

1896

Candidates for salvation

<https://hdl.handle.net/2144/48032>

"Downloaded from OpenBU. Boston University's institutional repository."

CANDIDATES FOR SALVATION.

Men, in thought, might be classified in periods. They seem to differ largely with their times. The things that our fore-fathers revered we sometimes forget to respect. Many doctrines that were formerly molded into the life of the church have, of late years, been cast aside as being, not only pernicious, but absolutely diabolical. Probably, upon no ecclesiastical question has there been a wider divergence of opinion than upon this: who shall be saved? When one searches the realm of literature for facts, that he ^{may} know what has been the record of men upon this question, he is led to believe that they have made up their minds without much regard to consistent thinking or loyalty to the most self-evident principles of common sense. In many instances persons have formed creeds and their followers have ~~believed in~~ ^{believed in} them even when the last ~~argument~~ ^{argument} has been ~~disproved~~ ^{disproved}. ~~The~~ The great majority of persons have shown a disposition to make up their minds according to their creed rather than think for themselves. We are unconsciously bound by the past let it contain ever so many distasteful things. We find the Jewish and Christian churches especially interesting when

we study them from the standpoint of the change that has been going on in regard to who comes within the pale of God's saving grace.

Let us look briefly at the Jewish Church.

Theoretically it made provision for the salvation of the Gentiles but practically the Jew was most reluctant in applying this theory. If we turn to Isaiah 9:6,7, we find the following: "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called, Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of the peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to establish it, and to uphold it with judgement and with righteousness from henceforth even forever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts shall perform this." This passage and many others in the Old Testament make provision for a growing kingdom but the benefits of the Jewish Code were not so far reaching when the Jew was allowed to apply it. All who were outside the pale of Jewish ^{nation} were in a hopeless condition. The Creator had no smiles for the Gentile and of course, no place for him in his kingdom. This was one of the points of

greatest contention between Christ and the Jews. Every attempt on the part of the Master to extend the limits of the Jewish nation and to inculcate the thought that God's saving grace was not for the Jew alone but for every needy soul met with the most bitter disapproval. The doctors of the law were the highest authority on ~~an~~ interpretation and the person who attempted to teach that the wretched heathen were to have the privilege of enjoying the benefits of salvation was immediately ruled out of court. The law in its purity was a most wonderful factor in keeping the Jewish nation free from polytheism and in bringing this peculiar people into the worship of the true God, but it proved itself too narrow for a working basis for redeeming the world. The large-heartedness and sympathetic love of the Master caused the Old Testament to be broadened into the New. The Old emphasizes the one nation, the New makes grace free for all, with an emphasis that is not found in the Old. It is difficult to see how any one can read the two books for the purpose of comparisons in this respect without at once seeing the contrast. The all inclusive-ness of Christ's mission is brought out in such words as "who-soever will, let him take the water of life freely". His great sympathy is made manifest in the words "whatsoever ye would

that men should do to you do ye even so to them."The lawyer was willing to accept the bare statement of the Master when he said "thou shalt ^{love} the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself." If the lawyer had been left to put his own interpretation on this, he would have found no fault, but when Christ gave the exegesis of the passage, it put a new meaning into it and led the Jews to see that they must either give up their own conception of whom one's neighbor is or else refuse to accept the teaching of Christ on this subject, and they chose the latter. It was difficult for them to see how the priest and the Levite could be counted out and the ungodly Samaritan, as they thought, let in. Christ taught them that it was even so, and thus we have an illustration of the difference between the Jewish and Christian conception of the benefits of salvation. The Jew seemed to think that God was somewhat arbitrary in his choosing and he had numberless passages to aid him in drawing such a conclusion. He found favor with God because he was a Jew and not altogether because he was a better man than his heathen neighbor. Amos and Isaiah tried to teach them a different story but they seemed to be blind to the truth. Of course there was no

possibility of the ^{success of the} Christian cause among them until this could be thoroughly cleared away. To do this Christ set himself distinctly against this narrow belief, first by example and then by precept. True, they called him a friend of sinners and that ^{was} correct but not as they understood it. The Apostles followed and emphasized, what the Master had taught, with no uncertain sound. Peter said "I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation, he that feareth him and worketh righteousness is accepted with him." This is plain and conclusive.

Let us next inquire what has been the underlying principles and doctrines of the Christian Church on this subject, especially since the time of the apostles. There seems to be no better way of obtaining the truth than to give the words of those who have been leaders of their periods. Kahnis says "It stands as an assured fact, a fact knowing no exception, and acknowledged by all well versed in the matter, that all of the pre-Augustinian fathers taught that in the appropriation of salvation there is a co-working of freedom and grace".

