil influences to which he is subjected in human companionship, that is to say, in the kingdom of sin. We can scarcely avoid inferring that the influences of evil in the kingdom of sin are stronger than those to good in the Kingdom of God. And that renders it difficult to understand how men inclined to evil and long immersed in the kingdom of sin, affected deeply by its influences, and more or less hardened in sinning, can be supposed to be able to turn at once to good on entering the Kingdom of God. The solution of the difficulty lies of course in the relative unimportance in Ritschl's scheme of thought of inducements in this or the other direction, as compared with the ineradicable power of the will to turn itself in any direction whatever. No doubt thus the whole machinery which Ritschl has created—of a kingdom of sin to account for the universal sin of man, of a Kingdom of God to account for the recovery of sinful man—is made nugatory. But the robustness of his Libertarianism is thrown up into a correspondingly high light. How entirely he depends on the will to work the change by which one becomes a Christian, is luridly exhibited by the temptation to which he yields to pronounce children, and the members of backward races, incapable of making it. Christianity is only for the well-developed. Children cannot attain to it: "faith in Christ can be expected only at a riper age."⁸³ And Christian missions to people in a low stage of culture are at least of doubtful utility. Such peoples can be expected to embrace Christianity only when they have become more capable of entering into its ends.⁸⁴ These suggestions fall in with the great part which immaturity plays in Ritschl's idea of the origin of sin; and they are strong attestations, as they are inevitable corollaries, of the decisive part played in his doctrine by his Libertarianism.

But although the significance of "the community" is thus depressed beneath that of "the will," in Ritschl's scheme, it is not given an intrinsically unimportant rôle. It is

⁸³ P. 599.

⁸⁴ Pp. 136 f.

through it that the whole “inducement to action” comes to the will. And therefore in this sense the character of the action taken can be attributed to it. Ritschl can even say⁸⁵ that the “new birth” or “new begetting by God,” or “the admission into the relation of sonship to God,” which “in its essence coincides with justification as well as with the bestowal of the Holy Spirit”—“all this is again the same with admission into the community.” Thus he reduces the entire list of expressions apparently declaring a divine introduction of the sinner into the new life to mere figures of speech for the eminently human act of entrance into the Christian community; it is the influence of his new environment upon him which alone comes into consideration.⁸⁶ Where comprehensiveness of statement is sought, it is apt to take some such form as the following. We obtain “forgiveness or justification, reconciliation and adoption into Divine Sonship”—all of which are one—we read,⁸⁷ “only as members of the religious community (*Gemeinde*) of Christ, as the result of the incalculable and mysterious interaction between our own freedom and the determining influences of the community (*Gemeinschaft*)—which (the community) however, is possible, in its nature, only through Christ’s unique life-course in its well-known double aspect, and its continuous operation through all ages.” Here all that enters into the Christian condition is represented as attained by us through our own wills acting under influences brought to bear on us through the Christian community. It is added no doubt that this community itself is a creation of Christ and the influences it exerts are transmitted from Him. But this does not introduce a new influence operative on the sinner—the influence of Christ—distinct from that of the community. In representing the community as the vehicle of the influence of Christ it interposes the community between Christ and the sinner, and reduces the influence of Christ from an immediate to a mediate one, from a possibly supernatural to a natural one. This is not an accidental, it is the calculated, result of Ritschl’s theorizing. He has nothing more at heart than to remove man from all direct contact with God.

It is therefore with unjustified charity in the concessive portion of his statement, that Hermann Weiss says,⁸⁸ “It is true, Ritschl wishes to avoid making the awaking of faith depend only on instruction or tradition—but really he is unable to find any other way.” Precisely what Ritschl wishes to do is to separate man effectually from all direct relation to God, and in order to do this he subordinates his relation even to Christ to his relation to the community through which alone (never directly and immediately) does the individual have any relation to the revelation of God in Christ and His reconciling work. The result is naturally that throughout all Ritschl’s discussions—which vainly represent themselves

⁸⁵ “Unterricht,” § 47, note 1.

⁸⁶ Cf. H. Weiss, as cited, pp. 399 ff. Weiss remarks (p. 400) on Ritschl’s failure to make a clear distinction between objectively belonging to the community and subjectively believing. “We have to do here,” he comments (p. 403), “with an underestimate of sin, so far as it involves not merely a relation of guilt ... but a perversion of the will and real corruption of the whole personal life in man. Therefore it is scarcely a question of a decisive conversion, and faith is conceived in the end entirely as a moral act of man’s own. The religious facts present in the community, through which the individual receives his call to the Kingdom of God, suffice to call it out.”

⁸⁷ P. 577.

