

II

ALBRECHT RITSCHL AND HIS DOCTRINE OF CHRISTIAN PERFECTION

ARTICLE II

RITSCHL THE PERFECTIONIST¹

IT LIES in the very nature of a naturalistic system that it should lay all its stress on the activities of the Christian life. There is nothing else on which it could lay its stress. What man himself does, the influences by which he is brought to do it, and the issue of his activities—this is the circle of topics in which what, by a strange transmutation of meaning, is still called Theology, moves. Ritschl continues to employ the terms reconciliation, justification, forgiveness, adoption, regeneration, sanctification; but they one and all denote in his hands human, not divine, acts; and his whole discussion is devoted to the elaboration of the influences under which man is brought to the performance of them, their nature, and their effects.

According to Ritschl all the influences under which man is brought to the performance of these acts are gathered up, as in their focus, in the person of Jesus Christ; or rather in the great discovery which Christ made of the real relation in which man stands to God, the effective transmission of which to His followers constituted the one object of His life.² This great discovery is comprehended in the one declaration that God is love and nothing but love, and therefore man has nothing to fear from Him. We do not rest under the Divine condemnation; the Divine wrath does not hang over us; God intends us nothing but good; God will do us nothing but good. This is what Jesus would have us understand and act upon; and this it is by which, if we understand and act upon it, we become Christians with all that that involves. Of course what we are assured of here is that sin has no significance in the sight of God; and what we are exhorted is to treat it as without significance. Bringing us to this attitude to sin and God is the reconciling work of Jesus; our assumption of this attitude is our justification. For when we assume this attitude our distrust of God, the product of our feeling of guilt, passes away; we take our place happily by God's side; and, assured that He means us only good, we make His end

¹ From *The Princeton Theological Review*, xviii. 1920, pp. 44–102. cf. Benjamin B. Warfield, *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield: Perfectionism, Part One*, vol. 7, 53–113. <http://faithsaves.net>.

² P. 386: “Beyond doubt Jesus experienced and declared to His disciples a religious relation to God not before known, and purposed to bring His disciples into the same religious world-view and self-estimate, and under this condition into the universal task of the Kingdom of God which He knew to be set for His disciples as for Himself.”

our end and work with Him for its attainment.

We are obviously entangled here in a perfect network of illusions.

There is no such thing as sin. What we call sin is merely ignorance. Our feeling of guilt is therefore an illusion.³ It is really not a sense of ill-desert for sins committed so much as a mere anticipation of the displeasure of God. We are not oppressed by the consciousness that we have done wrong; we are depressed by anxiety lest we shall receive harm. It is less regret than fear which gives it its form. This fear, however, is wholly misplaced. God feels no displeasure towards us and has no intention whatever of punishing our sin. He never has had. He experiences no movement of indignation against us; His whole emotional reaction towards us is love. Our sense of forgiveness is therefore also an illusion. There is nothing to forgive; and God has never been ill-disposed toward us. "If there is no truth in the consciousness of sin, as guilt causing alienation from God," writes Pfleiderer in an illuminating page,⁴ "neither can there be any truth in the consciousness of the annulment of guilt and alienation from God or in the forgiveness of sins. A guilt which does not exist except in man's illusory notion cannot be forgiven; a relation which has never really been interrupted cannot be restored, cannot be reconciled. The conclusion necessarily follows from the estimate of sin as an ignorance which is not deserving of wrath and does not interrupt our relation to God, that the consciousness of reconciliation or of a change from an interrupted to a peaceable relation is an illusion. There cannot occur here a change in the actual relation between man and God; the change lies only in man's conception of his relation to God so far as he is relieved from his former illusionary notion of this relation or is enlightened as to the absolute erroneousness of his sense of guilt and fear of the angry God."

In a word, Ritschl's whole doctrine of sin, guilt, forgiveness, reconciliation moves, not in the realm of realities, but in that of the subjective consciousness. Man feels himself under the Divine condemnation. He is wrong. All he needs is to be assured that he is wrong, and all is well. That is in effect Ritschl's doctrine of justification. Continuing his searching criticism Pfleiderer points out⁵ that Ritschl can assign no ground for justification and that the reason is that nothing has really happened in justification. "There is no such essential difference for God between sinners and righteous that the one stands in an entirely different relation to Him from the other." "In point of fact," says he, "the key to Ritschl's doctrine of justification lies here: there is no need for a ground for the justification of the sinner simply because the sinner has never been the object of God's disfavor, but his sin has been esteemed by God only as the stage of his ignorance. Justification is therefore really nothing but the historical notification, brought about by Jesus, that God is only love and as such is not angry with sinners, and that they may therefore lay aside their fear and distrust of Him. It is no doubt assumed along with this, that those who, as members of the communion of Christ, hear this proclamation and profit by it, will be led by it to adopt the end of God in His Kingdom. How, however, if

³ To be perfectly accurate we should note here that Ritschl is willing to allow that sin may become witting—in the case of the finally reprobate. As Pfleiderer ("Die Ritschl'sche Theologie," p. 69) puts it: "All sin, with the exception of the always only problematical definitive hardening, is in God's judgment only ignorance."

⁴ As cited, pp. 69, 70.

⁵ As cited, p. 75.

this assumption be too optimistic? How if it should rather be found that the proclamation of the God whose forgiveness of sins is not accorded on distinct conditions, but whom rather sin does not in the least offend, is understood and utilized by the mass of the members of the community as meaning that they need not make too much of their sin and can exercise their freedom over the world in joyous mastery of the world and enjoyment of the world, undeterred by old-fashioned scruples of conscience? Of course the Ritschlian theologians have no such meaning and purpose. But the danger of a practical consequence of this sort lies so uncommonly close in this theology that it certainly needs to be earnestly considered.”

There can be no sort of question that Ritschl makes the sense which the sinner has of resting under the displeasure of God, the sense which the believer has of having been forgiven by God, illusions. “All reflections about God’s wrath and pity, His long-suffering and patience, His severity and mercy,” he says,⁶ “are based on the religious adjustment of our individual situation with God in the form of time.” A. E. Garvie⁷ rightly expounds this to mean, that “subjective changes in our own spiritual state, which is conditioned by the lapse of time, are explained by us as due to objective changes in God’s relation to us, although God is not Himself subject to the condition of time.” But this is not all that it means. Ritschl is really employing the idea of the eternity of God to ground the denial of the presence in Him of any such emotion as wrath or any such quality as vindicatory justice, it being a maxim with him that wrath and love cannot co-exist in the same mind. However indispensable the judgments which he enumerates “may be in the context of our religious experiences,” therefore, he immediately adds, “they are out of all relation to the theological determination of the whole under the viewpoint of eternity.... Under the theological point of view, therefore, the wrath of God and His curse on sinners yet to be reconciled, finds no validity.” God’s actual attitude to us is, and therefore His eternal attitude has always been, just that of pure love. He feels no anger towards us, and has never felt any, and it is absurd therefore to speak of reconciling Him to us, and even more absurd to speak of reconciling His love and anger in Himself. It is true that under his own sense of guilt a sinner may imagine that God is angry with him, and, under this obsession, may even look upon the evils which befall him in the course of his life, as so many punitive inflictions. But all this is illusion. “Here,” says Garvie rightly,⁸ “we are concerned with a subjective representation, not an objective reality.” There being no such thing as “the wrath of God revealed from heaven against every doer of iniquity,” it is our sense of guilt only, not the fact of the case, which leads us to interpret the evils of life as punitive. Paul is wrong when he connects death, for example, with sin.⁹ The only evil which is a real consequence of sin, is that estrangement from God which results from our sense of guilt. This experience of estrangement from God—the result of our sense of guilt—is therefore in a true sense the only “punishment” of sin.¹⁰

⁶ P. 322.

⁷ *Op. cit.*, p. 307.

⁸ As cited, p. 310.

⁹ Pp. 358 f.

¹⁰ Cf. Orr, “The Ritschlian Theology,” p. 147: “It is this experience of separation from God which, on Ritschl’s showing, is the real core or essence of the punishment of sin, so far as, *ex concessis*, the punitive idea (which rests on the rejected theory of ‘rights’) is to

“The unremoved sense of guilt is not a penal state along with others, but this is the thing itself to which all external penal evils are related only as accompanying circumstances.”¹¹ Thus the whole of the evil of sin is swallowed up into the sense of guilt, which itself is—not the subjective reflection of an objective separation from God wrought by sin itself—but a subjective illusion as to the attitude of God towards sin, creating the feeling of a separation from God which has no existence except in our own imagination.

This being true, reconciliation naturally is to Ritschl, as Friedrich Nippold phrases it,¹² “at bottom, nothing but a change of mind, though no doubt this change of mind is made possible only by the knowledge and appreciation of the divine will of love declared by Christ.” And all that happens in justification—which is only a synonym of reconciliation—is, as Garvie points out,¹³ “the restoration of the sinner to communion with God,” or, otherwise expressed, “the removal of the separation of the sinner from God,” though to be perfectly accurate we must take the nouns “restoration,” “removal,” not actively, but passively. The separation here spoken of is expressed, or we would better say, consists, in a “sense of guilt”; it is therefore, this “sense of guilt” which is removed. “This, however,” remarks Garvie now, “would be no benefit, but an injury, unless with the sense of guilt there is also taken away the guilt, which is a real contradiction by man of God, and of his own moral destiny. As this contradiction is real, else man’s sense of guilt were an illusion, so the removal is real, else man’s feeling of forgiveness were a deception.” This reasoning is formally sound; but as the results it ostensibly reaches are the precise contradictions of Ritschl’s actual teachings, it serves only to show how completely the conceptions of sin and its removal drop out of Ritschl’s teaching. Man’s sense of guilt does appear in Ritschl’s system as an illusion and his feeling of forgiveness does appear in it as deceptive. The guilt and forgiveness which these illusory feelings fallaciously presuppose share, of course, in their illusoriness. Ritschl knows nothing of either guilt or its removal, in the proper sense of the word guilt, in which it includes along with subjective ill-desert, also obnoxiousness to punishment.¹⁴ The “sense of guilt” is represented by Ritschl as really just distrust of God, and there is no ground for distrusting God. God does not really forgive our sins; He merely takes no account of them—His whole reaction towards us being love. He loves us continuously, with a love unconditioned by the intrusion of wrath. He experiences no change of attitude toward us, or of action toward us. We simply come to know that this is His attitude

be admitted into Christianity at all.” In Ritschl’s system there is no place for real punishment of sin. “If there is no wrath of God against sin,” expounds Garvie (as cited, p. 310), “there can be no punishment by God of sin. This conclusion Ritschl expressly draws.”

¹¹ P. 365.

¹² As cited, p. 265.

¹³ As cited, pp. 325 f.

¹⁴ Orr has made the matter perfectly plain, “The Christian View of God and the World,” 1893, p. 199; “The Ritschlian Theology,” pp. 146 ff., 267 f.; and especially “Ritschlianism,” pp. 99 ff. The strictures on Orr’s representations made by A. T. Swing, “The Theology of Albrecht Ritschl,” 1901, pp. 125 ff., Orr has himself dealt with adequately. Those by J. K. Mozley, “Ritschlianism,” 1909, pp. 218 ff., are no more successful.

toward us; and our distrust of Him, the product of our unjustified sense of guilt, passes away. It passes away precisely because it has no ground in reality. We feel forgiven but we are not forgiven; we have merely learned that God is not “separated” from us—we have only been “separated” from Him.

What we receive through Christ according to Ritschl would be somewhat more accurately expressed therefore if we spoke of it as not forgiveness but the assurance of forgiveness.¹⁵ Our sins are already forgiven, that is to say, overlooked: what we obtain through Christ is only knowledge of this fact.¹⁶ We remain guilty of these sins, of course, in the sense in which Ritschl speaks of “moral guiltiness”—that is to say, we remain subjectively ill-deserving,—and we do not lose consciousness of this guilt. It would be contrary to God’s truth to pronounce us no longer guilty, and our own conscience witnesses to us that we are guilty.¹⁷ Our sense of guilt may even be intensified.¹⁸ Only we are made to feel that all this makes no difference in God’s treatment of us, and so we are encouraged no longer to hold aloof from God in distrust of His purpose towards us. What “forgiveness removes is not the sense of guilt for past sins, but only its effect in separating from God, or the distrust of God which attaches to it.”¹⁹ It “merely makes inoperative that effect of guilt and the consciousness of guilt, which would appear in the

¹⁵ On the technical subject of “assurance” Ritschl speaks at large on p. 652. He who manifests the characteristic features of the believer—faith in God’s providence, humility, patience, prayer, “combined as they are in normal fashion with the disposition to obey the moral law and with good action in one’s calling”—has sufficient evidence that he is in a state of salvation. This admits of no other meaning than that our assurance of reconciliation is an inference from the observed fruits of reconciliation—including our moral state. Accordingly Ritschl tells us in the summary statement (p. 670) that “the believer experiences his personal assurance of reconciliation” in the exercise of the Christian virtues. This is a position, however, which he does not seem always to preserve.

