

**THE DOCTRINE  
OF THE  
PRAYER BOOK**

DAVID N. SAMUEL

THE HARRISON TRUST

1998

# THE DOCTRINE OF THE PRAYER BOOK

The Prayer Book is not a standard of doctrine. That we have in the 39 Articles of Religion. Nevertheless, the Prayer Book contains doctrine, indeed a great deal of it, but it is expressed differently. The Articles are meant to be formal and careful statements of the teaching of the Church, but the Prayer Book is a manual of worship and such doctrines as it contains are expressed in the language of prayer. We find much doctrine in the Prayer Book, but we do not expect to find it expressed with the same precision and logical power as we find it in the Articles. The difference between the two is usually spoken of as *lex credendi* and *lex orandi*, the rule of faith which is that of the Articles and the rule of prayer which is that of the Prayer Book or the liturgy.

What is the doctrine of the Prayer Book? To answer that question we must first ask, What is the doctrine of the Articles? because it is from them that the Prayer Book derives its doctrine. The two cannot and must not be separated as some have tried to do. That is a recipe for disaster and has landed the Church of England in its present muddled and confused position. It was a witty saying of William Pitt that “We have a Calvinistic creed, a Popish liturgy, and an Arminian clergy.” He was no doubt right to some extent about the clergy, but he was entirely wrong about the liturgy. The Articles of the Church of England are indeed Calvinistic and so also must be its liturgy, for it was fashioned from the very same doctrine as the Articles, it was cast in the self-same mould, as I shall endeavour to show.

## AUGUSTINIANISM

The Church of England at its Reformation in the sixteenth century became Calvinistic in its doctrine. When I say that the Church of England became Calvinistic, I do not wish to give the impression that Calvinism was something new on the earth. It was not, for Calvinism is just another name for Augustinianism, and Augustinianism is really the teaching of the apostle Paul. So these doctrines had been present from the very beginning and had been the mark of true authenticity

and catholicity. They were restored to the Church of England at the Reformation. Indeed, as Charles Hodge points out, all the Churches of the Reformation adopted the Augustinian scheme, which is as follows:

The Augustinian scheme includes the following points: (1.) That the glory of God, or the manifestation of his perfections, is the highest and ultimate end of things. (2.) For that end God purposed the creation of the universe, and the whole plan of providence and redemption. (3.) That He placed man in a state of probation, making Adam, their first parent, their head and representative. (4.) That the fall of Adam brought all his posterity into a state of condemnation, sin, and misery, from which they are utterly unable to deliver themselves. (5.) From the mass of fallen men God elected a number innumerable to eternal life, and left the rest of mankind to the just recompense of their sins. (6.) That the ground of this election is not the foresight of anything in the one class to distinguish them favourably from the members of the other class, but the good pleasure of God. (7.) That for the salvation of those thus chosen to eternal life, God gave his own Son, to become man, and to obey and suffer for his people, thus making a full satisfaction for sin and bringing in everlasting righteousness, rendering the ultimate salvation of the elect absolutely certain. (8.) That while the Holy Spirit, in his common operations, is present to every man, so long as he lives, restraining evil and exciting good, his certain efficacious and saving power is exercised only in behalf of the elect. (9.) That all those whom God has thus chosen to life, and for whom Christ specially gave himself in the covenant of redemption, shall certainly (unless they die in infancy), be brought to the knowledge of the truth, to the exercise of faith, and to perseverance in holy living unto the end.

Such is the great scheme of doctrine known in history as the Pauline, Augustinian, or Calvinistic, taught, as we believe, in the Scriptures, developed by Augustine, formally sanctioned by the Latin Church, adhered to by the witnesses to the truth during the Middle Ages, repudiated by the Church of Rome in the Council of Trent, revived in that Church by the Jansenists, adopted by all the Reformers, incorporated in the creeds of the Protestant Churches of Switzerland, of the Palatinate, of France, Holland, England, and Scotland, and unfolded in the Standards framed by the Westminster Assembly, the common representative of Presbyterians in Europe and America.<sup>1</sup>

There is abundant evidence to show that this was the scheme of doctrine reinstated in the Church of England at the Reformation. Calvin had a large hand in the English Reformation and so did his

lieutenants Martin Bucer and Peter Martyr, who were specially invited here to take up chairs of divinity at Cambridge and Oxford, in order to set forward the Reformation in the Church of England and train the clergy of the future. The principal agents of Reformation were the Duke of Somerset and King Edward VI, who were themselves Calvinists. Somerset, while in prison, translated out of the French an epistle written by Calvin on godly behaviour. Edward himself prefaced Ponet's Catechism with his own letters of commendation. The Catechism was a thoroughly Calvinistic work.