⁸⁸ As cited, p. 404, end. His vouchers are pp. 529, 567.

as seeking a way between the Scylla of Romish and the Charybdis of Rationalistic conceptions—there looms (as Weiss does not fail to point out)⁸⁹ a background of essentially deistic thinking and the actual life of the believer is left by God wholly to himself. This is but one aspect of Ritschl's extreme anti-mystical preconceptions, the effects of which are briefly outlined by Henri Schoen⁹⁰ in such statements as these: "Ritschl does not speak of a direct relation of the divine Spirit with the individual"; "The relation of man and God 'ought not to be regarded as immediate; that would be to declare them imaginary (*eingebildet*)'";⁹¹ "Let it suffice us that God acts in the bosom of His Church by the *Gospel* and by the *remembrance* of Jesus."⁹²

Jesus Christ does not live in His Church. It is only His Gospel—the memory of Him—which lives in it and works the conversion of men. Johannes Wendland complains that "Ritschl has never more exactly defined what the community can give the individual, viz., only historical information."⁹³ The complaint is not well-founded. Ritschl makes it superabundantly plain that it is only "knowledge" which works through the community on the individual, though he magnifies, no doubt, the effects of this "knowledge." This is the account to give of his reduction of the Holy Spirit just to "knowledge"; and he looks to this "knowledge" to carry the sinner safely out of his own sin into newness of life—to this "knowledge" as the only thing needed to direct the will in its "free" action to which it is at all times competent. It is curious and not a little instructive to observe how widely such a representation, fatally defective as it is, commends itself. Theodor Haering, for example,⁹⁴ accounts it a special service done by Ritschl that he gives us an answer to "the question, in what way we arrive at faith in Christ." Ritschl says—through the impression made on us by Christ of being a Revelation of God; by which there is awakened in us at the same time faith in Him and in God. Orthodoxy, says Haering, is helpless here. "To point to the mysterious working of the Holy Spirit, however justifiable this may be, is in the present connexion really an evasion of the question, not an answer." Thus he sets "the Word and Spirit," by the conjunction of which alone, "orthodoxy" teaches, is faith wrought, in antagonism to one another, as if Ritschl had the one and "orthodoxy" the other—a very significant revelation of his conception both of "orthodoxy" and of Ritschlian teaching.

Alfred E. Garvie's reasoning⁹⁵ moves on much the same lines as Haering's. Criticizing the critics of Ritschl's antagonism to all "mystical elements" in Christianity, he writes: "If there is an immediate communion with Christ, or a direct action of the

⁸⁹ As cited, pp. 387 ff. Cf. Friedrich Nippold, "Die theologische Einzelschule," 1893, erste und zweite Abtheilung, p. 266, who says that Ritschl's passionate aversion to all mysticism "brought his idea of God into undeniable approximation to deism." This, he says, along with his Moralism, enters into his approximation to the older Rationalism.

⁹⁰ As cited, pp. 6–70. Schoen adds (p. 70, note 2): "W. Herrmann only draws the logical conclusion from these affirmations when he says: 'The idea of a real relation (*Verkehr*) of the Christian with God is not Christian' (*Verkehr des Christen mit Gott*, 1886, p. 8)."

⁹¹ "Theologie und Metaphysik," 1881, p. 47.

⁹² p. 608.

⁹³ "Albrecht Ritschl und seine Schüler," 1899, p. 79.

⁹⁴ "The Christian Faith," 1913, pp. 690 f.

⁹⁵ "The Ritschlian Theology," 1899, p. 149.

Spirit, unconditioned by the historical revelation, why contend so earnestly for the defence of the New Testament, why preach the gospel in all the world, why maintain the Church and its means of grace? If Christ needs no mediation, and the Spirit uses no agency, why all this effort and testimony? The truth is, that Ritschl and his school are contending for what is recognized practically in all the Christian Churches, the dependence of Christianity on the historical revelation of God in Christ, as recorded in the New Testament.” No, that is but half the truth. The whole truth is that Ritschl is contending for “the dependence of Christianity on the historical revelation of God in Christ” is not neglecting merely, but denying, the dependence of vital Christianity on the immediate operations of the Spirit of God in the heart. The appreciation of “the permanent value and universal significance of the historical revelation” which Ritschl may show (so far as he shows it) must not be permitted to obscure his depreciation—his denial—of the indispensableness of the direct operations of the Spirit of God on the heart, without which even this historical revelation could have no saving effect. Garvie is pleased to play a little⁹⁶ with the expressions “direct,” “immediate,” as applied to the “action of the Spirit in the soul.” They are not new expressions which James Orr invented: they are the vehicles through which Christians through all ages have given expression to their fundamental faith that (as a very early Christian put it) the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, and cannot know them because they are Spiritually judged. This fundamental Christian confession cannot be vacated by the remarkable suggestion that no part is left for the historical revelation to play, no place remains for the preaching of the Gospel, if there be allowed a direct action of the Spirit “unconditioned” by it. This turns things on their heads. What the New Testament teaches is rather that the saving effect of the historical revelation, of the Gospel, is conditioned by the direct action of the Spirit—a truth which, of course, Garvie has no intention of really denying.⁹⁷