"There was no favor in the Catholic Church of the first cen-

turies for any theory of irresistible grace, or of absolute predestination to eternal life" Prof. Sheldon, Hist. Doct. vol. I, p. 126. By further investigation we learn that the teaching of the early church was as emphatic as the New Testament on the idea that God invites not this class or that class but that he invites all, and that no one is received except by his own will and co-operation. Nevertheless the church in this period had some peculiar ideas about the Gospel. There was a tendency to magnify the power of the Word to work sudden transformations rather than emphasizing the power of the Spirit through the Word. Aside from the teaching of Augustine and his followers, the church of his time taught that Christ was a world-wide savior and that it was the will of God to have all partake of his grace. Up to this time the doctrine was free grace and free will.

Augustine introduced a new era. In his earlier life he took the position that God chooses those who he knows will accept salvation. In his later life he modified this until it meant something quite different. He advocated the absolute moral helplessness of every individual of the race. Man is only an instrument in the hands of God at best estate. He believed that man first fell from grace without

any positive decree on the part of God or in other words that he did it of his own free will, after which he became a machine in the power of God. In one place he says "Almighty God can turn to the practice of belief men's wills, however perverse and opposed to faith they may be." Such talk is opposed to reason and human experience. Our own person^{al} belief and inward experience is that we are free, and if we are not, we are created on a plan which leads to our own deception. The one who takes this ground is called upon to prove that the faculties are deceptive and that we are not what we seem to be but something different, before we are duty bound to accept his position.

John Calvin carried the Augustinian idea to its farthest ~~point~~ ^{extreme}. He maintained that the fall of man was in accordance with a positive divine decree. According to him God has fore-ordained every act ~~that~~ has taken place in the history of the race from the winking of an eye to the most gigantic undertaking, whether good or bad, that has ever been planned by a human mind. Concerning the human side he said "we lay it down as a position not to be controverted, that the human mind, even by natural instinct, possesses some sense of the Deity. For that no one might shelter himself under the

pretext of ignorance, God hath given to all some apprehension
 of his existence, the memory of which he frequently and in-
 sensibly renews." "All have by nature an ⁿinnate persuasion of
 the divine existence, a persuasion inseparable from their very
 constitution." Inst. I, 3. What does instinct and innate persua-
 sion amount to with a being who has every thing crowded up-
 on him? He can use them only in a definitely planned way ac-
 cording to the will of the Giver. Such a being could have no
 more accountability than a thrashing machine or any other
 tool in the service of man. In both cases they are machines
 only one is of a little higher order. Concerning Adam's free
 choice and merit from the Divine he said "if so weak a ^cshame
 as this be received, what will become of God's omnipotence, by
 which he governs all things according to his ^csecret counsel,
 independent of every person or thing besides." "It should not
 be thought absurd to affirm, that God not only foresaw the
 fall of the first man, and the ruin of his posterity in him,
 but also arranged all by the de/termination of his will.....
 It is not probable that man procured his destruction by the
 mere permission, and without any appointment of God, as though
 God had not determined what he would choose to be the condi-
 tion of the principle of his creatures." Inst. III, 23.

"Predestination we call the eternal decree of God, by which he had determined in himself what he would have become of every individual of mankind. For they are not all created with a similar destiny; but eternal life is fore-ordained for some and eternal damnation for others." "In conformity with the clear doctrine of the Scriptures, we assert that, by an eternal and immutable counsel, God has once for all determined both whom he would admit to salvation and whom he would condemn to destruction." Inst. III, 21.

It is as clear as the noon-day sun that the human mind, according to Calvin, has no choice in the matter of salvation. The path in which we are to walk has been made for us and we must step in and pass along. Even though we may think that we are having our way we are deceived. Thus the most real and certain experiences are nothing but delusions. We think that we have power within ourselves to choose either of two courses that may be presented to us but in reality there is but one course for us. We think that we have something to do in saying with whom we shall associate, but our companions ~~were~~ selected for us before we were born. We think that we have a part in saying whether we shall follow a good or an evil motive in life but this thinking only results from

our inherent constitution, for we are practically bound up to do the very thing that takes place. This kind of thinking results from a false idea of God's omnipotence. The Calvinistic faith starts on the assumption that God is omnipotent and omniscient. This is true but not in an irrational sense. The trend of the thought is something like this: God created all the universe and provided for all its implications. He saw from the beginning just what he was going to bring to pass. Having this omniscience and omnipotence he could have created the race free and yet had them remain true and faithful. In other words he could have created a free moral agent with such strength of character that he could not have fallen. Here is the false premise from which results all the erroneous conclusions that follow. Such an omnipotence is inconceivable. The very thought of freedom implies the opportunity and the possibility of falling. Therefore we conclude that it is unthinkable that God could create a being free without at the same time giving to such a one the possibility of falling, if at the same time the Creator recognizes any distinction of right or wrong. Some one may ask whether we limit the omnipotence of God. In answer we would say, that we attribute to him all the omnipotence that is in harmony with the laws

of consistent thinking. The realm of freedom may be large or small but the individual ~~m~~ust have the power of self-determination within this realm.