¹⁶ There is a certain analogy between Ritschl’s representation that men are not under the wrath of God, but need only to lay aside their distrust of God and realize that they have nothing to fear from Him to be “saved,” and a wide-spread type of preaching which declares all men by nature “sons of God,” and “salvation” to consist in coming to understand and live according to this high character. “It is the true philosophy of history,” says Phillips Brooks, “that man is the child of God, forever drawn to his Father, beaten back by base waves of passion, sure to come to Him in the end.” The analogy is not completely destroyed when a universal redemption is thought of as the ground of man’s favorable condition as already forgiven and requiring only subjectively to realize this forgiveness—which constitutes his salvation. It is unnecessary to point out how wide-spread this notion is: it is intrinsic in all doctrines of a “universal atonement” where the atoning fact is found in the work of Christ and not in an act of man’s. A curious example of it is mentioned by L. Ihmels, “Die tägliche Vergebung der Sünden,” 1901, pp. 39 f. in “the Bornholm movement,” for which see also Herzog-Hauck, “Realencyklopädie,” *sub nom.*

¹⁷ P. 60. “The removal of guilt and the consciousness of guilt would be in contradiction to the validity of the law of truth for God, as also for the conscience of the sinner.”

¹⁸ P. 544.

¹⁹ P. 545.

abolition of the moral communion between God and man, in their separation or mutual alienation.”²⁰ “When God forgives or pardons sins,” Ritschl now immediately continues, “He brings His will into operation in the direction of not permitting the contradiction—expressed in guilt—in which sinners stand to Him, to hinder that fellowship of men with Him which He intends on higher grounds.” Forgiveness of sins thus means for Ritschl that, on God’s part, God, having ends of His own to serve, will not permit man’s sin to stand in the way of fellowship with Him; and on man’s part, man, being assured of this, lays aside his distrust of God, the natural result of his sense of guilt (“that mistrust which as an affection of the consciousness of guilt naturally separates the offender from the offended one,”) and commits himself in full trust to God’s providential care. To put the matter bluntly, God proposes on His part to take man just as He finds him; and man agrees on his part, that being done, no longer to distrust and hold aloof from God, but to trust himself to His keeping. Having no longer to look for evil from God, according to his desert, he will accept the good, which, despite his unworthiness of it, God (for ends of His own) is willing to give him. This is really Ritschl’s doctrine of justification; and obviously, it is a profoundly immoral doctrine. It amounts at bottom simply to an understanding between man and God that by-gones shall be by-gones, and no questions will be asked.

Even C. von Kügelgen²¹ allows that Ritschl deals too lightly with the forgiveness of sins. “That, not indeed the idea of sin, but the idea of the forgiveness of sin, is (of course unintentionally) attenuated by Ritschl on teleological grounds, seem to us easily shown. Frank says,²² accordingly with justice, that according to Ritschl God forgives sin ‘on higher grounds,’ because the establishment of the Kingdom of God is His self-end, and forgiveness of sins is needed for that. Thus forgiveness of sins becomes for Ritschl at bottom a means to an end . . .” These remarks do not, however, go to the root of the matter. What is difficult to credit is not that God has a high end in view in forgiving sins and that it is this high end which determines His action—any doctrine of forgiveness must come

²⁰ Pp. 63, 64.

²¹ As cited, p. 44.

²² The reference is to Fr. H. R. Frank, “Ueber die kirchliche Bedeutung der Theologie A. Ritschl’s,” ed. 2, 1888, p. 14: “It corresponds with Ritschl’s conception of sin, that in order to the reconciliation of man with God there is no need of an atonement by propitiation. ‘When God forgives or pardons sin, He exerts His will in the direction that the contradiction, expressed in guilt, in which sinners stand to Him, shall not prevent that communion of man with Him which He purposes on higher grounds’ (p. 64). ‘On higher grounds’—because the establishment of the Kingdom of God is His self-end and forgiveness of sins is needed for it.” Pursuing his theme Frank points out that in Ritschl’s conception of God, no less than of sin, nothing else than this could be expected of him. “Now then,” asks Frank a few pages later (p. 18), “how are we to comfort a soul that has fallen into sin and is burdened in his conscience in the presence of God? We must say to him: Dear friend, you have a wrong idea of God. God has no need of punishment and atonement. On higher grounds, namely, that He may realize the purpose of the world, which is at the same time His own purpose, He pardons sin. Be at peace, dear soul, and do not disturb yourself with such mediaeval (cf. Ritschl, *Drei akademische Reden*, p. 28) notions.”

in the end to that; but that this forgiveness is grounded solely in this high end. Not only is God's ultimate motive in forgiving sin made to be His desire to establish a Kingdom of God; but His sole proximate justification in forgiving sins is supplied by this one motive. His forgiveness of sins is made thus a purely arbitrary act, performed for no other reason and with no other justification, than that He needs forgiven sinners for ends of His own. This, we say, is a profoundly immoral doctrine; it represents God as treating sin as no sin, which is as much as to say, failing to react to moral evil, perceived as such, as every moral being, by virtue of his very nature as a moral being, must react to it—with abhorrence and indignation. Nevertheless, as we have already seen, this representation falls in with Ritschl's actual teaching with respect to God, to whom he denies any other attribute than love and from whom he withholds specifically the attribute of vindicatory justice. It is also alone consonant with his teaching with regard to the work of Christ, to which he will not permit to be ascribed any expiatory or sin-bearing character. If he was to teach any forgiveness of sins at all, Ritschl was shut up to representing it as done by God in that purely arbitrary way in which alone, he tells us, it would be becoming for God's will to act.

An attempt is made to mitigate the immorality of the transaction, as it concerns man, by representing it as the reception by man of "eternal life" or "blessedness," and the source of great encouragement to him to undertake good works. Assured of acceptance with God, despite his sins, he, in trust in God's providence, rises, as a spiritual being, above the world, makes God's self-end his end, and, as a fellow-worker with God, labors for the building up of the Kingdom of God in the world. Having been given a new chance, he takes it. We have already seen Pfleiderer, with justified cynicism, questioning whether the proclamation of totally ungrounded forgiveness, open unconditionally to all, would naturally have this happy effect. With a similar implication Frank reminds us in this connection of Claus Harms's comment that in the sixteenth century the forgiveness of sins cost at least money; now, it seems, we are to have it for nothing at all—we are just to take it for ourselves.²³ Certainly to represent forgiveness of sins as costing absolutely nothing—either to God or to us—will scarcely gird our loins to avoid at all costs such negligible foibles. In any event, however, we are given here but a poor substitute for the Holy Spirit, making His people holy by His creative action on and in them. Yet this is what Ritschl offers us instead of that. Readers of Ritschl are struck by nothing more strongly than by his embarrassment in dealing with the topic of sanctification. With his passionate repulsion of all "mysticism"—that is, of all immediate working of God upon man—he has no instrument of sanctification but the human will, acting "freely" under the inducement of motives.²⁴ Man must sanctify himself. With his equally determined representation of justification as purely a change of relation—it would be better said, of attitude—to God, he repels all implication of sanctification in justification, however that implication may be conceived. Sanctification is an independent work of man, taking place in a different sphere of operation. The most that he can allow when swayed by this

²³ Fr. H. R. Frank, "Ueber die kirchliche Bedeutung der Theologie A. Ritschl's," ed. 2, 1888, p. 31.

²⁴ Hence Fr. Luther (*Neue kirchliche Zeitschrift*, ii. 1891, p. 479) very properly says that "according to Ritschl it is nature and not grace which is the source of the moral activities of life."

point of view, is that it is so far furthered by justification that the new attitude to God assumed in justification predisposes man to make God's self-end his own end, and enheartens him in its prosecution. Justification may be thus, he says, the fundamental condition of the Christian life,²⁵ apart from which the new life would not be undertaken or vigorously prosecuted.²⁶ But it is not the direct means of sanctification nor is sanctification its direct end. Such a representation would be to institute a "wholly apocryphal" connection between the two.²⁷

The dualism between the religious and the ethical aspects of the Christian life thus brought to expression, runs through the whole of Ritschl's exposition of the Christian life and is never quite resolved. It is embodied in the famous comparison in which he pictures Christianity, not as "a circle described from a single center, but an ellipse which is determined by two *foci*";²⁸ and it determines the form of his definition of Christianity, which is modified from Schleiermacher's precisely in its interests. "Christianity," says he,²⁹ "is the monotheistic, completely spiritual *and* ethical religion which, on the ground of the redeeming *and* Kingdom-founding life of its Originator, consists in the freedom of childship to God, includes in itself the motive to conduct out of love, aims at the moral organization of humanity, and grounds blessedness in childship to God *as well as* in the Kingdom of God." He is thinking here obviously in terms of religion and ethics set in a parallel relation to one another, with no vivid sense, at least, of their integration into a single notion. He is determined that Christianity shall not be to him "either merely a doctrine of redemption, or merely a system of morality." He insists that it is both; and in order that it may be both he continually emphasizes the two as two. He says,³⁰ it is true, that "dogmatics must be worked out, not purely from the idea of redemption; nor ethics purely from the idea of the Kingdom of God... Each must be kept under the constitutive influence of both ideas." "Effectuation by God" supplies the form of the one; "personal self-activity" of the other. Neither can do without the other; they interact on each other. But their unity continually escapes his grasp. In the end, no doubt, the two are integrated under the scheme of means and end. Redemption is in order to the Kingdom of God; the ethical activities of the Kingdom of God manifest childship to God. But this mode of representation is reached with difficulty and is not consistently maintained.

Means are of course always subordinate to their end. As redemption through Jesus has the Kingdom of God for its end, that means accordingly that religion is in order to morality, or, to use a parallel mode of expression employed by Ritschl, "religious dependence" is in order to "moral freedom." And that means in turn that Ritschl's system (conceiving of religion and ethics as it actually does) is at bottom less a system of theology than a system of ethics; and it is the idea of "moral freedom," which gives its

²⁵ P. 535, paragraph 2.

²⁶ P. 546. When von K ugelgen, as cited, pp. 94 f., declares that the reproach that with Ritschl "justification has no telic relation (*Abzweckung*) to the production of morally good conduct or of works"—as Lipsius represents—is unjust, he can be justified only so far as this.

²⁷ Pp. 495 ff.

²⁸ P. 11.

²⁹ P. 13.

³⁰ P. 14.

form to ethics, that dominates his thought. He does indeed remind us³¹ that Christianity is in the first instance a religion, and only in its specific character among religions, the ethical religion by way of eminence. Therefore, he argues, “the religious functions—trust in God, humility, patience, thanksgiving and prayer to God—in which according to Luther’s teaching, the believer takes his position against the world—have precedence of the series of moral functions in which we devote ourselves directly to man.” But this avails nothing; for in Ritschl’s view, these “religious” functions are at most only a parallel product of man’s free action, in the religious sphere, to his independent morality; and in reality only a means of his moral activity, supplying the “mood” in which alone it can be, or can be successfully, prosecuted. It is his naturalism which is determining his conceptions here. He is not talking of what God works in man in and through justification; but of how the new attitude which man assumes in what he calls justification affects him in his relations God-ward and man-ward. What he presents as the religious results arising out of justification are therefore merely the motives to moral action which spring from his change of attitude. The vacillation, in which Ritschl now presents the religious aspects of the Christian life as merely the means to the moral, and now keeps the two apart as independent parallel phenomena of it,³² may possibly be, Henri Schoen suspects,³³ if not exactly due to, yet facilitated by, a double inheritance. There is Schleiermacher, after whom it was difficult to present a purely ethical theory of redemption. But there is also Kant. And if, in spite of Schleiermacher, the ethical element dominates in Ritschl’s doctrine, “that is because, consciously or unconsciously, he remains more under the influence of Kant than of Schleiermacher. It is because he feared above everything to see the mystical element predominate over the will to do good, which appeared to him to be the essential factor of all religion.”

We perceive that Ritschl’s conception of the Christian life amounts briefly to just this: free ethical life inspired by a sense of well-pleasingness to God. Justification is viewed as the assumption of a new attitude of trust towards God and entrance, in this trust, into participation in God’s aim to found an ethical Kingdom; and this Kingdom of God is viewed as the society of those animated by this motive and sharing in this endeavor. Justification thus prepares for the ethical effort; the Kingdom of God is its sphere. This free ethical life under this inspiration constitutes now Christian perfection, in Ritschl’s nomenclature; that is to say, it is all that it is necessary to have in order to be a Christian—it makes us perfectly Christian though it may not make us perfect Christians.³⁴ Ritschl, however, is not content to leave his conception of the essence of

³¹ P. 527.

³² P. 521. “What we gain ... is not a simple subsumption of the ethical under the religious aspect of Christianity.”

³³ As cited, p. 138; cf. p. 136.

³⁴ William Adams Brown is quite right therefore when he tells us (“Christian Theology in Outline,” 1906, p. 413) that “perfection” “as understood by Ritschl ... is a name which describes the qualities which enter into the Christian ideal, however incomplete may be their quantitative realization in the individual.” “Thus,” Brown illustrates, “a man whose life is characterized by the qualities of faith, humility, patience and fidelity to his calling is perfect in Ritschl’s sense of the term; since he is living in the right relation to God, however conscious he may be of occasional lapses from his own standard.” And then he

Christianity, or Christian perfection, in this simple brevity of statement. He analyzes it, and he elaborates it. He divides, first of all, between those elements of it which are, in his view, the direct and immediate effects of justification, and those elements of it which proceed from justification only indirectly and mediately, namely, through the mediation of the former. The former are, as we have seen, the religious, the latter the ethical elements; and we note here again that the Christian life is conceived as essentially conduct to which its religious aspect serves as means. The religious elements—Ritschl calls them religious functions—are enumerated as we have seen, as faith in the divine providence, humility, patience, prayer. They form, in their necessary unity,³⁵ the temper of mind or mood of the Christian, the temper of mind or mood by virtue of which he is a Christian, and because of which he becomes a worker along with God in the moralization of the world, through love.