It is important that we should make clear to ourselves the completeness of Ritschl’s anti-supernaturalism. It is not uncommon to make an exception to its completeness in favor of what is called the revelation of God in Christ, to which the impulse to the Christian life is traced, and the asserted supernatural character of which may therefore be supposed to give a supernatural character to the whole process of salvation. According to Hermann Weiss, for example,⁹⁸ Ritschl’s system is saved from falling into “a complete Pelagianism,” and the Christian faith becoming in his hands simply “a no doubt respectable but entirely insufficient trust in God in the search after virtue and consciousness of freedom,” only by this circumstance—that he “would recognize a foundation for these dispositions exclusively in a peculiar possession of the Christian community, and would refer this community as Christ’s establishment to God’s positive revelation or arrangement.” “Herein,” says Weiss, “lies the supernatural side of the system.” In saying this, however, Weiss fully recognizes that the supernaturalism recognized is pushed back into the distant past, and, as God is not allowed to act directly

⁹⁶ As cited, pp. 143 f.

⁹⁷ As cited, pp. 149–150. Cf. Orr’s effective rejoinder to Garvie, “Ritschlianism,” pp. 83, 84.

⁹⁸ *Theologische Studien und Kritiken*, 1881, pp. 414 f.

on the individual, becomes somewhat illusive. P. Graue,⁹⁹ while occupying the same general standpoint with Weiss, is still less satisfied with the character of the supernaturalism which he recognizes in Ritschl and feels sure that it is logically insecure. Ritschl, says he, “has left standing the external revelation-fact which lies before us in the existence of Christ. That is the lure which he has thrown out to supernaturalism. From that on, the whole religious life runs on empirically-psychologically. That is his last century Rationalism. But the two do not get on together. This Rationalism swallows up that supernaturalism. How can an exception be made of Christ when in the religious life everything proceeds purely empirically? Already, now, He has for the Ritschlians (scientifically!) only the *value* of deity; already, now, it is at bottom nothing but the subjective conception of the love of God which Christ gives us; already, now, we can in this Christology speak logically neither of a deity, nor of a divinity, but only—pardon the aesthetically obnoxious term—of a God-for-us-ity of Christ. What prevents our turning away from that too? Our seeing in Christ’s God-the-Father only a subjective reflection of His own loving nature, of His own moral beauty? What prevents our remaining wholly on the earth and making Him to whom the Ritschlian school still ascribes the value of deity, put up with the value of a good moral character? Our rationalizing the Son of God into the son of man? The true logic of the Ritschlian notion of revelation is a *denial* of all revelation.”¹⁰⁰

What Graue presents here as the inevitable drift of Ritschl’s teaching about Christ is really rather the gist of his teaching. Accordingly J. Wendland,¹⁰¹ after surveying the grounds on which Ritschl bases his ascription of the predicate of deity to Christ, very properly declares that they do not in reality suggest that predicate. We may well understand, he says, that out of a feeling of piety for the past, unwillingness to break with the historical tradition and the custom of the Church, Ritschl should wish to retain such a title for Christ. But we can scarcely justify him in doing so, when what he means by it is nothing more than pure god-imaging (*gottebenbildlich*) humanity. “Particularly unhappy,” he continues, “is Ritschl’s defence of himself against his opponents who charged him with making Christ in the end nothing but a mere man. Ritschl rejoined (p. 397), ‘By mere man (if I should ever use the expression) I should mean a man as a natural being (*Naturgrösse*), with the exclusion of all characteristics of spiritual and moral personality.’ It follows from this that the deity of Christ is to be grounded in the characteristics of spiritual and moral personality. These, however, are not at all divine but human things.” Whatever we may think of the applicability of Wendland’s closing criticism, it is

⁹⁹ *Jahrbücher für protestantische Theologie*, xv. 1889, pp. 338 f.

¹⁰⁰ Similarly Nippold, as cited, p. 265, represents Ritschl as seeking to escape from Rationalism by rejecting all natural knowledge of God and representing the Christian community as the sole mediator of reconciliation. But, he adds, this is merely formal; in the matter of teaching “he comes near enough to the old Rationalism” to explain the polemical attitude to him of the orthodox and the only half-acceptance of the liberals. He talks of Christ no doubt as if he possessed in Him at least one supernatural datum; but from Him onward all is explained on a naturalistic, empirical-psychological basis. “All dogmatic predications dissolve in a complex of subjective-psychological notions, value-judgments and acts of will.”

¹⁰¹ As cited, pp. 114 f.

certainly true that Ritschl's defence of himself is in its entirety mere evasion and amounts in substance to a confession of judgment. "We, for our part," writes Leonhard Stählin justly,¹⁰² "are unable to discover anything in his Christology that raises it above the level of simple Rationalism. And the appending of the title of deity to the picture of Christ which he has drawn, is a pagan procedure for which no justification whatever is offered."