The English liturgy, in its new Reformed character, was submitted to the judgement of Bucer and Martyr. Dr. Beckwith, in his paper in this series, showed how the origins of that liturgy extended back to earliest Christian times. The Pauline and Augustinian elements of its character were therefore already present, but it had first to be purged of its semi-Pelagian and Popish accretions and cast afresh in a scriptural mould. Peter Martyr had a hand in the drawing up of the Articles of Religion adopted by the Church of England, which were first composed in the Convocation of 1552 toward the end of the reign of Edward VI. Bucer expressed his satisfaction with the Homilies, and warmly commended them for the simple and clear way they set forth the Reformed faith to the people. Also with regard to the liturgy Bishop Burnet states in his *History of the Reformation*:

About the end of this year [1550], or the beginning of the next, there was a review made of the Common Prayer Book . . . Martin Bucer was consulted in it . . . Upon which Bucer writ his opinion; . . . almost in every particular the most material things which Bucer excepted to were corrected afterwards.<sup>2</sup>

It is interesting in this connection that Griffith Thomas maintains, in his *Principles of Theology*, that it was Bucer who taught Calvin the doctrine of predestination, so that it was not Calvin who ingrafted it into Reformation theology. Thomas continues,

No doubt [Calvin's] logic and austerity gave clearness and force to the teaching, but its origin was much earlier, and this is a point never to be forgotten. St. Augustine was the true founder of the Reformation on its doctrinal side, and it was he who placed this doctrine in the heart of the Reformation consciousness.<sup>3</sup>

So there is ample evidence to show that the great continental Reformers, Calvin, Bucer, and Martyr, had a great influence upon the Articles of the Church of England and also upon its liturgy. As late as 1561 Calvin wrote concerning ecclesiastical rites and the common prayer newly established on the accession of Queen Elizabeth, and gave his general opinion in favour and approval of them. This was the book which in all its essentials is the Book of Common Prayer (1662).

It is generally acknowledged that a Calvinistic consensus existed in the Church of England, and was expressed in its Articles and liturgy from the beginning of the Reformation proper, in the reign of Edward VI, through the reigns of Elizabeth and James right up to the time of Charles I, with of course a brief hiatus in the reign of Mary. It is, then, to this Reformed doctrine that we must look for a proper understanding of the liturgy of the English Church, found in the Book of Common Prayer.

### *PREDESTINATION*

I propose therefore to consider some of the leading doctrines of the 39 Articles, which stem from the teaching of Scripture itself, and show how they are expressed and illustrated in the liturgy. And I begin, not with the sequential order of the doctrines as they occur in the 39 Articles, but with their logical order. A house must be built from the foundation upwards not from the roof downwards. The first doctrine in order of logic is the doctrine of predestination. Though it is not the first in our experience nor the first in number of the 39 Articles, yet logically it is the first in the order of salvation. "In God" (i.e. looking at it from the standpoint of God) said John Bradford, the martyr, "it be the first, yet to us it is last opened".<sup>4</sup>

This teaching of predestination is most clearly stated in the seventeenth of the 39 Articles:

Predestination to Life is the everlasting purpose of God, whereby (before the foundations of the world were laid) he hath constantly decreed by his counsel secret to us, to deliver from curse and damnation those whom he hath chosen in Christ out of mankind, and to bring them by Christ to everlasting salvation, as vessels made to honour.

This was the authoritative and official declaration of the Church upon the subject, but it did not stand alone. It is no isolated teaching, for there was a whole hinterland, as it were, of other writing which shows how deeply ingrained this teaching was in the Church of England over the whole period from Edward VI to Charles I. Many things could be cited in support of this position, but I will confine myself to two.

1. *The Lambeth Articles*. In 1595 a certain Peter Baro, a French refugee in Cambridge, and William Barret began to preach against the Calvinistic system. As a result Archbishop Whitgift and other bishops and divines drew up the Lambeth Articles in which the Calvinistic position is strongly affirmed. They run as follows:

1. God hath, from eternity, predestinated certain persons to life; and hath reprobated certain persons unto death.
2. The moving, or efficient cause of predestination unto life, is not the foresight of faith, or perseverance, or of good works, or of any thing that is in the persons predestinated: but the alone will of God's good pleasure.
3. The predestinate are a pre-determined and certain number, which can neither be lessened, nor increased.
4. Such as are not predestinated to salvation, shall inevitably be condemned on account of their sins.
5. The true, lively, and justifying faith, and the Spirit of God justifying, is not extinguished, doth not utterly fail, doth not vanish away, in the elect, either finally, or totally.
6. A true believer, that is, one who is endued with justifying faith, is certified, by the full assurance of faith, that his sins are forgiven, and that he shall be everlastingly saved by Christ.
7. Saving grace is not allowed, is not imparted, is not granted to all men, by which they may be saved if they will.
8. No man is able to come to Christ, unless it be given him, and unless the Father draw him: and all men are not drawn by the Father, that they may come to his Son.
9. It is not in the will or power of every man to be saved.<sup>5</sup>