Calvinism reached its culmination and decline in the "Westminster Confession of Faith." Let us examine some of its precepts on the ^equestion of salvation. In chapt. I clause 1, we find the following: "Although the light of nature, and the works of creation and providence, do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom and power of God, as to leave men inexcusable: yet they are not sufficient to give that knowledge of God, and of his will, which is necessary unto salvation." On any consistent system of thinking, we cannot harmonize the language of this first and introductory clause of the confession. If the light of nature etc. is sufficient to leave men inexcusable, then with any just judge on the throne, it must also be sufficient to ^{give} that knowledge which will lead to salvation from any punishment, such as pain in the future life. We must cling to this if the light of nature, in any case, be the only thing given. In chapt. X of the same we find: "Elect infants, dying in infancy, are regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit, who worketh when and where and how he pleaseth. So also are all other elect persons, who are incapable of being out-

wardly called by the ministry^T of the Word."

"Others not elected, although they may be called by the ministry of the word, and may have some common operation of the Spirit, yet they never truly come unto Christ, and therefore cannot be saved: much less can men not professing the Christian religion be saved in any other way whatsoever, be they ever so diligent to frame their lives according to the light of nature, and the law of their religion they do profess:, and to assert and maintain that they may is very pernicious and to be detested." Some have read the above quotation relative to infants and have concluded that it implies that there are non-elect infants who are not saved. One, of course^{etc}, would most naturally make this interpretation, but Prof. A. F. Mitchell of St. Mary's College, Scotland, has written a defense of the Confession and he maintains that this is not a fair interpretation of the clause, for it is not what the framers intended. When the clause was first introduced to the Assembly, it read "elect of infants" and not "elect infants" as it now stands. For this reason he thinks that we should not imply that any infants are lost, even according to this clause. If that is what the framers of the Confession meant, they could have made themselves plainly understood, had they merely said "infants"

instead of "elect infants." The Professor likewise makes a defense of the second quotation in a similar manner, and would have us believe that it makes provision for those who have never had the Gospel preached to them. He tries to sustain the idea that the authors of the Confession meant that this should be applied to those who have had the Gospel presented to them and have rejected it. By no system of interpretation can we get such a meaning out of this clause. The statement is a universal one and asserts that "much less can men not professing the Christian religion be saved in any other way whatsoever." The quotation is as plain as it can be expressed in English and if ^{we} introduce such juggling with phrases as this, we can make white mean black or anything else we wish. On this system ^{of} interpretation becomes a matter of putting our own construction upon it and not what language would convey. We are almost ready to doubt ~~the~~ ^{of the man} sanity or to question ~~the~~ ^{of the man} sincerity who attempts any such explanation. Again in chapt. III, we find "Those of mankind that are predestinated unto life, God, before the foundation of the world was laid, according to his eternal and immutable purpose, and the secret counsel and good pleasure of his will, hath chosen in Christ unto everlasting glory, out of his mere free grace and love,

without any foresight of faith or good works or perseverance in either of them, or any other thing in the creature, as conditions or causes moving him thereto; and all to the praise of his glorious name. "This paragraph reduces the activity of the Divine, on the *moral* side, to zero. Man is created with a conviction that some things are right and that others are wrong, and he is either true or untrue to this deep-seated and fundamental conviction, but his loyalty or disloyalty to these principles of a moral life is no ground whatever for the Divine attitude and dealing with him. All personal experience argues against such a view. Physical suffering always follows the wound or the disease and never precedes them. Mental remorse always follows the broken law or the calamity that may have befallen us. If the wound is not the cause of the physical pain, it appears to be. If the remorse is not caused by the consciousness of a broken law, it follows as a logical sequence at least. The whole of this life's activity is from the standpoint that we must suffer for broken laws. Then all that we know about the Divine dealings with us is squarely against the utterance of the Confession on this point.