Those who insist that Ritschl teaches the proper deity of Christ¹⁰³ appear to forget that Ritschl himself declined to make any such affirmation. We do not know how "the person of Christ came into being," he says,¹⁰⁴ or "became what it presents itself for our ethical and religious estimation"; that "is no subject of theological investigation"—it is a problem "which transcends every kind of investigation." Only, we must not combine Him with God His Father; that explains nothing scientifically.¹⁰⁵ Let us content ourselves with knowing that He is that being "whose whole vocational activity forms the material of the complete revelation of God present in Him, or in whom the word of God is a human person." That is to say, what Jesus Christ is, is just the man in whom this complete revelation of God is embodied. There is no question of a preexistence of Christ here, as indeed there could not be with Ritschl's view, whether of God or of Christ. Ritschl, it is true, employs the term "eternal" with reference to Him with great freedom.¹⁰⁶ He stands, we are told, in an eternal relation with God: He is the eternal object of the love of God; even the phrase "the eternal Godhead of the Son" is not shunned. But the employment of these phrases is accompanied with explanations which rob them of what might have otherwise seemed their natural meaning. Only God, he tells us, "does not become, but eternally is what He is": only He is "of Himself." As for Christ—even theological tradition denies to Him self-existence and (in the predication of eternal generation to Him) ascribes Him to "the category of becoming in distinction from being." So far as this, says Ritschl, we may go with the traditional theology, when we speak of the deity of Christ. So far as this—that Christ is a dependent being who had His origin in time. But we can go with it no further. What Ritschl is doing is giving a new sense to the term "eternal deity," as ascribed to Christ; a new sense which would necessarily be misunderstood were it not clearly explained. It has meaning only, Ritschl says, with reference to God, not to us. "The eternal Godhead of the Son of God, in the transcription (*Umschreibung*) of it which has been given, becomes completely intelligible only as

¹⁰² "Kant, Lotze, and Ritschl," p. 221, at the close of a couple of pages of telling criticism of Ritschl's meager Christology. Similarly, J. Wendland, as cited, p. 116, points out that apart from his use of "the extravagant" expression "Godhead" of Christ and the peculiar ideal of piety which Ritschl has brought to expression in his Christology, his estimate of Jesus does not differ from that of the "Liberal Theology"—as for example that of Pfleiderer.

¹⁰³ C. von Kugelgen, as cited, pp. 64 ff. supplies a very favorable example. His contention is that with his ontology of spiritual being and his epistemological views, Ritschl could say only what he says. See also William Adams Brown, "The Essence of Christianity," 1902, pp. 260–261. Ritschl here is in effect made a mystic.

¹⁰⁴ P. 451.

¹⁰⁵ "Aber die Combination zwischen ihm und Gott seinem Vater ist eben keine Erklärung wissenschaftlicher Art."

¹⁰⁶ E.g. pp. 470, 471.

object of the divine knowledge and will, that is for God Himself.” What is meant is that “Christ exists for God eternally as the same that He is manifested to us in temporal limitation.” That is to say, He has always, just as He existed on earth, been the object of the divine prevision and predestination. Naturally, only of the divine. Ritschl somewhat unnecessarily adds: “But only for God; for as preëxistent Christ is for us hidden.” We, not being eternal like God, can know things only under the conditions of time and space. God knows from eternity all things in one all-embracing knowledge. The mode of this knowledge is inscrutable; its objects are in a true sense real—that is to say in the eternal, timeless knowledge of God. Christ, therefore, as existing from eternity in this knowledge, has had an eternal preëxistence, in the sense of which it is more customary to speak as a merely ideal preëxistence. Of course the same could equally well be said of everything else. For anything that exists has eternally preëxisted in the divine knowledge and will. At bottom Ritschl is expounding in this passage not a doctrine of Christ’s preëxistence but the doctrine of God’s eternal foreknowledge and decree. This of course has not escaped notice. “Real premundane existence is thus ascribed,” writes Leonhard Stählin,¹⁰⁷ “not to Christ, but merely to the divine will as directed to the establishment of the kingdom of God through Christ. As thus defined, however, the divine will is the volition of something that has yet to exist, something therefore which does not yet exist.” “Ritschl,” writes Henri Schoen similarly,¹⁰⁸ “teaches the ideal preëxistence of Christ, and Christ is for him the historical person of Jesus. But as, at bottom, a historical person preëxists really or does not preëxist at all, as there is no middle term, Jesus does not preëxist at all. What preëxists is solely the divine intention, the mercy of God. Accordingly, when Ritschl speaks to us of an ideal preëxistence of Jesus, that is only a new expression for the omniscience of God.”