Of these Articles, Whitgift, Archbishop of Canterbury, said:

I know them to be sound doctrines, and uniformly professed in this Church of England, and agreeable to the Articles of Religion established by authority.<sup>6</sup>

2. *Bishop Ponet's Catechism* (sometimes known as King Edward's Catechism or Dr. Alexander Nowell's Catechism) published by authority in the reign of Edward VI to be taught in all schools. The following is a sample of its teaching.

As many as are in this faith stedfast, were forechosen, predestinate, and appointed out to everlasting life, before the world was made. Witness hereof they have within in their hearts the Spirit of Christ, the author, earnest and unfailable pledge of their faith. Which faith only is able to perceive the mysteries of God: only bringeth peace unto the heart: only taketh hold on the righteousness, that is in Jesus Christ.<sup>7</sup>

Having then shown you the nature of the faith which animated the Reformers of the Church of England and which prevailed in that Church by consensus for many years afterwards, I wish now to demonstrate how we find that doctrine employed and illustrated in the Book of Common Prayer.

First, the Order for the Burial of the Dead, where we find the following prayer:

beseeching thee that it may please thee, of thy gracious goodness, shortly to accomplish the number of thine elect, and to hasten thy kingdom

And again in the Collect:

and receive that blessing, which thy well-beloved Son shall then pronounce to all that love and fear thee, saying, Come, ye blessed children of my Father, receive the kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of the world

Here we have a clear, categorical statement, in liturgical terms, of the doctrine of election, which declares that God has from all eternity elected a certain number to life, through Jesus Christ, and that when that specific number is complete, the purposes of God concerning mankind will be complete, and his kingdom will come. The calling out of the elect through the preaching of the Word is the hastening of the kingdom.

Secondly, the Catechism. Here we have the following answer in response to the question on the creed, "What dost thou chiefly learn in these Articles of thy belief?"

First, I learn to believe in God the Father, who hath made me, and all the world.

Secondly, in God the Son, who hath redeemed me, and all mankind.

Thirdly, in God the Holy Ghost, who sanctifieth me, and all the elect people of God.

Notice, there is no contradiction between the second and third articles. The proper Augustinian/Calvinistic position is, that Christ's death is sufficient for all, but efficacious only for the elect. The efficacy and power of Christ's death is attributable to the fact that he is both God and man. It rests upon the hypostatic, or personal, union of the two natures — deity and humanity combined in the one person of Christ. Therefore, when Christ was obedient or suffered, though the Godhead in him did not suffer, yet he suffered as a divine person. Therefore, the Scriptures speak of Christ's righteousness as the "righteousness of God", and of Christ's blood as "the blood of God". It is to this fact that the infinite merit and efficacy of Christ's work of redemption are due.<sup>8</sup> But while it is infinitely efficacious, it is effectual only to the elect. So we see how faithful the teaching of the Catechism is on this subject.

Thirdly, Morning and Evening Prayer. Continuing with the doctrine of election, we pray in these services, "O Lord, save thy people. And bless thine inheritance." And again, "Endue thy Ministers with righteousness. And make thy chosen people joyful", thereby recognising that the true church is the people of God's election, choice, and promise.

Fourthly, the Litany. In this service we pray, "Spare us, good Lord, spare thy people, whom thou hast redeemed with thy most precious blood" and ask, "That it may please thee to bless and keep all thy people". In both these petitions there is the recognition of a specific people who are known to God, who have been redeemed by Christ and are preserved by grace. Again, "That it may please thee to give to all thy people increase of grace, to hear meekly thy Word," that is, for effectual calling and edification, "and to receive it with pure affection, and to bring forth the fruits of the Spirit", good works being the evidence of justification by faith and of grace in the heart.