There is nothing arbitrary in this construction. It is merely the expression in terms of the Christian life of the fundamental contents of Ritschl's doctrine of justification. He identifies justification with the forgiveness of sins, which is, positively expressed, entrance into fellowship with God. This entrance into fellowship with God involves, however, deliverance from the sense of guilt so far as the sense of guilt produces mistrust of God and separation from Him. It is necessarily accompanied therefore with peace of heart and joy. Ritschl calls this experience indifferently "blessedness" and "eternal life." And this naturally carries with it on the positive side a trust in God, which takes the place of the mistrust from which deliverance has been had. In this trust we not only accept God's providence as well for us and for the world, but are impelled to adopt God's end as our end, and to work along with Him to its accomplishment. This is all of the very essence of the experience of justification as a fact. And it is not a very complicated conception, but on the contrary, at once very simple and quite unitary. It would not be doing serious injustice to it if we said brusquely that it is comprehended in the idea of putting ourselves by the side of God and accepting His end as our end. We put ourselves by the side of God when we not only acquiesce in the course of things which He has in His providence established for His world, but recognize it as the best course of things and best for us. This carries with it what Ritschl calls "dominion over the world," that is, superiority to its changes and chances and the subordination of it to our spiritual life. It carries with it also humility and patience and thanksgiving to God: these are the tones of mind which acquiescence in, acceptance of, and rejoicing in God's providence bring with them. Putting ourselves by the side of God in this attitude of mind, we naturally make His

adds: "So defined, Christian perfection is only a name for that assurance which should characterize all true Christian living, and which is possible in every walk of life. It is the rejection of the Catholic doctrine of a double standard by which the possibility of perfection is confined to those who give themselves to the monastic life." We shall see subsequently that there is more to be said: Ritschl was not satisfied with a perfection of relation or a *perfectio partium*.

³⁵ The religious elements of Christian perfection all go together and *cannot* exist except in their combination. Ritschl says ("Die christliche Vollkommenheit," Rae's translation, pp. 148 f.) that "they are so constituted, that none of them can come up without the other; they are the various reflections shed by the religious certainty of reconciliation with God through Christ."

end our own and live for the purposes for which He has created and is now governing the world. This double attitude of believers, religious and ethical, constitutes their specific quality as believers: this is what Christianity is. In other words, this double attitude constitutes the perfection of Christians, which accordingly Ritschl defines in one of his briefer statements as consisting in “humility, faith in, and submission to God’s Providence, appeal and thanksgiving to God in prayer, and fidelity in the moral vocation which is useful to the community.”³⁶ Or again:³⁷ “Faith in the Fatherly providence of God, which maintains a right feeling with God through humility, and with the world through patience, and which expresses and confirms itself through prayer”—to which is to be added, on the ethical side, the faithful pursuit of our vocation.

Bearing such a relation to his doctrine of justification, Ritschl’s doctrine of Christian perfection obviously embodies the essence of his religious teaching, in which his whole system culminates and into which it flows out as its issue. He himself so regarded it. He speaks of it³⁸ as “the practically religious proceeds (*Ertrag*) of his theology, as also the result (*Ergebnis*) of the doctrine of reconciliation.” In it is depicted what in his view Christianity actually is, the tangible, palpable, concrete Christianity of reality. Whatever else may be theory, this is the fact, the whole fact, of Christianity. He did not easily win to its full apprehension. We are given to understand that it was only at the end of his long toil in the composition of his chief treatise, that he reached perfect clearness in his understanding and statement of at least the details. In January, 1874, while the great book was in process of going through the press, he was called upon to deliver a lecture for the benefit of the Göttingen Woman’s Club.³⁹ He chose the subject of Christian Perfection and, drawing out of the fulness of his thought what was the result of long years of labor, he found that “certain ideas which form the web of the great book, became to ... [him] for the first time, completely clear.”⁴⁰ He at once set himself to adjusting the text of his book to his new lucidity of insight, so that in it as well as in the lecture of 1874 we have his complete thought on the subject. Ritschl does not mean, of course, to say that the general conception which only thus late reached its final form was new to him. He tells us on the contrary that its fundamental elements had been for years in his mind.⁴¹ For long, however, he had employed them only in his Theological Ethics and it was apparently not until 1873 that he discovered that they had as important a place in Dogmatics as in Ethics.⁴² Perhaps it may be not without its significance that the special element of his doctrine which he himself looked upon as embodying its real significance was thus carried over from his ethical to his dogmatic system. Once carried over into the dogmatic system, it was made the most of. It is not merely the issue of the system; it pervades it. We do not have to wait to see it expounded, in its substance at least, until we read the end of the dogmatic volume, where the Christian life comes up for formal treatment. Its fundamental elements are already—as is natural since they are merely the

³⁶ Quoted by Garvie, as cited, p. 356.

³⁷ P. 652.

³⁸ Letter to Marcus, January 16, 1874, “Leben,” ii. p. 156.

³⁹ This lecture was of course, “Die christliche Vollkommenheit: ein Vortrag,” 1875.

⁴⁰ “Leben,” ii. p. 156.

⁴¹ “Leben,” ii. pp. 152–155.

⁴² “Leben,” ii. p. 148.

effects of justification—presented in the discussion of the subjective side of justification.⁴³ They are even more fully presented—as again is natural—as the opposite over against which the conception of sin is adjusted.⁴⁴ They are suggested again—as again is natural, since He is the pattern of His people—when the character of Christ comes up for discussion.⁴⁵ Ritschl did not make little of his doctrine of Christian perfection, or thrust it into a corner.

Ritschl is very eager, as elsewhere, so especially here, to attach to himself the teaching of the Reformers. Nowhere else does he do so with less right. He adduces especially a passage from the Augsburg Confession, which, he intimates, can with a little interchange of what he represents as equivalent statements, be made to teach about Christian perfection precisely what he teaches.⁴⁶ The Confession is very much concerned to repel the elevation of the monastic life in contrast with that of ordinary citizens into a “state of perfection.” No, it says, “the good and perfect kind of life is the kind of life which has the mandate of God,” not that which has been invented by man without any commandment from God. The perfection which the Gospel teaches does not consist in a pretence of poverty and humility and celibacy, but in the fear of God and faith. It is—and this is the passage adduced by Ritschl—⁴⁷ “to fear God sincerely and again to conceive great faith, and to be assured for Christ’s sake that we have a placated God; to ask from God, and confidently to expect, help in all our undertakings, according to our calling; meanwhile diligently to do good works outwardly and to attend to our calling.” “In these things,” it is added with emphasis, “there is true perfection and the true worship of God; it is not in celibacy, or mendicancy, or dirty clothing.” Here, says Ritschl,⁴⁸ there is asserted just what he teaches—“not merely ... that faith in God’s fatherly providence and prayer are the expression of our consciousness of reconciliation, but also that these functions, together with humility and the moral activity proper to one’s vocation, are the expressions of *Christian perfection*.” It may repay us to observe just how far this amazing assertion is justified, and precisely where the two statements part company.

This at least the Confessional statement obviously has in common with Ritschl’s—it is speaking, as he ostensibly is, merely of the *perfectio partium*; of what is necessary to be a true Christian; of what enters into the idea of Christianity as essential constituent

⁴³ Pp. 168 ff. (177).

⁴⁴ P. 335.

⁴⁵ Pp. 389, 463, 551, 574; and see especially the letter to Diestel of May 24, 1873, printed in the “Leben” (ii. pp. 149 f.).

⁴⁶ We have only, he says, (Lecture on “Christian Perfection,” E. T. *Bibliotheca Sacra*, October, 1878, p. 665) to “group these thoughts a little more systematically ... and to combine ‘reverence for God’ and ‘trust in him’ into the one idea of ‘humility’”; to “substitute also ‘faith in God and submission to his providence’ for ‘the expectation of God’s help and the contempt of death and the world’”; and “add to these supplication and thanks to God in prayer; and lastly, faithfulness to the public demands of morality.” That is to say, we have only to rewrite the statement from a fundamentally different point of view and to make it witness to a completely different conception.

⁴⁷ “Confessio Augustana,” xxvii. 49, 50 (Schaff’s “Creeds of Christendom,” iii. 1878, p. 57).

⁴⁸ P. 647.

elements; of *Christianismus totus* as it itself expresses it: not of the perfect embodiment of this perfect and entire Christianity in the individual. It is in these things alone, it says, that the perfection of Christianity is to be found; we are not to seek it elsewhere. But it is not said that these things are embodied in any given life in their perfect manifestation (the *perfectio graduum*). On the contrary the Reformers very explicitly assert that they are not.⁴⁹ Another thing in which the Confessional statement resembles Ritschl's is that in enumerating the characteristics of true Christianity it includes both religious and ethical elements and places them merely side by side. Christianity embraces, it says, both a religious attitude and ethical activities—and it adds nothing as to the relation of the two to each other. For all that is said here, that relation might be one of mere adjacency. This, Ritschl would have us believe, is the characteristic attitude of the Reformers.⁵⁰ In this, however, he is wrong and he has himself incidentally adduced some of the evidence that he is wrong.⁵¹ The whole nature of the relation of religion to morality in the Christian system—or to speak more narrowly of the relation of justification to sanctification—may have required some time to be brought out into clear light, and may even yet in wide circles be imperfectly apprehended. But the necessary connection of the two has never been doubted in evangelical circles, and Ritschl's tendency to conceive of them in separation is only one of the results of his lapse from the evangelical position. The simple collocation of the two in the passage adduced from the Augsburg Confession means nothing more than that Melanchthon at the moment was not concerned with a closer definition of their relation. In a third matter the similarity of the passage adduced from the Augsburg Confession and Ritschl's doctrine of Christian perfection is more striking and more significant. This lies in the prominence given in the definition of Christianity on the ethical side to the great Protestant conception of vocation.⁵² It is the most satisfying and the most fruitful element in Ritschl's treatment of the Christian life that he

⁴⁹ It is a characteristic phrase of Luther's: "Christianus non est in facto sed in fieri." Similarly Calvin (on Eph. 1:16 f., 1548), "The knowledge of the faithful is never so clear that their eyes are without blurring and free from all obscurity." Our warfare, says Calvin ("Institutes," I. xiv. 13) "is terminated only by death"; then only (§ 18) is our victory perfected, "our flesh having been put off, according to which we are yet subject to infirmity." So Luther ("Lectures on Romans" of 1515) declares of the truly righteous that "they sigh, until they are completely cured of concupiscence, a release which takes place at death."

⁵⁰ Cf. the discussion, pp. 487 ff. He discusses Luther's and Melanchthon's views in pp. 167 ff., and Calvin's, pp. 184 ff. They all, he says, were clear that both justification and sanctification follow on saving faith, but not clear as to the exact relation in which they stand to one another.

⁵¹ Cf. p. 147 where he recognizes that both Melanchthon and Calvin teach that the believer "sees in his ability to perform good works an evidence of God's special pardon"—which certainly connects sanctification with justification.

⁵² This is the way Doumergue speaks of it ("La Réformation et la Révolution," 1919, p. 35): "Then Luther, and with more logic still, Calvin, proclaimed the great idea of 'vocation'—an idea and a word which are found in all the languages of the Protestant peoples ... and which are lacking in the languages of the peoples of antiquity and in the culture of the middle ages."

organizes its ethical side around the idea of vocation, although, of course, the conception itself cannot, in the presence of his antisupernaturalistic point of view, come fully to its rights.⁵³ It is a matter of course that the idea appears even in the brief allusion to the moral life of Christians in the Confession. It was a living influence in all the thought of the Reformers regarding conduct.