It is something that Ritschl thus relates Christ directly to the divine activities of foreknowledge and foreordination. It does not appear that he relates Him with similar directness to any other divine activities. How He came into being, how He came to be what He was—the bearer of the complete revelation of God, the vehicle of the complete will of God, and therefore the founder of the Kingdom of God—Ritschl warns us it is useless, even noxious, to enquire.¹⁰⁹ “How it was possible for such a man to come into existence,” Stählin expounds,¹¹⁰ “is a question which Ritschl declines to answer. ‘So far as one desires to be a Christian, one must recognize as a fact—a given fact, a *datum*—this relation of Christ to God, declared by Himself and proved even unto death, as also by His resurrection from the dead.’¹¹¹ We must refrain entirely from attempts to get behind this *datum*—to explain how it came to pass in detail, how it acquired an empirical existence. Attempts of this kind are purposeless, because they are resultless; and being resultless, it is injurious to make them.’”¹¹² That Ritschl was careful to leave such questions in what

¹⁰⁷ As cited, p. 207.

¹⁰⁸ As cited, p. 84.

¹⁰⁹ P. 451.

¹¹⁰ As cited, pp. 214–215.

¹¹¹ On what Ritschl understood by the Resurrection of Christ see the careful statements of Orr, “The Ritschlian Theology,” pp. 92, 202 f., and “Ritschlianism,” pp. 96 ff.

¹¹² “Theologie und Metaphysik,” p. 29.

Orr calls “convenient vagueness”¹¹³ is full of significance. The plain fact is that his theology had no means at its disposal for solving them.¹¹⁴ With his exclusion of all direct commerce of God with the human spirit—all “mystical fantasies”—he has rendered all revelation in the proper sense of the word impossible, and with it all immediate divine guidance. On this ground Christ cannot be a God-taught man; He must be explained merely as a religious genius. C. von Kügelgen, it is true, declares¹¹⁵ it is unjust to represent it as Ritschl’s view, as Lemme does, “that in Christ too the idea of the moral world-view arose in the same way as in us all—as a consequence of a moral wish or of meditation.” Did not Ritschl, he demands, represent Jesus as “actually experiencing a religious relation to God, theretofore non-existent, and undertaking to introduce His disciples into the same world-view and world-estimate?” The premise and conclusion here certainly do not hang together. That Ritschl represents Christ as the discoverer of a new relation to God and as able to transmit it to a following, says nothing as to his view of how Jesus acquired this new conception of the relation of man to God. And the passage in Ritschl to which von Kügelgen appeals¹¹⁶ also says nothing of it.

This passage says, to be sure, more to the honor of Christ than von Kügelgen extracts from it. It says that Christ is something more to the community which He established than its founder and lawgiver—than “the transitory occasion of His disciples’ religion and the legislator for their conduct, who would be a matter of indifference to them, as soon as His law had been learned.” Ritschl magnifies the abiding influence of Jesus’ person on His followers, the example which it is to them, the inspiration which it brings them. “The task,” he says, “of the real development of the spiritual personality, cannot be conceived rightly or fully apart from the contemplation of the prototype of this human destiny. What therefore we recognize in the historically unique portraiture (*Lebensbild*) of Christ as the particular value of his existence (*Daseins*), gains through the peculiarity of this phenomenon, and through its norm-giving bearing on our religious and ethical destiny, the value of a permanent rule, since we at the same time establish that it is only through the arousing and directing power of this person that we are in a position to enter into His relation to God and to the world.”¹¹⁷ These remarks very greatly exalt Christ—in His functions. In this exaltation of His functions, He is separated from other men: He is the originator, they at best the imitators; He is the producer, they at best the reproducers—who apart from His inspiration can do nothing. This is not a small difference, though it be but a difference of degree: a difference of but degree all the more that it is hinted that in reproducing what He has produced we may reproduce it fully. This exaltation of Christ in His functions is even carried so far that it is connected with the predicate of Godhead—though unfortunately these high functions on which this Godhead is based are treated

¹¹³ “Ritschlianism,” p. 46. “How Christ should arrive at this knowledge of God,” remarks Orr, “should possess these extraordinary endowments, should stand in this unique relation to God and to His purpose,—in short, should be the Person that He is, and should stand in the relation to God and man that He does—is a mystery into which we are not permitted to pry.”

¹¹⁴ Cf. Stählin, as cited, p. 314.

¹¹⁵ As cited, p. 65.

¹¹⁶ P. 386.

¹¹⁷ P. 387.

rather as forming its content than supplying its evidence. Nowhere do we get beyond their limit, and therefore nowhere do we get beyond a great man—say the supremely great man, who has found God and found Him completely, and by the power of His unique spiritual energy stamps His own religious image on the hearts of men.