Here I must mention a petition in the Litany that might seem as if



it did not sit easily with the general scheme of Calvinistic teaching, namely, "That it may please thee to have mercy upon all men". There is however no contradiction. We are bidden by St. Paul in Scripture, 1 Timothy 2: 1, to pray for all men, but it does not follow that all men are elected to eternal life. In the same epistle, 4: 10, Paul declares that God is "the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe." Of this verse John Owen says that the subject of whom Paul speaks is God the Father not Christ the Mediator, and the salvation of which he speaks is providential preservation, not purchased redemption. That is, there is a providence of God protecting and governing all, but watching in a special manner for the good of his people.<sup>9</sup>

Fifthly, the Collects. I can, of course, mention only a few in this connection. In one of the Collects for Ember Weeks, to be said for those who are to be admitted to holy orders, we read, "Almighty God . . . who hast purchased to thyself an universal Church by the precious blood of thy dear Son", that is, Christ has died for the elect of God and has made them his own peculiar possession. He is indissolubly united with them, having paid the ransom for the members of his mystical body. This follows the teaching of Ephesians 5: "Christ . . . loved the church, and gave himself for it". The Collect of Good Friday: "Almighty God, . . . behold this thy family, for which our Lord Jesus Christ was contented to be betrayed, and given up into the hands of wicked men, and to suffer death upon the cross". Or again, the Collect of All Saints Day: "O Almighty God, who hast knit together thine elect in one communion and fellowship, in the mystical body of thy Son Christ our Lord". All these underline the concept of the church as a distinct people chosen by God in Christ.

Sixthly, Baptism. In the prayer immediately preceding baptism, the minister is instructed to pray, that the child now to be baptised "may receive the fulness of thy grace, and ever remain in the number of thy faithful and elect children". And at the conclusion of the service, the prayer is that he, the child, may "finally, with the residue of thy holy Church" (i.e., with the elect who finally persevere) . . . "be an inheritor of thine everlasting kingdom".

Finally, the Communion Service, a service which is not so familiar to people today, but one which reiterates the same doctrine found elsewhere in the Prayer Book. The plea is: "Spare us . . . , good Lord, spare thy people, whom thou hast redeemed".

So we find the doctrines of predestination and election, so prominent in the Scriptures and so fundamental to the teaching of the Reformers of the Church of England, illustrated in a remarkable way in the Prayer Book. It should not surprise us, when we think of the framers of this book, of the faith of the Edwardian fathers of the English Church, for whom the only alternative to the corrupt system of the Church of Rome was the Reformed faith we call Calvinism.

### *THE BONDAGE OF THE WILL*

I come now to another aspect of Reformed doctrine which we see amply illustrated in the Book of Common Prayer. And that is this: *That the fall of Adam brought all his posterity into a state of condemnation, sin, and misery, from which they are utterly unable to deliver themselves.* This is sometimes spoken of as the total depravity of man or the bondage of the will. *The Bondage of the Will* was the title of Luther's great treatise against Erasmus. The denial of man's 'free-will' was to Luther the foundation of the Biblical doctrine of grace. The recognition and admission of this truth, so clearly taught in Scripture, yet so hard for human pride to accept, is the first and necessary step on the path to understanding the Gospel and to faith in God.

Luther depicts the will of man as a horse standing between two riders. If God rides, it wills and goes where God wills. If Satan rides, it wills and goes where Satan wills. Nor may it choose to which rider it will run, or which it will seek; but the riders themselves fight to decide who shall have and hold it.<sup>10</sup>

The teaching of the Church of England on this subject is clearly set out in Article 10 *Of Free Will*:

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

This position is in contradistinction to the semi-Pelagianism of the Church of Rome, which in the decrees of the Council of Trent teaches, that man's will is free and can cooperate with the grace of God in salvation. The Roman Church would have it that grace and free-will each contribute its quota to conversion and salvation. To which Dr. Fulke replied on behalf of the Church of England,

Our election, calling, and first coming to God, lieth wholly in God's mercy, and not either wholly, or principally, or any thing at all in our own will or works. But whom God elected before time, he calleth in time by him appointed, and of unwilling, by his grace maketh them willing, to come to him and to walk in good works, unto which he hath elected them. So that man hath no freewill, until it be freed.<sup>11</sup>

Which is only to say what our Lord said, namely, "If the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed." Likewise, Bishop Beveridge, in his comment on Article 10 *Of Free Will*, states that its teaching is that of the early churches of Christianity. Our Lord, he declares,

doth not say, there are some things you cannot do without me, or there are many things you cannot do without me, but, *without me you can do nothing*, nothing good, nothing pleasing and acceptable unto God: whereas if we could either prepare ourselves [to turn,] or turn ourselves when prepared, without him, we should do much. And to put it out of doubt, the same Spirit tells us elsewhere, *For it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure*, Philipp ii. 13. It is he who first enables us to will what we ought to do, and then to do what we will. Both the grace we desire, and our desire of grace, proceeds from him. . . .