So soon however as we rise from the ethical to the religious aspect of the Christian life all similarity of the description of it given in the Augsburg Confession to Ritschl's conception of it completely vanishes. According to the Confession the Christian life receives its form from three fundamental reactions. These are sincere fear of God, assurance of His reconciliation through Christ, and confidence that He will answer the prayers of His people. Ritschl allows no place in the Christian life for any one of the three, and thus sets himself in diametrical opposition to the Confession's conception of the substance of Christianity. As in his system God is love and nothing but love, there is no propriety in speaking in it of a "fear," of a "serious fear," of God; phraseology which conveys, no doubt, particularly the ideas of awe, reverence, veneration, but from which the sentiment of dread—we still speak of God as a "Dread Being"—cannot be eliminated.⁵⁴ It is precisely every idea which can be expressed by "dread" that Ritschl discards from his conception of God. Consequently in adjusting the Confessional statement to his own view, Ritschl passes lightly over the phrase "serious fear of God," rendering it—not of course in essence wrongly—"reverence (*Ehrfurcht*) for God," and combining it—quite unwarrantably—with part of the next clause—"trust in God"—"into," he says,⁵⁵ "humility." A "placated God" (*Deus placatus*) is of course equally abhorrent to him as a "dread God," and for the same reason. A God who is all love needs no placating: He has no wrath toward sinners; and the whole of "salvation" consists in the discovery of this fact by the sinner. Christ has not appeased God, and the essence of His work consists, indeed, in persuading men that God needs no appeasing. Ritschl therefore simply sums up the entire declaration, the key declaration in the Confession, in the idea of "trust," and considers it, in combination with the "fear of God," as we have already noted, to be absorbed in the one notion of "humility." As little as a "placated God" does Ritschl believe in a prayer-answering God. In his watchful zeal against all "mysticism," he will not permit God to act directly on the human heart, and his conception of God's relation to

⁵³ For example, the immediately divine appointment of each man's calling; cf. Doumergue, as cited: "Vocation is the call of God addressed to each man, whoever he may be, to charge him with a special work, no matter what. And the calls, and consequently those called, are equal among themselves. The burgomaster is God's burgomaster, the physician God's physician, the merchant God's merchant, the laborer God's laborer. Every vocation, liberal as we say, or manual, the most humble, the most lowly, or the most noble, the most glorious, according to appearances, is of divine right." Among all the wise things which Ritschl says about our vocation (cf. pp. 444, 666), he cannot quite rise to this wisest of all.

⁵⁴ Edward Young, "Centaur," p. 6 ("Works," 1757, iv. p. 108): "That dread Being we dare oppose." Cf. O. W. Holmes, "Army Hymn": "God of all nations! Sovereign Lord! In Thy dread name we draw the sword."

⁵⁵ "Die christliche Vollkommenheit," 1889, p. 8 (E. T. *Bibliotheca Sacra*, October, 1878, p. 665).

the universe is rather deistic than theistic. There is no way then for God to answer prayer, and prayer is reduced accordingly to the forms of adoration and especially thanksgiving—although, it seems, that Ritschl, quite inconsistently, does not venture to reject petition altogether.⁵⁶ Accordingly he again divides the Confessional statement and gravely bids us “to substitute for ‘the expectation of God’s help and contempt of death and the world’ ”—the latter phrase being derived from a passage of Luther’s which he couples with the Confession—“faith in and resignation to God’s providence”; to which he adds as a new item “invocation of and thanks to God in prayer.” “Faith in and resignation to God’s providence” are, however, not in the least the same thing as “petitioning from God and certainly expecting aid.” The personal relation is gone altogether, and with it the postulation of personal action *ad rem*.⁵⁷

The difference between the Confessional and Ritschl’s conception of the Christian life, thus, is polar. In the one we have a life instinct with the sense of God in His majesty, passed in His presence as the ever present and active ruler of the universe, who is nevertheless accessible to us in our weakness, to whom therefore as to a personal supporter and helper we can go in every time of need, with full expectation of aid, because, though we are sinners, He has been reconciled to us in the blood of Jesus Christ;

⁵⁶ Pp. 641 ff.; “Instruction”: § 54, 55, 78 ff. Orr (“The Ritschlian Theology,” p. 177) says: “Petitionary prayer is ... generally excluded, and we are taught to regard prayer as chiefly thanksgiving.” That expresses the fact. Ecke (as cited, p. 303), Haug, Lamm, omit the qualifications. Von Kùgelgen (as cited, p. 127) comes to Ritschl’s defence but without effect. From all that appears, the answer to our petitions is “limited by the reservation that the petition must accord with God’s providence over us” (“Instruction,” § 55); which appears to mean that we receive nothing we ask for which we would not have received had we not asked. Even Garvie (as cited, p. 354) allows this. He condemns Ritschl’s “limitation of prayer to thanksgiving” or the “practical exclusion of petition from it,” and adds that in these circumstances that “faith in God’s fatherly Providence, of which Ritschl makes so much,” means “little more than acceptance of whatever God may choose to send us, without any expectation whatever that our desires will in any way be taken into account.” Garvie is writing from a standpoint which would subject God to man; but he recognizes here that Ritschl’s doctrine of prayer renders specific answers to petitions impossible.

⁵⁷ George Macdonald, who is not often right, is right when he says (“Robert Falconer,” p. 166): “She had taught him to look up—that there was a God. He would put it to the test. Not that he doubted it yet: he only doubted whether there was a hearing God. But was not that worse? It was, I think. For it is of far more consequence what kind of a God, than whether a God or not.” Of course Ritschl does not represent his far-off, silent God as a direct object of human affection. What believers love is their fellow-believers, and it is only in them that they love God, or, we may add, the exalted Christ. “For,” says Otto Ritschl, describing his father’s ethical teaching (“Leben,” i. 1892, p. 354), “in the Johannian declarations it is ‘the suppressed mediating thought that God as the unseen cannot be the immediate object of human action. Accordingly neither can Christ, as the Lord who has become unseen, be the direct object of love-expression.’ ” So in the “Instruction,” § 6, Ritschl says: “Love to God has no sphere of activity outside of love to one’s brother.”

a life therefore suffused with the hope, the confidence, the joy which comes from the consciousness of pardoned sin. In the other we have a life of submission—no doubt humble, patient, even grateful, or even joyful submission—to the course of things, in the belief that it is a good God that has ordained this course of things and that it must therefore be working for good. The former conception is the Christian conception. The latter—must we not call it merely pagan?

It is desirable to go somewhat more into the details of Ritschl's doctrine. Ritschl represents the sole direct effect, as it is the single proper end, of justification to be what he calls "eternal life,"⁵⁸ a conception which he empties of both its eschatological⁵⁹ and its ethical content, and thinks of in terms of pure "blessedness." Its quality is given to this blessedness by the experience of what Ritschl calls "dominion" (*Herrschaft*) over the world, or, in other words, the sense of superiority to the changes and chances of the world which is proper to a spiritual being—or just "freedom." "The positive aim of forgiveness or justification or reconciliation," says Ritschl,⁶⁰ is "that freedom of believers in communion with God which consists in dominion over the world, and is to be regarded as eternal life." And von Kügelgen expounds the meaning of his master thus:⁶¹ "Eternal life, in the sense of Christianity, is the Christian independence ... which in harmony with God's providence subjects all things to itself, so that they become the means to blessedness, even though, from the external point of view, they run athwart it." This "lordship over the world," which is identical with "eternal life," and "blessedness," we see, is identical also with what Ritschl calls "faith in God's providence." We are told accordingly⁶² that "the aim of reconciliation with God in the Christian sense" is "lordship over the world," and then again⁶³ that "in general, the form in which religious lordship over the world is exercised is faith in God's providence." The aim of reconciliation "which does not differ in substance from justification or regeneration" is then, in this intensely this-world religion, "faith in God's providence." Thus, "faith in God's providence" becomes the substance of the Christian life, the thing that makes it a really Christian life. The other elements entering into Ritschl's conception of the Christian life which are subsequently mentioned—humility, patience, thankfulness—are merely qualifications of mode, not additional constituents, of the Christian life, as thus defined. Now, we are told⁶⁴ that this "faith in Divine providence" is "normally a tone of feeling." That is to say reconciliation, justification, regeneration, have as their aim, and issue into, a purely subjective change, that and that only. We need not, because of them,

⁵⁸ Pp. 495 ff. Maerker subjects Ritschl's doctrine of "eternal life" to a careful examination in an article in the *Neue kirchliche Zeitschrift* for 1898 (ix. pp. 117–138), entitled "Lehrt Albrecht Ritschl ein ewiges Leben?"

⁵⁹ Von Kügelgen (as cited, p. 94) points out that Ritschl identified "eternal life" not with an extramundane consummation (*Vollendung*) but with intramundane Christian perfection (*Vollkommenheit*).

⁶⁰ P. 556. Cf. the phrases on p. 518: "reconciliation with God, or liberation from the world, or eternal life." These phrases are synonymous.

⁶¹ As cited, p. 131.

⁶² P. 609.

⁶³ P. 617.

⁶⁴ P. 622.

find ourselves in any objectively different situation from that occupied before; we in point of fact, do not. There has come about a change only in our “tone of feeling.”

Let us endeavor to make clear to ourselves precisely what this means. When it is said that Ritschl uses the phrase “eternal life” not in an eschatological sense, but of a “tone of feeling” acquired in this life, it is of course not meant merely that he teaches that the Christian does not wait until death to receive the blessings obtained through Christ, but enters into them at once on believing. What is meant is that Ritschl conceives “eternal life” after a fashion which adjusts it entirely to this life; it is in its essence in his view an attitude towards the actual course of this world. If there is anything beyond, it does not appear. “Salvation” with him, if we can speak of “salvation” with reference to his theories, is an entirely “this-world salvation.” “Saving faith” is a phrase as little consonant with Ritschl’s system as “salvation,” and the relation of faith to justification gives him a great deal of trouble. He wishes to speak in the terms of Reformation doctrine, but he does not find it easy to determine whether faith should be represented as antecedent to justification—its condition, he would say—or as consequent on it; the best he can do is to call it its “concomitant.” In point of fact, faith in his system is the substance of justification. All that justification is, is the passage from distrust to trust: this is not the way justification is obtained—this is itself justification. Justification thus is identified with faith; and the faith with which it is identified is not faith in Christ our Redeemer, nor even faith in a redeeming God, but just faith in the divine providence. The sinner having been persuaded that he can safely draw near to God despite his guilt, lays aside his distrust and draws near to God in trust. He is sure now that God, admitting him despite his guilt into fellowship with Him, will deal well with him. That is to say, he commits himself to God as Father and trusts to His fatherly love that all things will work for good to him. This is nothing more than faith in God’s providence. And this faith in God’s providence is declared to be itself justification, reconciliation, adoption, eternal life, all of which are synonyms.

This being so, it is astonishing to learn, as we quickly learn, that by the providence of God Ritschl has not at all in mind what that phrase would naturally suggest to the average Christian, the ever present watchful care of God; but just the established course of things, conceived of as the general ordinance of God. The world is governed by law; and God is not to be expected to interfere in any way with the working of that law, which He himself has made the governing power of the world. To trust in the providence of God, as Leonhard Stählin points out,⁶⁵ does not mean then confidence that God will “really intervene in the course of nature at individual junctures for the benefit of believers,” but confidence that the actually existent order of things is not accidental, but has been ordained by God, who is our Father; and acquiescence in it as such. The established course of events is not modified by special divine action to adjust it to our needs, but we adjust ourselves to it, because, knowing it to be ordained of God, we know its ordering is for the best. “It is our duty ... to see in the existing order of things the result and sway of divine providence,” and to accept it in humble and patient thankfulness. There is no providence which “extends” one “whit further than the order of things as it actually exists.” “Faith in the fatherly providence of God,” therefore “resolves itself, on this view of the matter, into an assured confidence that reason is immanent in the actually existent

⁶⁵ As cited, pp. 228 ff.; cf. Orr, “The Ritschlian Theology,” pp. 176 f.

order of things, and that accordingly nature is a means subordinate to spirit.” No change takes place in the course of events in our behalf; the only change that takes place takes place in us. When we lay aside our distrust of God and trust in His providence, we merely assume a different attitude towards the course of events. The same things happen to us which would have happened had we not made this change of attitude towards God. But what we looked upon as against us, we now look upon as for us: what we looked upon at best as but the grinding out of blind law, at worst as the caprice of a malevolent deity, we now look upon as the expression of the will of a Father. After all is said, however, what is meant when Ritschl speaks of trusting in divine providence is nothing more than that it is the mark of the Christian that he trusts in law: he acquires a new attitude toward the actual course of things and humbly, patiently, and thankfully accepts his lot in life.

Garvie, it is true, registers a somewhat sharp dissent. “When Ritschl speaks of God’s Providence,” he declares,⁶⁶ “he means what he says. He does not believe in an inevitable course of nature, independent of a Personal Will, which does not do its worst with us, because we make the best we can of it. He does not give a stern fact, submission to fate, a sweet name, faith in God’s Providence, by a ‘poetic license,’”—and so on. This passionate language, however, is quite futile, and only betrays the confusion in its author’s mind. Of course Ritschl is not supposed to be teaching a doctrine of “fate.” He looks upon the course of things as having been determined by a Personal Will, and represents therefore this course of things as expressing a personal choice, the choice of a person whom he declares to be love and nothing but love. But he does not allow that this course of things is ever modified (no matter when the modification has been determined upon) for the individual’s benefit, according to his emerging needs. It has been once for all established for the benefit of the Kingdom of God and we, for our part, are to look on it as our Father’s will and understand that it is working as a whole for our good. Our trust in divine providence does not mean with Ritschl then, that we are sure that God adjusts the course of events to meet our varying individual needs. But it does mean the assurance that our loving Father has ordered the established course of things for the best, and it does mean that we, now become one with Him, have learned that that is true, and therefore accept every event as it befalls us as from His hands. This amounts to saying, when taken at its height, that we see the hand of God in all that comes to pass, the hand of our Father in everything that befalls us—whether in itself good or grievous: that in a word we look through nature in all its happenings to nature’s God, even though we may see Him only far off. When taken thus at its height, faith in divine providence is no small religious achievement. It is the fundamental religious attitude towards the world: and it must enter into every worthy conception of the Christian life. It is nevertheless, as here expressed, being deistic in its tendency, a fatally inadequate conception of the nature of divine providence, and it certainly, however taken, can never be accepted as Ritschl represents it as a complete account of the essence of Christianity. “Faith in the fatherly providence of God,” says Ritschl,⁶⁷ “which maintains a right feeling with God through humility, and

⁶⁶ As cited, pp. 350 f. Cf. the words cited in note 56.