These unintelligible doctrines of the church did not always find smoothe sailing. Koornheert and others early attack the Genevan doctrine. James Arminius was called upon to answer them, and in the course of his preparation, he was led to doubt the truth of any doctrine of unconditional election. Later he became an opposer of Calvinism and headed the Remonstrants, or Arminians as they are better known. They taught that man wandered away from God of his own free will and not because of any decree, on the part of God. "Because God in his infinite wisdom, saw from eternity that man would fall at a certain time, that fall occurred infallibly only in respect to his prescience, not in respect to any act of the divine Will, either affirmative or negative." Arminius, Discussion with Junius. The Arminians^u taught that no soul will ever be condemned by God on the simple ground of original sin. "Prof. Sheldon, Hist. Doct. vol. II, pp. 130, 131. "The Remonstrants, decide with confidence, that God neither will, nor justly can, destine to eternal torments any infants who die without actual and individual sins, upon the ground of a sin that is called original, which is said to be contracted by infants by no individual fault of theirs, but by the fault of an other person, and

which is believed to be theirs for no other reason than that God wills arbitrarily to impute it to them. This opinion is contrary to the divine benevolence, and to right reason; nay, it is uncertain which is greater, its absurdity or its cruelty. "

Episcopius, Apology.

Thus far we have made inquiry into the principles and doctrines that have been applied to the candidates of salvation; let us next inquire into the classes represented and the grounds and conditions governing these classes. First, let us ask who are to be reckoned with the saved? On a question like this it is possible to grow very dogmatic and yet neglect to say anything. It would be impossible to give any definite answer to ^a question like the above. All that we can hope to do ⁱ in this brief space, is to inquire into its meaning and thus make our answer general. There has ^{been} a great tendency in the past to magnify the idea that heaven is a place and thus make the great thing in ⁱ gaining salvation mean simply getting into this place, a great hole that the Divine being has reserved for the angels and ~~the~~ saints off in one corner of the universe. The man who thinks on the sense plain persists in thinking of heaven as a place of golden streets and crystal streams and fruitful trees and blooming flowers and that these

will fill out all that we need. We need to reduce the place idea of heaven to the lowest degree and then raise the subjective side of salvation to the ^{nth} power. Salvation is not a world or a place in harmony with man, but a soul ~~in harmony~~ in harmony with God's world. We take it for granted that the world that God made is perfect for its purpose. Man unsaved is not in harmony with God and his world, and does not choose to be. Two things become necessary to reach salvation—first, the desire to obtain it and second, divine cleansing through the atoning sacrifice of Christ.

There are some special classes whose right to this atoning sacrifice has been questioned. Persons dying in infancy, it has been argued, are not all saved. On the principle of a God of justice who regulates himself in his judgment according to the character of the individual judged, this question disappears. But one of two things seems evident:—all dying in infancy must be saved or else they must have the opportunity of developing into a moral or immoral life before any judgement is pronounced.

But the poor heathen who has never heard the Gospel of Christ, what shall we do with him? According to the

Westminster Confession they are shut out. If the framers of the Confession meant different, they failed to express it in English. Many persons who stand in the pulpit, grow very eloquent over the thought that so many millions of heathen are going down to Hell all because we do not carry the Gospel to them. There are some difficulties in the way of such conclusions. On this ground we assume that a man is held responsible for not doing what he never had the opportunity of doing. Then added to this we have the divine Being basing one man's salvation on the action of another and at the same time, this other is a fallible, untrustworthy being. We cannot admit that the Kingdom of God rests on any such flimsy principles as these. We cannot harmonize the thought that the eternal salvation of the man who knows not Christ is made to swing for a moment on the activity or the non-activity of a fallible being, with the thought of a God of wisdom and justice. We need to turn the Gospel guns the other way and say that our salvation may be endangered if we do not our duty in carrying the message, but that the poor pagan will not be called upon to undergo an eternal torment if we fail to do it. We have the power of enlarging the circle of light and life of our fellow man but it is not consistent with our reasoning faculties to say

that ^{the} creator has placed in our hands the power to say whether or not our brother shall be saved, and that is what we do if we maintain that the pagans are lost without our going. Some may say that we are instrumental in saving only a part on them and that the others will be saved without us. If we make provision for a part, we must for all. This question may still be pursued and it may be asked when are the pagans to be saved? If we say that God judges them at death according to their light, we have Him taking souls into heaven that are not perfected in character, and if we say that they are sanctified at ^a death, we open the road to irresistible grace. We are not to be judged as a race or as a church but as individuals and each soul must have justice done to it in any case, and must have a chance that will bear comparison with every other soul. In thought we must keep our God true to principles of love and truth and justice whatever we may think of men.

Edward E. Ayers.

B.U.S.T. '96.