And therefore it is requisite, in order to our conversion, that the understanding be not only so enlightened as to discern the evil from the good, but that our wills be so rectified as to prefer the good before the evil. By which rectifying, or bringing of the will into its right order again, its liberty is not destroyed but healed; so that it is free after as well as before conversion; yea, free to God and holiness, as it was before free only to sin and wickedness.

And this was the doctrine of the primitive church. St. Augustine (in whose

days Pelagius first rose up against this truth) hath writ several volumes to this purpose.<sup>12</sup>

This being the true and Biblical doctrine of the Church, how do we find it illustrated and expressed in the Book of Common Prayer? There is, in fact, an embarrassment of riches in this respect, for the Prayer Book from end to end is full of liturgical examples of this fundamental teaching regarding the inability of man's will in the matter of salvation, and the need for God's irresistible, sovereign grace to regenerate him. Let me begin with the Collects. In the Collect of Advent 1 we ask God for grace to "cast away the works of darkness"; Advent 4: "raise up . . . thy power, . . . and with great might succour us; that . . . thy bountiful grace and mercy may speedily help and deliver us". Quinquagesima: "without [charity] whosoever liveth is counted dead before thee". Ash Wednesday: "Create and make in us new and contrite hearts". Easter Day: "by thy special grace preventing us thou dost put into our minds good desires". Easter 5: "by thy holy inspiration we may think those things that be good, and by thy merciful guiding may perform the same". The Collect for Easter 4 speaks of "the unruly wills and affections of sinful men", i.e. they cannot be ruled and restrained by man himself. Trinity 1 refers to "the weakness of our mortal nature", i.e. its moral weakness and inability to do what is good without the help of God's grace. Trinity 9 continues that thought: "that we, who cannot do any thing that is good without thee, may by thee be enabled to live according to thy will". Trinity 19: "without thee we are not able to please thee". Trinity 13: "Almighty and merciful God, of whose only gift it cometh that thy faithful people do unto thee true and laudable service". Trinity 17: "Lord, we pray thee that thy grace may always prevent and follow us, and make us continually to be given to all good works". And, finally, Trinity 23: "O God, . . . who art the author of all godliness". These, of course, are but a selection.

When we consider the state of moral and spiritual impotence and corruption into which human nature has sunk since the Fall, it should surprise us that any ordered human society is possible at all. That

human society should exist is “the standing miracle of the world”, and is attributable only to the common grace of God which restrains and curbs the flood of human wickedness that would otherwise inundate the world. St. Augustine said, “Remove righteousness, and what are kingdoms, but great bands of brigands.”<sup>13</sup> But it requires special grace to regenerate man and make his will free for God and for salvation. The Confession of Morning and Evening Prayer in the Prayer Book is that “there is no health in us”, no salvation in us, and without free and sovereign grace we cannot turn and prepare ourselves for faith and calling upon God. This grace is completely and entirely the free gift of God.

Thus in the Litany we pray “That it may please thee to give us an heart to love and dread thee, and diligently to live after thy commandments”. This special grace is not the reward of merit, as the Church of Rome teaches, but it is the free, unmerited favour of God and rests only upon our election in Christ. To those so chosen in Christ, as the Scriptures teach, God gives his distinguishing grace, which brings them in time to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ and enables them to bring forth good works as the evidence (not the ground) of their justification. All of which is expressed so beautifully in the second post-communion prayer:

And we most humbly beseech thee, O heavenly Father, so to assist us with thy grace, that we may continue in that holy fellowship, and do all such good works as thou hast prepared for us to walk in; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

“Prepared” or “ordained before” is a quotation from Ephesians 2: 10, and means, as Paul explains in chapter 1, from all eternity, in the secret counsel and will of God. All this is underlined in the teaching of the Catechism.

My good child, know this, that thou art not able to do these things of thyself, nor to walk in the commandments of God, and to serve him, without his special grace; which thou must learn at all times to call for by diligent prayer.

In the Confirmation Service the Bishop prays for increase of grace for those being confirmed:

daily increase in them thy manifold gifts of grace; the spirit of wisdom and

understanding; the spirit of counsel and ghostly strength; the spirit of knowledge and true godliness

The Prayer Book then is rooted and grounded in the doctrine of God's unmerited grace to sinners, based upon his free election of them in Jesus Christ. That grace alone is able to make man's will free for God and for his service, which service, as the Collect for Peace at Morning Prayer affirms, "is perfect freedom". Such grace is continually needed throughout the Christian's life, which brings me to the third aspect of Reformed doctrine which I wish to deal with in this paper.