⁶⁷ P. 652. On January 1, 1874, Diestel, endeavoring to make a forecast from as yet incomplete materials of what would be the upshot of Ritschl’s great work, suggests that it will be that the essence of Christianity consists in faith in God’s providence. Ritschl agrees. See “Leben,” ii. p. 154.

with the world through patience, and which expresses and confirms itself through prayer, is, in general, the content of the religious life which grows out of reconciliation with God, through Christ.” That is to reduce Christianity to a merely natural religion.

From the point of view here brought to expression, Ritschl is obviously right in speaking of Christianity as consisting in a “tone of feeling.” And it is natural that we should wish to ascertain somewhat closely the particular feeling which it is. We think first of all of the feeling of submission, and there does not lack phraseology in Ritschl’s discussions which justifies this. But it quickly becomes evident that he does not think of the Christian’s attitude towards the course of things, conceived of as the providential appointment of God, as one of bare, negative submission. It is an attitude of positive acquiescence, acceptance, adoption: the Christian makes God’s appointment his own. No doubt his attitude toward the course of events conceived as God’s appointment is characterized by humility with reference to God and patience with reference to the course of events itself, but it is characterized also by thankfulness. And Ritschl pours into the notion not only satisfaction, but joy. The tone of feeling which he makes Christianity consist in is distinctly an optimistic one. In the discussion which he devotes to this matter,⁶⁸ indeed, he goes far toward making it indistinguishable from the instinctive optimism of exuberant vitality, the care-free temper of the man of action prosecuting his work in the world. We are told, for example, that we have this faith in divine providence not on empirical grounds—observation does not produce it and would not confirm it⁶⁹—but as a conviction drawn by each man from the complex of his own experiences. And yet not as a reasoned conclusion based on an analysis of our experiences; but as an instinctive conviction. It has no necessary conceptual content; it is normally a “tone of feeling” which is the expression of our “spiritual energy.”⁷⁰ It may, no doubt, develop into clear ideas and judgments; but only if the conflicts so far inhibit action as to compel mental analysis of our struggling spiritual energy. It is, normally, just our feeling of well-being and of courage in the face of our circumstances. It may easily, therefore, be confused with the mere natural courage of man in facing the evils of life.⁷¹ It is specifically different from this, however, because it is not merely courage in facing the evils of life but acceptance or rather adoption of the whole course of things, including the evils, into our own scheme of life, because it is God’s will. That is to say, it is not merely self-assertion, but confidence in providence. And that is an attitude, says Ritschl, which is

⁶⁸ Pp. 618 ff.

⁶⁹ P. 618: “For observation of the fortunes of others would afford just as much, or even more, ground for shaking as for supporting our own conviction.”

⁷⁰ Pp. 622, 623.

⁷¹ It is rather a pungent question which J. L. Schultze raises (*Neue kirchliche Zeitschrift*, ix. 1898, pp. 238 f.) when he asks: Do all Christians actually show the characteristics here depicted? How many possess the energy of will here made characteristic of all? Paul himself seemed able to live on such a plane only through Divine help. “If, however, this direct converse with God is replaced, as with Ritschl, by a mere conviction mediated by the Christian community—if thus then the possibility of continual renewal from the source is cut off—why then, this feeling of perfection becomes nothing but an artificial fiction. Energetic characters may persuade themselves that they possess it”—but the generality?

peculiarly Christian. It is an attitude not to be found in any who have not derived it from Christ. It was precisely this, in fact—identical as it is with the assertion that God is love—in which Christ's discovery consisted.⁷² Thus Ritschl, having abased Christianity to a merely natural religion, by reducing it in its essence to “trust in the divine providence,” seeks to restore it again to its uniqueness as the only “revealed” religion by declaring “trust in the divine providence” to be solely the product of the “revelation” in Christ. This does not in any way affect the poverty of his conception of Christianity. It merely recalls us sharply to the realization of the extreme destitution of the religions men have made for themselves.⁷³

It is, now, this general point of view or “tone of feeling” (*Gesinnung*) which constitutes, on the religious side, what Ritschl calls Christian Perfection. He who is of this way of thinking and feeling is a Christian, and is all that he need be, from the religious point of view, in order to be all that a Christian is. But in accordance with Ritschl's dualistic conception of Christianity, there is an ethical side to Christianity also. And the ethical is so related to the religious element in Christianity that the ethical task cannot be undertaken or accomplished save under the impulse derived from the religious attitude. It constitutes, nevertheless, as the end to which the religious attitude is the means, the real substance of the Christian life, which is as much as to say the precise thing in which Christian perfection consists. How the two elements are related in the whole made up of their union, is made quite clear in an excellent summary statement of Johannes Wendland's, in the opening page of his description of Ritschl's type of piety. “With him,” says he,⁷⁴ “all religion originates in man's estimate of himself as something more than a fragment of dead nature. Christianity is to him the perfected religion because man is qualified by it to become a spiritual personality, a whole in his kind. It delivers man from violent oscillations of mood between pleasure and displeasure. In the certainty that all things work for good to those who take them from the hand of God, the Christian knows how to prevail over even the evils of life in trust in God, humility, and patience. Conscientious work in his calling, whether it be a spiritual one, or one of manual labor, of low esteem among men, is for man at once the best remedy against distress, and also the way to secure that perfection which is obtainable for the Christian. Thus the personal life of the individual takes its place in the general life-purpose of the whole, which consists in erecting the Kingdom of God in the world. Man coöperates in building up God's Kingdom in every true vocational work in his appointed place. For the Kingdom of God is advanced not only by domestic and foreign missions, but marriage, family, civil society, national state are fellowships in which it is to be realized. It is through righteous conduct and neighborly love that the Kingdom of God is established.” Let us see now, in more detail, how Ritschl presents Christianity on its ethical side and how he relates the idea of Christian perfection to it.

The ethical task of the Christian, he teaches, is determined fundamentally by his adoption of God's self-end as his own. God's self-end is the Kingdom of God.⁷⁵ This

⁷² Pp. 181, 625.

⁷³ Von Kügelgen, as cited, pp. 121 ff., defends Ritschl's attitude.

⁷⁴ As cited, p. 8.

⁷⁵ See especially on Ritschl's conception of the Kingdom of God the very clear and satisfactory summary statement of Orr, “The Ritschlian Theology,” pp. 119 ff.

conception is not to be confounded with that of the Church. The Church is the people of God organized for the particular purpose of worship.⁷⁶ The Kingdom of God is the people of God conceived in the totality of their ethical activities, under the impulse of love.⁷⁷ The breadth of the conception enables Ritschl to subsume under it every activity of man viewed in its ethical aspect. He utilizes here, as has already been intimated, however, the Reformation conception of vocation, and thus is able to present the primary ethical task of the Christian under the rubric of faithfulness in his vocation.⁷⁸ He that is faithful in his vocation has performed his whole ethical duty in the Kingdom of God, and, being thus a whole in himself, is perfect. No doubt we may think of many other moral acts which, in the abstract, we might lay upon him as duties. But, lying outside the circle of duties belonging to him in the faithful discharge of his vocation, they do not enter into the whole which it behooves him to be in his own kind; and his failure to perform them therefore cannot be imputed to him as fault. No man can be more than one kind of a man; or if by reason of strength he may embrace in his task more than one vocation, or if, as needs must be, a penumbra of secondary duties may gather around the governing vocation which is his special task, nevertheless the center about which the whole circle of his duties revolves remains his vocation, and it is faithfulness to this vocation and to whatever is inseparably connected with it that determines his ethical character.

We perceive that the chief concern which Ritschl shows in developing his doctrine of vocation is to utilize it so to limit the range of duty as to make it possible for the Christian man to be ethically as well as religiously perfect. The motive on which he acts here is derived from the consideration which he advances with confidence to the effect that hope of attainment supplies the only adequate spur to endeavor. "If in any activity," says he,⁷⁹ "we know ourselves beforehand unconditionally condemned to imperfection, then impulse to it is paralysed. The possibility of perfection must be held in prospect if we are to use diligence in any department of activity." On this ground, sufficiently dubious in itself—though not on this ground alone—he repels the evangelical doctrine that even in the state of grace we must always be mindful of the imperfection of our moral conduct, so that we may never be tempted to depend for our salvation on our own works, which never meet the demands of the law, but only on Christ received by faith alone. It is a contradiction, he says,⁸⁰ in any case, to tell us in one breath that we are to look away from

⁷⁶ P. 284: "In order to preserve the true articulation of the Christian view of the world, it is necessary clearly to distinguish between viewing the followers of Christ, first, under the conception of the Kingdom of God, and secondly, under the conception of the *worshipping community*, or the Church. This distinction depends on the difference which exists between moral and devotional action...."

⁷⁷ Pp. 610 ff. Cf. p. 285: "The same believers in Christ constitute the Kingdom of God in so far as, forgetting distinctions of sex, rank, or nationality, they act reciprocally from love, and thus call into existence that fellowship of moral disposition and moral blessings which extends, through all possible gradations, to the limits of the human race."

⁷⁸ Cf. p. 163: "...the Reformation principle that justification becomes matter of experience through the discharge of moral tasks, while these are to be discharged in the labors of one's vocation."

⁷⁹ P. 662.

⁸⁰ P. 661.

our works to Christ because they are too imperfect to put any dependence on, and in the next that despite this their imperfection we are to depend on them as proof that we are under the action of grace. The ultimate conclusion to which he would drive us is that the Christian man's works are not subject to the judgment of the law. Before following him to this conclusion, however, we wish to point out briefly the fallacy of the reasoning from which it is drawn and the consequences of the rejection which it involves of the evangelical doctrine of the Christian's unbroken sense of imperfection. The justification of this digression lies in the importance of the matter for the understanding of Ritschl's point of view. There is involved in it in one way or another, indeed, a very large part of his system; and, we may add, also the fundamental error of every form of Perfectionism.

Robert Mackintosh⁸¹ observes that one of the leading motives of Ritschl in his dogmatic volume is his "desire to find a remedy for the Protestant perplexity regarding the assurance of salvation." And then he posits the dilemma which we have just cited from Ritschl, in somewhat different words. "Is it logical," he asks, "to bid us discover defects in all our works in order that we may rest upon God's grace, and yet to insist that we must have good works to submit lest we be moral impostors?" Why "perplexity" should be caused by such a question is inexplicable. The answer is simple. Certainly it is logical—provided salvation be a process. To find salvation in progress is as sound evidence of salvation as to find it completed—provided salvation be a supernatural work. The writers of the New Testament and the Reformers and their evangelical successors, agree in these two things—that salvation is a process and that it is a divine work. They recommend us therefore to recognize it as always here incomplete; to discover imperfection in all our works. And they recommend us equally to perceive in its discovery in us, in any stage of incompleteness whatever, the incontrovertible evidence that we are in God's hands. There can be no assurance derived from any other source than evidence that we are in God's hands; and that assurance is as firm and as vivid when the evidence is derived from the discovery that God is working, as it could be were it derived from the discovery that He had already worked, our salvation.

We are not dealing here, however, with merely an *apex logicus*. We are dealing with the very essence of Protestantism. The progressive character of salvation lies at the very heart of Protestantism's heart, because (among other things) the Protestant doctrine of justification and its effects takes to a considerable extent its form from it. A large part of the religious value of the Protestant doctrine of justification, in its distinction from sanctification, is lost, if sanctification be not a process, the completion of which occupies the whole of life; if, that is, the injunction, "Work out your own salvation," does not apply to the whole of the Christian's walk on earth, but ought to be addressed to men only at some particular stage of their Christian experience—say, only at its beginning. For a large part of the religious value of this distinction turns on this—that the Christian's hope of salvation (his assurance) does not depend on the stage of sanctification to which he has already attained. Sanctification being a process, and a process which reaches its completion only when this life is over, the discovery of sin remaining in him at any point of his earthly life is no proof that the Christian may not nevertheless be in Christ. In proportion as it is made the Christian's duty not so much to work out his salvation continuously but to enjoy it at once in its completeness, the believer, conscious of sin,

⁸¹ "Albrecht Ritschl and his School," 1915, p. 132.

loses his confidence that he is a believer at all. If this attainment of complete salvation is made coincident with justification, all sense of continued sinfulness is a clear disproof of present salvation. The matter is only mitigated, not changed, by separating the attainment of complete sanctification in time from justification. Salvation involving taking this second step, the continued sense of sinfulness becomes evidence of failure of such portentousness as to shatter our peace and assurance. If it belongs to the Christian to be without sin, and to be without sense of sin—in this sense of the statement—then the fact of experience that we are not without sin and not without the sense of sin is pretty clear proof that we are not Christians. It is not a matter of little importance, then, that we should settle it with ourselves whether the characteristic of the Christian walk in the world is constant advance towards sinlessness, or complete present enjoyment of sinlessness. If the latter, then, gloss it as we will, no one is entitled to think of himself as a Christian, no one is justified in regarding himself as saved, unless he is in the possession of complete sinlessness. In that case the whole religious gain of the Reformation doctrine of justification in distinction from sanctification is lost, and we are thrown back again into the despairing task of determining our religious state and our future hope on the ground of our own merits.