It is necessary to revert for a moment to the hint in Ritschl's discussion to which we have just called attention in passing, that Christ's followers may become altogether like Him. Is Christianity adequately described, we may ask, as "the religion of Jesus," or is its essence to be sought rather in "faith in Christ"? Is Jesus merely our Example, or is He also our Savior? These two antitheses are not quite identical, and we may be advanced in our understanding of Ritschl's teaching by discriminating between them. Ritschl does not wish to teach that Jesus is only our Example. He vigorously assaults the "advocates of the religion of Jesus," who seek to "exhaust the significance of Jesus in the scheme of individual imitation." They overlook, he declares, the fact that Jesus withdraws Himself from imitation "by setting Himself over against His disciples as the author of forgiveness of sins."¹¹⁸ Ritschl is seeking, formally at least, to preserve to Jesus some shreds of His function as Savior. We use this depreciatory language because it appears that he ascribes saving functions to Jesus only so far as there proceeds from His person an influence which incites His followers to action and gives direction to their action.¹¹⁹ After all, therefore, he conceives of Jesus only as our Example, except so far as he throws the emphasis on His example, less as pattern than as inspiration. Jesus affects us, according to him, only through the impression which the contemplation of Him makes on us—the influence which He exerts upon us; and our Christianity consists in the end, therefore, only in our repeating in our own persons what is found first in Him—unless we prefer to split hairs with Theodor Haering¹²⁰ and carefully explain that it is not a question of our individual imitation of Jesus but only of experiencing in ourselves after the fashion of a copy (*nachbildlich*) the childship to God which Jesus promises after the fashion of an original (*urbildlich*). It remains true that the Christianity of the Christian consists, according to Ritschl, in his presenting in his own life-experience the "piety" which Jesus lived out in His own person. Beyond doubt, he explains, Jesus experienced and testified to His disciples a religious relation to God which had had no exemplification before Him, and made it His task to lead His disciples into this same conception of the world and judgment of self. "This religious determination of the members of Christ's community is prefigured in the person of the Founder and is grounded on it as the abiding power to all imitation of Him."¹²¹ In point of fact Ritschl therefore brings us back, for the essence of Christianity, to the repetition in His followers of just those simple elements of piety which are given originally in Jesus. His Christianity is just "the religion of Jesus." And the whole purpose of his main treatise would not be misleadingly described as an attempt to show that those conceptions pronounced by Lagarde¹²² "apostolical, not evangelical" are really "evangelical" as well as "apostolical," because "rightly understood" they mean nothing more than following Jesus in thinking of God as mere love, who has no intention

¹¹⁸ Pp. 2, 561 ff.

¹¹⁹ P. 387.

¹²⁰ "Ueber das Bleibende im Glauben an Christus," 1880, p. 14.

¹²¹ P. 387.

¹²² "Mittheilungen," iv. 1891, p. 109.

of punishing sin, and therefore living no longer in distrust of Him, but in trusting acceptance of His end as our end. Like Jesus, and under the impulse received from him (through the community), we are to live in faith, humility, patience, thankfulness, and the practice of love in the Kingdom of God. Doing so, we shall be divine as He, doing so, was divine. This is to Ritschl the entirety of Christianity: and this is at bottom just a doctrine of “imitation” of the “religion of Jesus.”

It is mere paradox to speak of Ritschl as teaching a supernatural Christianity. “Although he lays little stress on specific miracles,” writes William Adams Brown,¹²³ “Christianity is to Ritschl in a true sense a supernatural religion, for which no adequate preparation or explanation can be found in pre-Christian history.” The qualification “in a true sense” really tells the story; its function in the sentence is to guard against its being understood to say that Ritschl’s Christianity is a supernatural one in the ordinary sense of that term. The reason assigned for the supernaturalness of Ritschl’s Christianity is, moreover, ineffective. Ritschl, to be sure, teaches that Christianity came into the world as something new; and we may for our own part believe that, properly considered, that involves its supernaturalness. But there is no reason to suppose that was Ritschl’s opinion: on the contrary, he takes great pains to prevent its attribution to him—and he gives us a Christianity which, despite its sudden advent into the world, is through and through, in its substance, modes of working, and accessories alike, purely natural. It certainly is a meiosis to say that he “lays little stress on specific miracles.” He does not allow the occurrence of any such thing as a “miracle.” “Miracle” with him, as Orr justly tells us,¹²⁴ “is the religious name for an event which awakens in us a powerful impression of the help of God, but is not to be held as interfering with the scientific doctrine of the unbroken connection of nature.”

Even more paradoxical than Brown’s is Gustav Ecke’s representation.¹²⁵ According to him Ritschl not only has no intention of excluding the supernatural factor from the course of the development of the Christian life, but actually so suggests it as to compel us to perceive in it his genuine point of view. It is allowed that he is not altogether consistent in the matter. He only sometimes speaks as if he recognized a direct supernatural activity underlying the Christian life, providing indeed its producing cause; recognized it but declined to assert it or to expound it, because, above all else that he recognized about it, is this—that, though it is to be acknowledged, it is a hidden mystery of which nothing whatever can be said, a kind of *Ding an sich* behind the phenomena of the spiritual life. At other times, it is admitted, he speaks as if there is nothing of the sort to be recognized and the Christian life is to be explained solely out of the natural powers of man’s own spirit. Ecke now declares that, led by considerations of a general character, he is of the opinion that Ritschl is himself only when he speaks in the former fashion. He apparently forgets that even to speak in this former fashion is already to withdraw oneself wholly

¹²³ “The Essence of Christianity,” 1902, p. 227.