### *THE FINAL PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS*

This teaching also is clearly set out in the 39 Articles of Religion, not as a separate Article, but as part of Article 17. In respect of God's choice of a people, the Article declares it is his purpose in so choosing them "to bring them by Christ to everlasting salvation, as vessels made to honour". Since nothing that God decrees and purposes can fail, that end must be infallibly fulfilled. He will bring them by Christ to everlasting salvation. Again it is stated in the Article how this will be done.

They be called according to God's purpose by his Spirit working in due season [‘called’ according to Paul always means, not mere invitation, but effectual calling]: they through Grace obey the calling: they be justified freely: they be made sons of God by adoption: they be made like the image of his only-begotten Son Jesus Christ: they walk religiously in good works, and at length, by God's mercy, they attain to everlasting felicity.

So here we are invited to view a process which, once it is begun, must by virtue of Divine Sovereignty and power be carried forward until it is completed. The Article is based on Romans 8: 29-30.

For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.

Paul speaks of all this in the past tense, as if it were already something completed. And that is indeed true *sub specie aeternitatis*, in the mind of God, such is the certainty of it. But Paul is also speaking

proleptically in that, in another sense, from the point of view of time, it has yet to be fulfilled.

The doctrine of final perseverance, that those whom God has chosen in Christ and called, he will bring to glory, is one that had general support amongst the English Reformers. A confession of faith was published in 1556 by John Clements on behalf of the Protestant martyrs then in prison. Strype considers it to be representative of the faith of the Church of England in the reign of Edward VI. In the confession we read this concerning final perseverance:

... suche is Godes greate mercye towardes us, (for our Lorde Jesus Christes sake,) that our synnes shall never be imputed unto us: we are all geven to Christe to kepe, who will lose none of us, neither can anythinge plucke us furthe of his handes, or separate us from him; he hath maryed us unto him by faythe, and made us his pure spouse without spott or wrinkle in his sight, and will never be devorced from us:

And again:

therfore I confesse and beleve with all my harte, soull, and mynde, that not one of all Godes electe children shall fynallye peryshe or be dampned. For God, who is their Father, both can and will preserve, kepe, and defende them for ever: for seyenge he is God, he wantethe no power to do it; and also seyenge he is their moste deare lovyng Father, he lackethe no good will towardes them, I am sure. Howe can it be, but he will perfourme their salvation to the uttermoste, sythe he wantethe neither power nor good will to do it.<sup>14</sup>

It is superfluous to quote extensively from the English Reformers in support of this position, though it would be edifying to do so. However, I may just mention the case of Bishop Latimer, since he is cited sometimes as one who broke ranks on this teaching. That is not strictly the case. It is true Latimer appeared to be of the view that it is possible for the elect to fall away completely during the course of their profession, but he was absolutely certain and sure that they could never fall away finally from God. The following brief quotations from amongst a multitude to be found in his writings prove this point conclusively.

In the prophets everywhere he setteth out his great love which he hath towards us, saying, "Can a woman forget her own child which she hath

borne into this world? Yea, and though she do forget the same, yet will not I forget thee." It is a rare thing, when the devil so much prevaieth in parents, that a mother should neglect or forget her own child; yet, saith God, "Though it were so that she would forget her child, yet will not I forget thee, when thou believest in my Son Christ: for the devil cannot prevail against me, though he prevail against women, so that sometimes they forget their own children, or kill them; yet shall he not prevail against me, for I am mightier than he is."<sup>15</sup>

This, says Toplady in his comment on this passage, is hinging the question on the right point. While God perseveres in his love to the saints, the saints cannot but persevere in the grace of God. So that God himself must cease to persevere, ere they can.

So far was Latimer from denying the final perseverance of true believers, that he held it sinful in true believers to doubt their own final perseverance.

We must always consider that God is able to save us, and believe undoubtedly that he will save us. So that when I am sick, as is said before, I may doubt whether God will deliver me from my sickness, or no; but I may not doubt of everlasting life.<sup>16</sup>

I come now to show how this doctrine of final perseverance is expressed and employed in the Book of Common Prayer. It is by the very nature of things expressed in the form of petitions for grace to persevere and continue to the end in faith and good works, and immediately there springs to mind a prayer that is often used and appears amongst a number of collects at the end of the Communion Service.

Prevent us, O Lord, in all our doings with thy most gracious favour, and further us with thy continual help; that in all our works, begun, continued, and ended in thee, we may glorify thy holy Name, and finally by thy mercy obtain everlasting life

Indeed all the Collects in this section of the Prayer Book are concerned with the same theme of perseverance.