It is no accident, therefore, that the Reformers presented the Christian life as a life of continuous dissatisfaction with self and of continuous looking afresh to Christ as the ground of all our hope. The effort of Ritschl to present the Christian life rather as a life of complete satisfaction with self tends not only altogether to undermine the entire evangelical system, but to strike a direct blow at that peace and joy of the Christian which it is his professed object to secure. For the Christian's peace and joy are not and cannot be grounded in himself, but in Christ alone. He rejoices in the sufficiency of Christ's saving work for him; his exultation is in a salvation made his despite his unworthiness of it. This joy obtains its peculiarity precisely from the coexistence of dissatisfaction with self and satisfaction with Christ. The dissatisfaction with self does not mar it; it enhances it rather—because the more dissatisfaction we feel with ourselves the more the greatness of Christ's salvation is manifest to us, and the more our delight in it waxes. Transfer the ground of our satisfaction from Christ to ourselves, and all satisfaction becomes at once impossible—except for the shallow souls who can find satisfaction in their own hearts and in the works which proceed from them. We have returned to medieval work-salvation: the very essence of Luther's revolt turned on his inability to find satisfaction in self. We are not preaching, and Luther did not preach, a lugubrious Christianity, which is always and only preoccupied with shortcomings and failures. Of course the Christian delights in his salvation. Of course he has no impulse to depreciate what he has already received. Of course his joy is unbounded, and his peace supreme. But this only because—and only on the condition that he understands that—he has not yet “attained”; that what he has received is but the earnest of what is to come; that what he has already done or is now doing is not the ground, and what he already is is not the extent, of his hope. It belongs to the very essence of Christianity that we have not “attained”; and that is the same as saying that sanctification is in progress and there is more to come. The Christian who has stopped growing is dead; or to put it better, the Christian does not stop growing because he is not dead. Luther rightly says the Christian is not made but is in the making.

Precisely what Ritschl emphasizes, nevertheless, is that the satisfaction of the

Christian has its ground in himself.⁸² We gather, however, that it does not take much to satisfy a Christian: a very imperfect perfection is perfection enough to make him perfect. We have observed how Ritschl sets his main contention in direct contradiction to the evangelical doctrine of the continuous dissatisfaction of the Christian with his attainments during this life. He does not admit, however, that he is also in conflict with Scripture. In this matter at least, he contends, the Reformers were at odds with the Scriptures. The exegetical justification of this contention he seeks to supply in a passage in the closing pages of the second volume of his main work which has become famous and which has exerted a greater influence than any other portion of his discussion of the perfection of the Christian.⁸³ In this passage Ritschl declares that the relation in which the Reformers place the believer's supposed consciousness of continued imperfection to justification was wholly unknown to Paul. Paul, of course, knew that Christians sinned; his epistles are full of the proofs of it. But he did not at all bring these sins into relation with justification. Moreover he had a very healthful sense of his own faithfulness in his vocational activity, and asserts it against all gainsayers. Nor was his self-satisfaction official alone. We cannot do otherwise than infer, Ritschl sums up,⁸⁴ that "alongside of the conviction of justification through faith, a consciousness of personal moral perfection, especially of perfect faithfulness in our vocation, is possible, which is disturbed by no twinges of conscience...." Paul accordingly arrogates to himself in this matter nothing which he does not accord to others. He distinctly presupposes that Christians as such possess not indeed a multiplicity of good works but a connected life-work which may properly be called good. Only John⁸⁵ among the New Testament writers strikes a different note; and the note he strikes is not fundamentally different. He teaches, it is true, that believers continue to sin and need to have continued recourse to the Forgiver of sins (1 John 1:8, 9). But it does not follow that even in his teaching the self-consciousness of the Christian is to receive from this its dominant tone. Rather in this teaching also this is determined by the possibility of moral perfection. "From the pessimism with which Luther emphasized the constant imperfection and worthlessness of the moral activity of Christians, John is far removed. The sinful was to him still always only the exception in the Christian life, not the rule and an inevitable destiny."⁸⁶ As a conspectus of New Testament teaching, this representation is, of course, absurd. Nevertheless, Paul Wernle (after certain forerunners) took it up and elaborated it in his maiden book,⁸⁷ thereby opening a controversy which threshed out such questions as whether we may speak of "Paul the 'miserable sinner,'" and whether Paul knew anything of "the daily forgiveness

⁸² Cf. p. 651: "The destination of men for perfection in Christianity may likewise be seen in the exhortation to rejoice amid all the changes of life which, in the New Testament, accompanies instruction in the Christian faith (ii. pp. 344, 350). For joy is the sense of perfection."

⁸³ "Rechtfertigung und Versöhnung," ed. 3, ii. 1889, § 39, pp. 365 ff.

⁸⁴ *Op. cit.*, p. 370.

⁸⁵ This, of course, can be said even by Ritschl only after he has explained away such passages as Rom. 7:14–25, Gal. 5:17, not to speak of multitudes of others which he does not notice.

⁸⁶ *Op. cit.*, p. 378.

⁸⁷ "Der Christ und die Sünde bei Paulus," 1897.

of sins.” That, however, is another story.⁸⁸

We may suppose that Ritschl could not have been led to such a representation of New Testament teaching save as a result of his low view of sin as in essence just ignorance. This made it possible for him to imagine that Paul, for example, never reflected on the relation of the abounding sin which he saw in the Christian communities to the justification of these sinners, and cherished in himself a consciousness of moral perfection in conjunction with the very poignant sense of personal unworthiness to which he gives expression. Some such representation was, however, forced on him by the most fundamental elements of his system of thought, if he was to preserve for his teaching any semblance of connection with the New Testament. There is his contention, for instance, that it is impossible for God “to love” and “to hate” the same person at the same time, which lies at the very root of his whole system. He had made use of it in framing and developing his remarkable doctrine of the “wrath of God.” Because God loves sinners and out of that love has chosen sinners to become sharers in His Kingdom and objects of His “redemption,” it is impossible, he says,⁸⁹ to speak of the “wrath” of God with reference to sinners as such. God’s wrath is turned against those sinners alone who show themselves irreconcilably enemies of His Kingdom and despisers of His love, that is to say, the finally impenitent—if there be any finally impenitent. It does not burn against sinners as such, since all are sinners, and in that case none could be the objects of His “redemptive” love; it is a purely eschatological notion. Holding firmly to this irreducible either-or—that there can be no love of God present where His wrath is in any measure active, and no wrath of God where His love is in any measure active—Ritschl could not allow that the reconciled sinner could justly suffer under a continuous sense of guilt. No clouds could be admitted to obscure the Father’s countenance. The reconciled believer must not only bask in an unbroken but in an unsullied sense of the divine love. The Reformation doctrine that the Christian life is a continuous repentance, that the believer is conscious of continual shortcomings which, he knows, deserve the wrath of God, and is continually receiving unmerited forgiveness, was not merely repugnant, but impossible to him. He was compelled to develop a conception of the Christian life which inferred perfection. There could be no room in it, we do not say merely for distrust, fear, despondency, but for contrition, repentance, self-abasement. The very essence of the Christian life is for him necessarily freedom from these things. Precisely what “reconciliation” is to him is the discovery that God takes no account of sin in us. Not that we are freed from sin. But that it makes no difference whether we sin or not: God closes His eyes to our sin. This is of course an antinomian attitude. All perfectionist doctrines run into antinomianism. It is intrinsic in Ritschl’s low view of sin. What is at the moment important for us to note is that it enables us to understand that Ritschl is not willing to have the perfection which he proclaims for Christians measured by the standard of the moral law. Whatever the Christian may actually do, he is no “sinner,” and his conscience must not accuse him.

In order to sustain himself in this lamentable position Ritschl develops an unhappy

⁸⁸ Wernle, growing older and somewhat wiser, found it necessary to correct the extremities of his teaching: see the *Theologische Literaturzeitung*, xxxiv. 1909, coll. 586 ff.

⁸⁹ Pp. 323.

argument designed to show that the moral law is in any event incapable of fulfilment. Not incapable of fulfilment by sinners only, but intrinsically and of its very nature incapable of fulfilment.⁹⁰ This because it is in effect infinite in its demands: it claims the will simultaneously for illimitable requirements spread out through space, and the series of claims made by each of these requirements extends inimitably through time. The finite being is capable, however, of only one act at a time. And since it is impossible for him to do at once everything that falls under the category of the good, he is under no obligation to do it. What he is required to do, in point of fact, is not to fulfil the moral law in its abstract completeness, but to make of his life a moral whole, rounding it out in dutiful conduct in accordance with its intrinsic requirements as such a whole. It is the conception of vocation to which Ritschl appeals here to supply the limitation of duty by which it may be rendered capable of performance. “Everyone,” says he,⁹¹ “is moral in his behavior when he fulfils the universal law in his special vocation or in that combination of vocations which he is able to unite in his conduct of life.” Thus, we are told, “there is excluded every moral necessity to good actions on ends which do not fit in with the individual’s vocation,” and the “apparent obligation is invalidated that we have to act morally at every moment of time in all possible directions.”⁹² The situation, however, he perceives not to be relieved in this manner. The spatial infinity is cleared away, indeed, but the temporal remains. We are moving now in one, narrow path, but there is no end to it. “Even when the fulfilment of the moral law is confined to one’s own calling and what is analogous thereto, the series of good actions which are incumbent is still illimitable in time.”⁹³ Relief can be found only in discarding all responsibility whatever to “statutory law”; that is, to externally imposed law. We “find the proximate norm which specifies for every one the morally necessary conduct in our moral vocation” itself, and thus vindicate the “autonomy of moral conduct.”⁹⁴ We are under no law but such as is evolved out of our moral disposition in the course of our activities themselves: and we evolve this law, of course, only as it is needed and fulfil it as it is made. Thus, executing the particular judgments of duty as we form them, we preserve steadily, it seems, our perfection. “Under these circumstances,” says Ritschl,⁹⁵ “and in this form the individual produces the moral law out of his freedom, or”—that is, in other words—“lives in the law of freedom.” We are therefore under no other law but “the law of freedom,” and “the universal statutory law” has no authority over us. Emancipated from all externally imposed law, we are a law to ourselves, and we recognize no other law as having dominion over us.

It can occasion no surprise, of course, that Ritschl, with his Kantian inheritance,

⁹⁰ P. 662: “Now the notion of good works, which find their standard in the statutory law, is the expression of a task which not only is impracticable on the presupposition of the continuance of sinfulness, but in and for itself cannot be thought in connection with the characteristic of perfection.” “Therefore it is not merely sin, as evil will or as indifference, which thwarts the quantitatively perfect fulfilment of the moral law, but this is in itself impossible in comparison with the statutory form of the law.”

⁹¹ P. 666.

⁹² P. 666.

⁹³ P. 666.

⁹⁴ P. 666.

⁹⁵ P. 667.

should proclaim this doctrine of “autonomous morality.” Our interest is only in the particular form he gives it, and the use to which he puts it in expounding his views of Christian perfection. The assertion of the doctrine itself pervades the discussions of the dogmatic volume of his chief work.⁹⁶ We turn for example to its very closing sentences,⁹⁷ there all its chief elements are given crisp expression, precisely as we have drawn them out above from an earlier page. Christian perfection, he says, consists (together with the “religious functions”) just in “freedom of action.” In this freedom of action, the Christian, seeking the final end of the Kingdom of God, imposes on himself—“gives himself”—a “law.” He gives himself this law “by the production (*Erzeugung*) of principles and judgments of duty.” Thus the law which he follows, and by following which he manifests himself as what he ought to be, is his own product, developed, as means to its accomplishment, out of the aim (*Endzweck*) which he is pursuing. Not only is no “statutory law” (*statutarisches Gesetz*) imposed on him from without, but no immanent law is written on his heart by the finger of God.⁹⁸ He evolves his own rules of life—his governing principles and his determinations of duty—out of himself, solely under the guidance of the end he is seeking. In the absolute freedom of his will he chooses his own end; and that end determines his rules of living for him. These are the elements of Ritschl’s ethics. God is concerned in them only so far as that He provides, through the “revelation” made by Christ, the end to which, freely adopted by them, the efforts of Christian men are freely directed—His own self-end, the “Kingdom of God.” The “moral

⁹⁶ See especially the discussion on p. 526 where we are told that “the moral law is complete only in the reticulation of those judgments of duty which determine the necessary form of good action in each particular case,” and further that “the principle of autonomy not only holds good within the circle of general moral law as such, but we act autonomously in each particular province of life...” Cf. p. 650: “The saints who strive to act in the fear of God and to follow God’s ways, come to know the duties incumbent on them through their disposition and not through a statutory law.” We must not be misled by the superficial resemblance of language like this to the Christian doctrines of the leading of the Spirit and the writing by Him of the law of God on the heart. Ritschl knows no Holy Spirit, no immediate work of God on the heart, and indeed, no heart for God to work on. What Ritschl is doing is only adapting to his own purposes Kant’s doctrine of autonomous morality, which was Kant’s protest against the view of vulgar Rationalism that sin arises only from the deliberate transgression of known external law.