¹²⁴ “The Christian View of God and the World,” 1893, p. 31; see also “The Ritschlian Theology,” p. 93. Cf. Wendland, as cited, p. 61, who gives the passages from which Ritschl’s doctrine may be drawn: “Justification and Reconciliation,” E. T. iii. pp. 616–617; “Instruction,” § 17, E. T. pp. 188–189; *J. d. Th.*, 1861, pp. 429 ff.; *Hist. Zeitschr.*, viii. 1862, pp. 97 ff.

¹²⁵ As cited, pp. 63 ff.

from the supernaturalism of the Christian life. It is already to treat this supernaturalism, which is only conventionally allowed, as negligible; to take up an agnostic attitude over against it, which, like all agnostic attitudes, is only an indirect way of denying it. It already betrays a rationalistic conception of the processes of the Christian life as ruling the mind, and thus points to the rationalistic mode of treatment which lies by its side as representing the fundamental point of view of the author.

It is true that, after expressing, at least, a complete “agnosticism” with reference to the working of the Holy Spirit on the human spirit, and asserting the consequent necessity of confining ourselves in expounding them to a mere description of the phenomena themselves, Ritschl is able to write such a sentence as this: “In these statements the Holy Spirit is not denied, but recognized and understood.”¹²⁶ And it is true that after reasserting this “agnostic” attitude in its extremest form, going so far as to declare that “nothing further can be objectively taught” about the justification and regeneration of the individual than that they follow on his acceptance of the gospel as presented to him in the Christian community, he feels justified in striking back waspishly at his critics in the assertion that he too recognizes that there are “mysteries” in the Christian life but that it is his habit when he comes across a mystery to be silent about precisely it.¹²⁷ Such declarations, however, do not point, as Ecke appears to suppose, to a fundamental supernaturalism of conception on Ritschl’s part, which represents the real Ritschl; but have precisely the contrary meaning. Ritschl is able to neglect whatever supernatural elements in the Christian life he may be thought here and there to suggest that he dimly perceives, and to develop the whole story of its rise and progress without their aid. And even when his language, taken literally, may seem most clearly to carry a supernaturalistic meaning, we cannot fail to know that it is not intended to convey it. This is true for example of the instances which have just been adduced. It is certain that when Ritschl speaks of “mysteries in the religious life” he is thinking of nothing supernatural, but only of the wonders of the natural operations of the human spirit. And it is certain that when he speaks of “recognizing and understanding” the Holy Spirit, he is not thinking of any supernatural Being—a Divine Person who acts as a Power on the persons of believers—but only of the “common spirit” of the Christian community, which in the form of a common knowledge affects the activities of the individual. Facts like these throw a lurid light on the survival in Ritschl’s expositions of expressions which might otherwise be thought capable of bearing a supernaturalistic interpretation.

What these expressions indicate is not that Ritschl was of a divided mind, and spoke now in a naturalistic, now in a supernaturalistic, sense without ever being able to find a point of equilibrium. Still less do they mean that, though working out his system on naturalistic postulates, he remained at bottom a supernaturalist, and that his fundamental supernaturalism occasionally forces itself to the surface. What they mean is simply that Ritschl, though working out a purely naturalistic system, worked it out in the face of, and with a view to commending it to, a supernaturalistically minded community. He therefore clothes his naturalistic system with the terms of supernaturalism, or, to be more precise, of conservative evangelicalism. He himself thought of this procedure as a reminting of the old coin; it is not strange that the evangelical public itself looked upon it as rather

¹²⁶ Pp. 22 f.

¹²⁷ P. 607.

counterfeiting it. In point of fact he everywhere employs the old nomenclature of a supernaturalistic theology in order to express—with whatever twisting and straining—his new naturalistic conceptions. The method cannot be said to be a happy one. Henri Schoen, who deals with it gently, points out that Ritschl borrowed, or may have borrowed, it from Hofmann, who, he thinks, in other matters also exerted a certain influence on Ritschl's development. Hofmann, says he,¹²⁸ not only compelled the Bible to teach his theology, "but inaugurated a procedure which became that of the Göttingen theologian. Persuaded that his contemporaries would accept his theory more easily if it was clothed in an orthodox form, he preserved the traditional terms, redemption, expiation, satisfaction, only giving them a new sense. He did not wish, at any price, to cast off 'the uniform of his army,' that is to say, that of the orthodox party. His object, as he liked to repeat, was 'to teach old truths in a new form.' It is possible, with equal right, to reverse the formula, and say that he taught new truths, while employing old expressions. Ritschl expressed indignation at this procedure;¹²⁹ he imitated it more than once." He found, in effect,¹³⁰ "in the writings of Hofmann a valuable lesson in prudence; he could learn from them that, in order to get a truth accepted he must avoid shocking the religious feeling of his contemporaries, and that it is often useful to present new ideas under an old form, that is to say, by preserving the expressions to which pious men are accustomed. The method is dangerous; beyond question, very dangerous: we do not hesitate to repel it when the sense of truth is in danger of being blunted by it..."