But let us turn to Morning and Evening Prayer, and there we find in the words of the Absolution, following the declaration of God's forgiveness, the express desire that God would grant true repentance and his Holy Spirit to lead a life pleasing to God, so that "at the last



we may come to his eternal joy". We pray in the Litany that God will "bless and keep all [his] people"; that he will "strengthen such as do stand; . . . comfort and help the weak-hearted; . . . raise up them that fall; and finally . . . beat down Satan under our feet". In the General Thanksgiving we thank God "for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory", and pray that we may walk before him "in holiness and righteousness all our days".

In the service of Baptism we ask for those being baptised that they "being stedfast in faith, joyful through hope, and rooted in charity, may so pass the waves of this troublesome world, that finally they may come to the land of everlasting life" and also that they "may receive the fulness of thy grace, and ever remain in the number of thy faithful and elect children". And in the prayer of thanksgiving at the end of this service we pray "that finally, with the residue of thy holy Church, they may be inheritors of thine everlasting kingdom". The 'residue' is the remaining part, that which endures, those who finally persevere.

It would be tedious to recite all the Collects for the Christian year which have reference to final perseverance. Let me conclude this brief survey with just two, which must stand for the others.

Trinity 4: O God, the protector of all that trust in thee, without whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy: Increase and multiply upon us thy mercy; that, thou being our ruler and guide, we may so pass through things temporal, that we finally lose not the things eternal

Trinity 15: Keep, we beseech thee, O Lord, thy Church with thy perpetual mercy; and, because the frailty of man without thee cannot but fall, keep us ever by thy help from all things hurtful, and lead us to all things profitable to our salvation

These examples are sufficient to show that the Prayer Book as a whole is shot through with the concept of final perseverance.

But it may be said, if you pray for grace to persevere, it must mean that you are uncertain of it. On the contrary, the believer asks for that which is certain and has been promised by God in his Word. This is

the ground of his asking. He believes that the grace of final perseverance has been promised, and therefore he asks that it might be granted him. Here again the Prayer Book shows a sure touch in these matters, as the Collect for Easter 4 puts it: “Grant unto thy people, that they may love the thing which thou commandest, and desire that which thou dost promise”. That surely is the secret of effectual prayer.

Of course, the perceptions of believers may vary and doubts may arise in the mind, but the promises of God regarding the safety and final perseverance of his elect remain certain and sure. This explains why we have in Morning and Evening Prayer, the versicle and response, “O God, make clean our hearts within us. And take not thy Holy Spirit from us”, petitions which may seem to sit uneasily with the doctrine of final perseverance. Yet this is only an apparent inconsistency. Let the questions and answers published in the authorized Bibles of Elizabeth’s reign answer this point.

*Q.* Cannot such perish as at some time or other feel these motions within themselves?

*A.* It is not possible that they should. For as God’s purpose is not changeable, so he repenteth not the gifts and graces of his adoption. Neither doth he cast off those whom he hath once received.

*Q.* Why then should we pray by the example of David, that he cast us not from his face, and that he take not his holy Spirit from us?

*A.* In so praying, we make protestation of the weakness of flesh, which moveth us to doubt. Yet should not we have courage to ask, if we were not assured that God will give according to his purpose and promise that which we require.<sup>17</sup>

This I believe furnishes us with a full answer on this point and shows the consistency of the Prayer Book in this matter. However, it is interesting to notice also what the Reformation martyr John Bradford has to say on this question.

Whereof it cometh, that they [i.e., God’s people] praying according to their sense, but not according to the truth, desire of God to give them again his Spirit, as though they had lost it, and he had taken it away. Which thing God never doth in deed, although he make us to think so for a time; for always he holdeth his hand under his children in their falls, that they lie not still as

other do which are not regenerate. And this is the difference betwixt God's children which are regenerate and elect before all time in Christ, and the wicked castaways, that the elect lie not still continually in their sin as do the wicked, but at the length do return again by reason of God's seed, which is in them hid as a sparkle of fire in the ashes; as we may see in Peter, David, Paul, Mary Magdalene, and others.<sup>18</sup>

## CONCLUSION

I have sought to deal with three very fundamental doctrines set out in the 39 Articles of Religion — predestination, the bondage of the will, and final perseverance — and to show how they were present in the thought of the English Church in the Reformation period and immediately following that, and how they are therefore reflected in the thought and structure of services of the Book of Common Prayer. Yet, I am concerned to emphasise, as I have already done, that those doctrines which are called Calvinistic, and which guided the Reformers in their formulation of the 39 Articles and the Prayer Book, were not something new and unprecedented, but can be traced back through St. Augustine to St. Paul to the Scriptures themselves.