⁹⁷ P. 670.

⁹⁸ Ritschl strangely thinks these two things inconsistent, and blames the Second Helvetic Confession for bringing them together (p. 523). At bottom Ritschl confuses knowledge and power. He speaks as if action cannot be voluntary if directed by law—which would be as much as to say that voluntary action is necessarily lawless. That, no doubt, is much his notion of “freedom.” The writing of the law on the heart does not abolish the law which is thus written on the heart. No doubt the writing of the law on the heart may be construed to mean the implantation of an independent instinct for what is contained in the law. Something like that is, apart from its “mysticism,” what Ritschl supposes, not indeed to have been done to Christians, but fairly to represent what the native powers of Christians, as moral men, are capable of. The Christian will, says he (p. 526), “is guided by a free knowledge of the moral law, through which it perpetually produces that law.”

law”—we are availing ourselves here of Fr. Luther’s exposition⁹⁹—“is deduced by the men who appropriate this end out of themselves; it is a subjective product of the human moral will. It is the law which man in moral freedom gives himself so soon as he has established the advancement of the ‘Kingdom of God’ for himself as the self-end of his life-practice. He takes this advancement of the Kingdom of God as self-end to himself, however, so far as he has become conscious that thus his personal self-end—which he has already set before himself—is furthered. This self-end is the attainment of that moral, spiritual freedom which maintains itself triumphantly over against all hindrances from the world of nature. In ‘carrying through’ this ‘his self-end over against the world’ consists ‘the blessedness of the person.’ The Christian is therefore with reference to the establishment of the moral law dependent on God only in the one respect that the end of the ‘Kingdom of God,’ morally determining his life, is revealed to him by God through Christ. Otherwise he is morally ‘autonomous.’ ”

With this doctrine of autonomous morality Ritschl certainly seems to have found a basis on which he can pronounce Christian men really perfect. If we create our own moral law and create it in accordance both with our special ends in our particular vocations, and with our particular situation at each moment,¹⁰⁰ there seems no reason why, measured by that standard, we should not be and remain “perfect.” Ritschl felicitates himself especially that with this understanding of the matter, the moral life of the individual becomes “a whole.” If duty is limited by the demands of our vocation (together with whatever else is associated with it), and determined by ourselves under our conceptions of those demands, no doubt a certain unity is acquired by our lives which gives them the aspect of “wholes in their kinds.” It is not so easy to assure ourselves that the kinds of which they are wholes are good kinds. Ritschl apparently would say that this is secured by the fact that all the vocations pursued by Christian men are pursued in subordination to the one great end of the Kingdom of God, God’s self-end communicated to us by Christ and made ours by the new attitude which we have taken to God in our justification. Meanwhile he exhibits a certain uneasiness here. The limitation of duty to the requirements of our vocations no doubt reduces the multiplicity of good works in which conduct manifests itself to an inwardly limited unity; that is, to a “whole.” “But,” he adds,¹⁰¹ “the whole that is so conceived is not yet perceived to be a thing which is also externally limited,” and here he reverts to a figure of speech before employed by him: “Even if the spatial unlimitedness of good works as measured by the universal statutory law be set aside, yet the temporal series of actions in our moral vocation appears to be endless.” Men’s consciences, it seems, are not easy in the facile solution of the question of their moral obligation which Ritschl offers them: they are not so sure that they have no duties which do not lie in the direct line of the prosecution of their callings, and none in this line which they have not yet recognized.

There seems no particular reason why Ritschl should permit himself to be disturbed by such pricks of conscience. To conscience, which to him is only “something picked up

⁹⁹ *Neue kirchliche Zeitschrift*, ii. 1891, p. 485; cf. also his exposition in his book, “Die Theologie Ritschl’s,” 1887, pp. 40 f.

¹⁰⁰ P. 526.

¹⁰¹ P. 667.

in the course of living,”¹⁰² surely no normative authority can be ascribed. He feels bound, however, to seek to quiet its qualms. He admits that his perfect men are disturbed by a sense of shortcoming and guilt. He suggests however that this may be only the result of an undesirable “self-torturing self-scrutiny,” which threatens, he complains, to “throw back the discussion on to the lines of the idea of good works from which we are trying to escape”—that is, the idea that we are really under moral obligation to do everything that is good. Conscience, the implication appears to be, ought to be kept under better control. And he has suggestions to offer in the way at least of soothing us under its assaults. We shall, no doubt, omit many actions even in the discharge of our calling which we might have performed, and we may impute their omission to ourselves as guilt and thus bring ourselves under an impression of perpetual imperfection. But consider! May we not find later that “the relaxation which we have allowed ourselves to take has served to increase our activity in our calling”? This seems to mean that we ought to have no scruples in omitting duties if it furthers us in our calling; a sentinel, for example, we suppose, is right to sleep on his post if it refreshes him for fighting on the morrow! Moreover—can we say that all omission of useful actions that are possible is wrong? Must we not confine the condemning judgment to the omission of actions which are morally necessary? Above all, Ritschl continues in an exposition which has fallen into the commendation of a purely negative morality—must we not remember that in order to be the “whole” which constitutes Christian perfection we need not be a very big “whole”? It is not necessary in order to be “perfect” that we shall be the biggest “whole” we can be. We may well content ourselves with being a moderatesized “whole.” If we are a perfect little “whole” we need not bother over the fact that we might have been a bigger whole had we striven harder. The point is not the quantity but the quality. “True, a whole, too, must be a *quantum*.... But a whole does not require as one of its conditions a quantitative extension *ad infinitum*.... He who in the moral fulfilment of his vocation is more indefatigable than his neighbor, merely makes the whole possibly greater, while he also possibly imperils its existence.”¹⁰³ The moral seems to be that we perhaps would do well not to try to be too good; economy in goodness may be a good thing; we may overreach ourselves and by excess of goodness become bad.

We shall make no attempt to conceal our conviction that Ritschl’s effort to show that we may be “perfect,” by limiting ever more and more the sphere of our moral activities—though it has the element of truth in it that our moral duty is conditioned by our vocation—is not only ineffective but immoral. At the moment, we are more concerned to point out, however, that the attempt itself, and the manner in which it is worked out, combine to make it superabundantly plain that Ritschl’s purpose is to represent a real moral perfection as attainable by Christians; or in other words that Ritschl teaches, in the proper sense of the words, a perfectionist doctrine. His method of showing that perfection is attainable is, to be sure, to show that we can be perfect without being all that term strictly connotes. This general method of vindicating the attainability of perfection, however, he shares with all perfectionist teaching. His special mode of giving a color of

¹⁰² “Etwas im Gemeinschaftsleben Erworbenes” (“Ueber das Gewissen,” 1876, p. 20). On Ritschl’s doctrine of conscience see the illuminating comment of Pfeleiderer, “Die Ritschl’sche Theologie,” 1891, pp. 77 ff.

¹⁰³ Pp. 667, 668.

perfection to manifest imperfection is all that is his own. He has the courage of his convictions here too, and separates himself from the modes adopted by others, with some decision. In particular he plumes himself greatly that he is not as other men are in the matter of the relaxation of the law—limiting ability by obligation and confining sin to deliberate transgression of known law. Of course the typical examples of the reprobated teaching are supplied by the relaxed and relaxing teaching of the Illumination, which, says Ritschl,¹⁰⁴ “trifled away the Christian problem of reconciliation ... by referring men’s obligation towards God’s law to the relative criterion of their internal and external situation.” He adduces Töllner to whom nothing was sin but sins of “set purpose,” and who taught at once that obedience to the strict law of righteousness is impossible and that in the administration of God, therefore, no absolute standard of moral perfection is applied but every man is judged according to his ability. But Ritschl does not confine his condemnation of such conceptions to them as found in the teachers of the Illumination. They are found in orthodox writers too, he says, and wherever found are offensive. They are found, too, he says,¹⁰⁵ in the Methodist doctrine of perfection, which also he represents as a mere evasion—“casuistry” is his word—teaching as it does that “not every transgression of the law is sin,” and that “it is possible not to sin even when actually doing wrong to others.” We perceive that Ritschl holds strongly that every transgression of moral law is sin and that there can be no perfection where the whole moral law is not kept. His mode of escape is to deny the validity of all “statutory law.” There is no such thing as a universal moral law imposing duty in all its items on all men alike. Each man secretes for himself his own moral law, and in order to be perfect must fulfil only it in all its requirements.

We must confess that we do not see that, on the basis of this general doctrine, Ritschl can escape sharing the reproach of his fellow perfectionists—that they relax the law of God and confine sin to transgression of known law. To explain that not the entire moral law in all its range—in space and in time, he would say—applies as prescription of duty to the individual, but only those moral obligations which arise into consciousness in the process of the faithful prosecution of his vocation, is rather expressly to place himself in the same category with them. For surely this is to make “the internal and external situation” of the individual the criterion of his duty, and to confine sin in him to the deliberate transgression of moral requirements clearly known to him. There is eliminated from his obligation the whole body of duties which the moral law, considered in its entirety, prescribes outside the special consciousness of duty developed by him in the faithful prosecution of his particular vocation. That this general moral law is a reality and constitutes the general standard of duty can hardly be denied even on the ground of a doctrine of autonomous morality. We surely are not expected to believe that each individual develops in the prosecution of his special calling not so much the section of the moral law applicable to him, but a so-called moral law, peculiarly his own, unrelated to, perhaps contradictory of, those evolved by others. These sections of the moral law, developed by individuals, must therefore in combination constitute a general moral law, the whole of which is authoritative, though it is known only in part to each individual. If this be not admitted, then there is no such thing as morality. What we call morality has

¹⁰⁴ Vol. i. E. T. p. 387.

¹⁰⁵ P. 664.

become only what in each individual's case he has discovered by experience to be the most useful "trick of the trade" for him. Ritschl, then, has no advantage in the matter in question over his fellows, and his doctrine of perfection is perceived to be only another attempt to quiet the human conscience in its condemnation of the imperfections of our lives, by persuading it that its duty does not extend beyond our actual performance; and to betray it into finding satisfaction in our imperfection as if it were, in our "internal and external situation," really perfection.

It does not appear that Ritschl's doctrine of Christian perfection has reproduced itself as a whole very extensively. Its influence can be traced, however, in many quarters. We have already called attention to the controversy aroused by Paul Wernle's book on "The Christian and Sin in Paul," which took its start from Ritschl's exposition of Paul's doctrine of sin in Christians. In the wake of this controversy, it has become the fashion among a certain school of "liberal" writers to represent Paul as teaching a doctrine of perfection for Christians. David Somerville cannot be classed with these writers; but his description of Paul's relation to sin in his "St. Paul's Conception of Christ," 1897,¹⁰⁶ has derived much from Ritschl's. In H. H. Wendt's "Die christliche Lehre von der menschlichen Vollkommenheit untersucht," 1882, the whole circle of Ritschl's characteristic ideas reappears, transposed into a lower key. But not only is the entire thought and expression simplified, but the asperities and exaggerations of Ritschl's doctrines are eliminated. What is left is merely the reasonable assertion that man attains in Christianity and in Christianity alone his human perfection, a perfection manifested in its completeness in Christ Himself and in His followers principally and qualitatively here, but not hereafter quantitatively. Strangely enough Paul Lobstein takes from Ritschl's treatment of Christian perfection the mould into which he pours his exposition of Calvin's doctrine of "the goal of the new life," in the last chapter of his "Die Ethik Calvins," 1877. Perhaps no more striking manifestation of a disciple's zeal could be afforded. "It is Ritschl's service," he says,¹⁰⁷ in explanation of his remarkable procedure, "to have investigated the idea of Christian perfection in a true Evangelical-reformed spirit, and introduced it into Christian ethics."

Ritschl's commentators naturally often express a favorable opinion of his doctrine of perfection, either as a whole or more frequently in one or another of its elements. The element in it which seems most commonly to attract favorable notice is, as it is natural it should be, the emphasis given to the notion of vocation. Garvie says shortly:¹⁰⁸ "This conception of Ritschl's is a very valuable one, and deserves our grateful recognition." When he comes to reproduce, however, what Ritschl's doctrine of Christian perfection is, he rather overdoes an element in it, which is already in Ritschl quite sufficiently exaggerated. "It does not mean," says Garvie, "infallibility of judgment, sinlessness of life, moral completeness; but it does mean that in his relation to God man is conscious of his own worth as a child of God, of his own claims on the grace of God, of his own independence of nature and society." The note of "humility" which is at least formally present in Ritschl's exposition is not heard here. Mozley expresses himself with even

¹⁰⁶ Pp. 125 f.

¹⁰⁷ P. 131.

¹⁰⁸ As cited, p. 358.

more enthusiasm of admiration than Garvie. Ritschl's handling of the subject, he says,¹⁰⁹ "is strikingly illuminating and of real help to piety." He particularly commends the use which Ritschl makes of the idea of vocation. This doctrine, says he, "that a man should try to be faithful to his particular vocation, and make his life a whole in its own order, and that therein lies Christian perfection, is exceedingly valuable, since it banishes the hopeless sense of imperfection, of inability even to approach the goal of effort, which must result if any one compares himself with the universal moral law, and sees perfection in conformity thereto." The lesser task is no doubt the easier: but we should be sorry to suppose that fact abolishes the greater.