It cannot be denied that Ritschl deliberately adopted this method of commending his naturalistic theology to a suspicious public; or that he pressed his employment of it to an incredible extreme. It would no doubt be a mistake, however, to attribute to him a calculated intention to deceive. He obviously took pleasure in his employment of the consecrated forms of speech and no doubt persuaded himself with more or less success that he had a right to them. We have to reckon here with the peculiarities of his personality, with the special type of his piety, with the sources of his theological system.

Johannes Wendland, in an illuminating page or two, makes us aware¹³¹ of the close connection of Ritschl's theological attitude and development with his strong and proud, angular, and self-assertive character. Hating above all things what he regarded as sentimentality and pious "gush," seeing religion rather in "doing" than in "feeling," and priding himself on his "practical" Christianity, he conceived it to be his mission to bring this type of Christianity to its rights as over against the tendency to emotionalism which he marked with disgust in the professionally religious. With this natural temperament, his mind turned with predilection to that ethicizing form of Christian teaching which for more than a century had been regnant in a large section of German thought, and which we know by the general name of Rationalism.¹³² "In point of fact," says Leonhard Stählin

¹²⁸ As cited, p. 133.

¹²⁹ "Justification and Reconciliation," i. p. 546.

¹³⁰ Schoen, as cited, p. 140.

¹³¹ As cited, pp. 7 ff. Much of the contents of these closing paragraphs is drawn from this discussion.

¹³² Cf. the good remarks of Julius Leopold Schultze in the *Neue kirchliche Zeitschrift*, ix. 1898, p. 214.

justly,¹³³ “his system of theology is an attempt to revive in new form the antiquated principles of rationalism, and to establish them on a new basis by means of a theory of cognition suggested by Kant and Lotze, and with the help of elements drawn from Schleiermacher.... It is simply a reconstructed theology of the so-called faith of reason or rational faith (*Vernunftglaube*), and differs from other attempts of the same kind, not so much in substance as in form and method.... Matters are not altered by simply laying stress on the historical revelation through Christ, as long as Christ has no other significance than that of having first realized that which forms the content of natural religion.” It is not, however, in this philosophic-theological inheritance that his theology found its starting point, although he ostentatiously presents his epistemology as its determining factor. Neither does it take its starting-point from his historical or exegetical investigations, although he ostentatiously lays extended historical and exegetical investigations at its base. His philosophical, historical, and exegetical results are all already dominated by his point of view, which has its roots in his religious peculiarity and the ideal of piety which he cherished and sought to illustrate in his person.

This type of piety he endeavored to impress on the Church as the substance of what it is to be a Christian. It was in its interest that he worked out his theology, and it was in its interests that he turned and twisted the teaching of the Scriptures and of the great Reformers alike, in the determination to wrest from their unwilling lips support for it. Nothing could exceed the eclecticism of his procedure, except it be its violence. He takes from Scripture and Reformers alike what suits his purpose, without the least regard to its logical connection, and then fits it without mercy into his scheme. He himself naïvely betrays how he deals with the Reformers, for example, when he drops the remark:¹³⁴ “The reformatory ideas are more concealed than revealed in the theological books of Luther and Melancthon themselves.” Neglecting their real teachings he gathered out from their writings such chance remarks as could be made to fit in with his own view of things, and built up from them a new Reformation doctrine which he presented as the only true one. Thus he gave the world a new Naturalism, decked out in phrases borrowed from the Scriptures and Reformers, but as like their system of thought as black is to white, and called it the true doctrine of the Bible and Reformers. This strange procedure has, under his influence, been systematized and men now tell us gravely that the essence of any movement consists of that in it which we can look upon as lasting truth—which, being interpreted, means that in it which we find conformable to our own predilections.¹³⁵ In Ritschl’s own hands it was rather the result of his overbearing temper, which imposed itself upon the materials of his thought and bent them to his service. So far as this, or something like this, is the true account of the matter, it is not necessary to attribute to him any direct purpose to deceive. The result was the same.

¹³³ As cited, pp. 277, 326.

¹³⁴ “Drei akademische Reden,” 1887, p. 18.

¹³⁵ This is the procedure of W. Herrmann and A. Harnack when dealing with the doctrines of the Reformation. For the general notion see the *Harvard Theological Review*, October 1914, pp. 538 ff.