That is why the English Reformers were anxious to show that they were not beginning afresh, but merely restoring that which had become hidden and neglected by unscriptural teachings and novelties of later times. As Bishop Jewel put it, "We have forsaken the church as it is now, not as it was in old time."<sup>19</sup> The proud boast of the Reformers was that while they considered the Fathers to be on their side, above all they appealed to Holy Scripture as their supreme and sufficient authority. Amongst the Fathers, St. Augustine stood head and shoulders above the others in their estimation generally, but as someone put it, while "one page of St. Austin is worth a thousand of most of the Fathers, one page of St. Paul is worth a thousand of St. Austin's".

I am conscious that I have not said anything about other important doctrines contained in the 39 Articles of Religion, which also have a bearing upon the liturgy of the Book of Common Prayer, such as Article 6 *Of the Sufficiency of the holy Scriptures for salvation*,

*Article 11 Of the Justification of Man, Article 18 Of obtaining eternal Salvation only by the Name of Christ, Article 19 Of the Church, Article 22 Of Purgatory, Article 25 Of the Sacraments, Article 31 Of the one Oblation of Christ finished upon the Cross,* to mention but a few. However, I have dealt with some that are of great importance, and which, as I have explained, stand first, logically, in the order of salvation. There may be opportunity, at another time, to deal with some of those I have omitted today.

I hope that what I have said has helped you to see, as Toplady has put it, “our prayers, and the whole of our standard writings as a church, breathe only the doctrines of grace.”<sup>20</sup> I hope I have given you fresh confidence in the soundness doctrinally of the Book of Common Prayer, and shown that there has not been, and is not now, any other book to compare with it, in the way in which it infuses the spirit of true religion and moulds the hearts and minds of those who use it to a right understanding of God’s grace and salvation in Jesus Christ, and inculcates the attitude of true worship of Almighty God. It is only true worship that gives God his due, and in assisting us in that aim the contribution of the Book of Common Prayer has been, and will continue to be, invaluable.

## Footnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, II (1872), 333
- <sup>2</sup> Gilbert Burnet, *The History of the Reformation of the Church of England*, Part II (1681), Book I, 155-156 [Edited by N. Pocock (1865), II, 269-270]
- <sup>3</sup> W. H. Griffith Thomas, *The Principles of Theology* (1930), 242
- <sup>4</sup> John Bradford, *Writings*, II (Parker Society: 1853), 134
- <sup>5</sup> Toplady's translation: Augustus Toplady, *Historic Proof of the Doctrinal Calvinism of the Church of England* (1774), II, 173-174 [*Works* (1825), II, 165-166; *Works* (one-volume edition), 214-215]. Latin text at: Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom* (Sixth edition; 1931), III, 523-524
- <sup>6</sup> John Strype, *The Life and Acts of John Whitgift, D.D.* (1718), 459 [1822 edition: II, 277]
- <sup>7</sup> *The Two Liturgies . . . of King Edward VI* (Parker Society: 1844), 511-512
- <sup>8</sup> Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, II (1872), 395
- <sup>9</sup> John Owen, *Works* (ed. Goold), X (1852), 191
- <sup>10</sup> Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will* (translated by J. I. Packer & O. R. Johnston; 1957), 53
- <sup>11</sup> William Fulke, *The Text of the New Testament . . . translated out of the vulgar Latin by the Papists . . . at Rhemes . . . with a confutation of all such arguments, glosses, and annotations as contain manifest impiety* (1580), Romans 9, Annotation 4 [1589 edition: 253; 1617 edition: 465]
- <sup>12</sup> William Beveridge, *The Theological Works*, VII - On the Thirty Nine Articles (1845), 278, 281-282
- <sup>13</sup> Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, Book IV, Chapter II
- <sup>14</sup> John Strype, *Ecclesiastical Memorials* (1721), III, Appendix, no. LXI, 221, 222 [1822 edition: III, ii, 461-462, 462]
- <sup>15</sup> Hugh Latimer, *Works*, I (Sermons; Parker Society: 1844), 536
- <sup>16</sup> Hugh Latimer, *Works*, II (Remains; Parker Society: 1845), 173
- <sup>17</sup> John Strype, *Annals of the Reformation* (1709), III, Appendix, I, no. XXVI, 50 [1824 edition: III, ii, 240]; cf. III, 157 [1824 edition: III, i, 226-227]
- <sup>18</sup> John Bradford, *Writings*, I (Parker Society: 1848), 298
- <sup>19</sup> John Jewel, *Works*, III (Parker Society: 1848), 92
- <sup>20</sup> Augustus Toplady, *Historic Proof of the Doctrinal Calvinism of the Church of England* (1774), Introduction: I, viii [*Works* (1825), I, 172; *Works* (one-volume edition), 47]