An earlier English expositor¹¹⁰—we understand it to be Archibald Duff, Jr.—throws the emphasis of his agreement upon another point. What Ritschl seeks to describe, he says, using phraseology of his own, is "what the atonement effects, what are the results of it in men," or otherwise expressed, "what a man is who has been reconciled to God through Jesus." The answer given is that such a man is "perfect." "If," he now adds, "there be men on whom God now looks with full pleasure (for what else does 'reconciled' mean?), if there be men whom God thus regards as perfect, let us know what are the characteristics of such men." Evangelical Christians, however, are not accustomed to suppose, that the fact that God looks on "reconciled" men "with full pleasure" infers their perfection. They think of Christ, and suppose that the satisfaction of God is with Him as Redeemer, rather than with them, the redeemed. They would by no means agree, therefore, that the faith of the soul "that God and it are reconciled is faith that at that moment God is satisfied with its being what it is." They suppose on the contrary, that God is so little satisfied with what the soul is that He does not intend to leave it in that condition. God cannot be satisfied with any soul in which any depravity whatever remains, nor can that soul—on the hypothesis that it is a "reconciled" soul—be satisfied with itself. The truth is that this feeling of "satisfaction," the characteristic tone of mind which Ritschl demands for the believer, a demand which Duff is here echoing from him, is so far from being the mark of the Christian's life that it would be the signature of his death. Ritschl complains that unless the possibility of attaining perfection be held before Christians all impulse to effort dies in them. He forgets that dissatisfaction with their present condition supplies a much more powerful spur to effort. No doubt the Christian must be animated by hope of improvement if he is to strive with energy to advance in his course. But why this hope should take the specific form of conviction that the supreme goal of this improvement is within his easy reach at any time, if only he will take it, it is difficult to see. And should he once reach out and take it—surely that motive to exertion would at once be lost. He would then be "satisfied" and would have no motive for further effort. It is a much more powerful incitement to effort that he should know the evil of the case in which he is, the difficulty of the task which lies before him, the always increasing reward of the journey as it goes forward, and the supreme greatness of the final attainment.

We should not pass on without a further word or two suggested by the assumption which underlies Duff's remarks, that to be reconciled with God is to be perfect. There is a sense in which this is Ritschl's doctrine. But this is not the sense in which it is Duff's

¹⁰⁹ As cited, p. 232.

¹¹⁰ *Bibliotheca Sacra*, October, 1878, pp. 656 ff.

doctrine. And it is not the sense in which it is the doctrine of many of Ritschl's critics. We have had occasion to point out that in the interests of the "perfection" of his Christians Ritschl was ready to limit the law to which they are responsible, and in that regard cannot escape the charge of "relaxing the law." But his zeal nevertheless was precisely for morality—though a limited "autonomous morality"; and he never dreamed that morality could be had merely by believing, without being conquered, without effort. It is even true, as we have seen, and as Heinrich Münchmeyer, for example, is at pains clearly to point out,¹¹¹ that the Christianity of the Christian consists according to Ritschl precisely in his morality, and that whatever religion he is allowed to have is subsidiary and ancillary to his morality.

We find ourselves accordingly in substantial agreement with Münchmeyer when he writes thus:¹¹² "It is now clearer what the real state of the case is with Ritschl. Man is to supplement himself by God, with God's help to attain his destination by dominating as spirit the world and its influences upon him; and to labor as member of the human society at its God-appointed destiny. The first he attains through appropriation of reconciliation, the second through appropriation of the divine world-end which is directed to the Kingdom of God. It follows that for Ritschl communion with God is only a means to an end, to the end that man shall attain his destiny, which, however, does not coincide with the Kingdom of God but is only purposed, that is to say, conditioned by it. I cannot comprehend why Ritschl does not, according to his presuppositions, set forth as the destination of man, to labor, in spiritual freedom from the world, on the moral organization of humanity in the Kingdom of God—which destination he attains through the relation in which he places himself to God. In that case, the task of Christianity would of course be merely a moral one. But in any case it is not in Ritschl of a religious kind, but a rational and an ethical one, and the character of Christianity as religion is only so far preserved by him that humanity attains its rational and moral destination in dependence on God. This dependence on God would remain preserved, however, even had Ritschl more logically posited only the moral aim for Christianity. I say again, it is simply a self-deception when it is supposed that Ritschl teaches a religious and a moral destination of Christianity; in reality there is question with him only of a rational and moral destination, which however certainly cannot be set in parallelism. In reality there can be only a moral destination of Christianity according to Ritschl."

This criticism is just. Ritschl's system is a one-sided ethical system and in principle reduces Christianity to a morality. But that affords no reason why it should be met by an equally one-sided construction of Christianity as a purely religious system. This is, however, what is done by Münchmeyer in fellowship with many others, zealous for "faith" as constituting the whole substance of Christianity. Man's destination, he declares, is uniquely "communion with God," though he is forced to add that men have always felt that it was precisely sin which separated them from God, and have accordingly sought after atonement for sin. "When according to this," he asks,¹¹³ "is man perfect?" And he

¹¹¹ *Zeitschrift für kirchliche Wissenschaft und kirchliches Leben*, viii. 1887, pp. 95 ff.

¹¹² As cited, p. 109.

¹¹³ As cited, p. 110. Similarly E. Cremer, "Über die christliche Vollkommenheit," 1899, pp. 21, 22: "Because the forgiveness of sins is God's whole salvation, perfect salvation—faith, which apprehends it in Christ, is perfection." "It is intelligible now why faith in

answers: “When he has found his God in faith, when in faith he knows Him as his Father and himself as His child. Then his heart has peace, he desires no more. That is what the Augsburg Confession means when it places Christian perfection in ‘serious fear of God and again the conceiving of great faith and confidence for Christ’s sake that we have a reconciled God.’ For only by the way of repentance do we come to faith in the grace of God. He who has been brought to this faith—‘I have a reconciled God’—he is perfect. And the more he grows and waxes strong in this faith, the more joyful will his heart be. Joy, however, as Ritschl says, (and in this I agree with him) is the feeling of perfection. And thus it is fully explained why Paul and the Reformers and our theologians place reconciliation so completely in the center; for by it alone is the communion with God which constitutes our perfection, made possible.” According to this representation perfection consists entirely in our religious relation; produced directly by reconciliation it is just the reconciled state; and it is realized subjectively in the soul-attitude we call faith. To be “in faith” (*im Glauben*) is to be *ipso facto* “perfect.” Good works are only the natural activities of one in communion with God. They have no other significance. When we sin, that is a proof that our faith has failed; and that drives us back to faith. “So soon as the Christian has found in faith His God’s heart again, he is perfect.” The perfection of the Christian, in a word, consists solely in a relation.

In their conceptions of the nature of Christian perfection, considered in itself, Ritschl and his followers and those of his critics represented by Münchmeyer obviously are looking, each at one side only of the same shield. Each holds, each denies, half the truth. What is lacking in Münchmeyer’s construction is that he has in view only the guilt of sin. It is sin, says he, which separates us from God: when we are relieved from sin we are at one with God and rejoice in communion with Him. He is thinking only of the guilt of sin: what of its pollution? The Reformers did not make that mistake. They knew that the blessedness of the Christian consists not only in abiding in the presence of God but also in partaking of His holiness. They remembered that without holiness no one shall see the Lord. They did not oppose communion with God and holiness to each other: they understood that these are inseparable from each other. Ritschl is not wholly wrong in making morality the end of Christianity: John Wesley is undeniably right when he says that holiness is the substance of salvation. Ritschl was right when he emphasized the moral nature of Christianity as a religion, and saw it advancing to a Kingdom of Righteousness. He rightly wished to relate his so-called religious aspect of Christianity to his so-called ethical aspect; and he was not wholly wrong in looking at this relation under the rubric of means and end. He was wrong, of course, in exalting the moral aspect of Christianity into practically its totality; in reducing the religious aspect from the primary place it occupies in the New Testament to almost a mere name. In his hatred of supernaturalism, he gives us no God to flee to, and no God to visit us. His total discarding of what he calls “mysticism” is really the total discarding of vital religion. His whole labor impresses the reader as a sustained effort to work out a religious system without real religion; or, with respect to our present subject, to make out an issue of justification

Christ is perfection; it is because the forgiveness of sins is God’s whole salvation, in which God’s saving work reaches its goal; believers are perfect because Christ’s saving work is perfect.” “By designating the believer as perfect, it is emphasized that in Christ we have in the forgiveness of sins all that we need from God.”

into sanctification without any real justification to issue into sanctification and without any real sanctification for justification to issue into. The peculiarities of Ritschl's dualistic conception of Christianity and his treatment of the matters which fall under the relations of justification and sanctification arise from his determination to have only a self-moralization instead of a sanctification for believers. His antisupernaturalism rules everywhere and here, too, as in his system at large, we have only a camouflaged Rationalism. Nevertheless, it is a good witness which he bears when he testifies that there is no perfection which is not ethical. And this is the witness of the Augsburg Confession also. For Münchmeyer quotes only a part of its declaration. He omits the concern shown in it for "all our undertakings according to our vocation." And he omits the inclusion in its definition of Christian perfection itself of these words: "meanwhile diligently doing good works and serving our vocation." It is "in these things" as well as in the others "that true perfection and the true worship of God consist." There is no perfection whether *partium* or *graduum* without them in their due relations: without them no man is a Christian and no man, of course, therefore, can without them be called "perfect."¹¹⁴

¹¹⁴ The sources for Ritschl's doctrine of perfection are especially his "Die christliche Lehre von der Rechtfertigung und Versöhnung," ii. ed. 3, 1889, §§ 39–40, 365 ff.; iii. ed. 4, 1895, chap. ix. pp. 575 ff., and E. T. 1900, pp. 609 ff.; his lecture "Die christliche Vollkommenheit," ed. 2, 1889, and English translations in *The British and Foreign Evangelical Review*, 1875, pp. 137 ff., by John Rae, and in the *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 1878, pp. 656 ff., by E. Craigmile; and his pamphlet "Unterricht in der christlichen Religion," 1875, ed. 3, 1886, and E. T. 1901, in "The Theology of Albrecht Ritschl" by Albert T. Swing, pp. 169 ff. See also the relevant passages in O. Ritschl, "Albrecht Ritschls Leben," 1892, 1896; G. Mielke, "Das System Albrecht Ritschl's, dargestellt, nicht kritisirt," 1894, pp. 50 ff.; J. Thikötter, "Darstellung und Beurtheilung der Theologie Albrecht Ritschl's," 1883, pp. 48 ff.; C. von Kügelgen, "Grundriss der Ritschlschen Dogmatik," ed. 2, 1903, pp. 120 ff.

The following are some of the more notable discussions of Ritschl's doctrine of perfection:—John Rae, "The Protestant Doctrine of Evangelical Perfection," in *The British and Foreign Evangelical Review*, 1876, pp. 88–107; R. Tifling, "Ueber christliche Vollkommenheit nach Ritschl," in the *Mittheilungen und Nachrichten für die evangelische Kirche in Russland*, 1878, pp. 341–362; H. Münchmeyer, "Darstellung und Beleuchtung der Lehre Ritschl's von der christlichen Vollkommenheit," in the *Zeitschrift für kirchliche Wissenschaft und kirchliches Leben*, 1887, pp. 95 ff.; Fr. Luther, "Die Theologie Ritschls," 1887, pp. 31 ff., and also "Über christliche Sittlichkeit nach lutherisch-kirchlicher Lehre und nach den Aufstellungen der neuen Schule," in the *Neue kirchliche Zeitschrift*, 1891, pp. 469 ff., 619 ff., 712 ff.; Fr. H. R. Frank, "Ueber die kirchliche Bedeutung der Theologie A. Ritschl's," ed. 2, 1888, pp. 21 ff., and also "Geschichte und Kritik der neueren Theologie," 1894, ed. 4, 1908, pp. 350 ff.; H. Weiss, "Über das Wesen des persönlichen Christenstandes" in the *Theologische Studien und Kritiken*, 1881, pp. 377 ff.; J. Köstlin, "Religion nach dem Neuen Testament," in the *Theologische Studien und Kritiken*, 1888, pp. 7 ff.; P. Graue, "Der Moralismus der Ritschl'schen Theologie," in the *Jahrbücher für protestantische Theologie*, 1889, pp. 321 ff.; E. Vischer, "Albrecht Ritschls Anschauung von evangelischem Glauben und Leben," 1900; R. Wegener, "A. Ritschls Idee des Reiches Gottes im Licht der Geschichte kritisch

untersucht,” 1897, along with J. Weiss, “Die Idee des Reiches Gottes in der Theologie,” 1901, chap. vi. pp. 110 ff., and J. L. Schultze, “Die Ritschlsche Theologie eine Teleologie,” in the *Neue kirchliche Zeitschrift*, 1898, pp. 211 ff.; E. Cremer, “Über die christliche Vollkommenheit,” 1899, pp. 7 ff.; Beyreiss, “Die christliche Vollkommenheit,” in the *Neue kirchliche Zeitschrift*, 1901, pp. 526 ff.; Karl Schmidt, “Zur Lehre von der christlichen Vollkommenheit,” in the *Neue kirchliche Zeitschrift*, 1905, pp. 724 ff.