**THE FUNDAMENTALS: A TESTIMONY TO THE TRUTH**

**VOLUME 3; CHAPTER 1. THE BIBLICAL CONCEPTION OF SIN**

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Holy Scripture undertakes no demonstration of the reality of sin. In all its statements concerning sin, sin is presupposed as a fact which can neither be controverted nor denied, neither challenged nor obscured. It is true that some reasoners, through false philosophy and materialistic science, refuse to admit the existence of sin, but their endeavors to explain it away by their respective theories is sufficient proof that sin is no figment of the imagination but a solid reality. Others who are not thinkers may sink so far beneath the power of sin as to lose all sense of its actuality, their moral and spiritual natures becoming so hardened and fossilized as to be "past feeling," in which case conviction of sin is no more possible, or at least so deteriorated and unimpressible that only a tremendous upheaval within their souls, occasioned perhaps by severe affliction, but brought about by the inward operation of the Spirit of God, will break up the hard crust of moral numbness and religious torpor in which their spirits are encased. A third class of persons, by simply declining to think about sin, may come in course of time to conclude that whether sin be a reality or not, it does not stand in any relation to them and does not concern them - in which case once more they are merely deceiving themselves. The truth is that it is extremely doubtful whether any intelligent person whose moral intuitions have not been completely destroyed and whose mental perceptions have not been largely blunted by indulgence in wickedness, can successfully persuade himself, at least permanently, that sin is a myth, an illusion of the mind, a creature of the imagination, and not a grim reality. Most men know that sin is in themselves a fact of consciousness they cannot deny, and in others a fact of observation they cannot overlook. As Chesterton expresses it, the fact of sin any one may see in the street: the Bible assumes that any man will discover it who looks into his own heart.

Accordingly the Bible devotes its efforts to imparting to mankind reliable knowledge about the nature universality, the origin and culpability, but also and especially about the removableness of sin; and to set forth these in succession will be the object of the present paper.

**I. THE NATURE OF SIN**

It scarcely requires stating that modern ideas about sin receive no countenance from Scripture, which never speaks about sin as "good in the making," as "the shadow cast by man's immaturity," as "a necessity determined by heredity and environment," as "a stage in the upward development of a finite being," as a "taint adhering to man's corporeal frame," as a "physical disease," "a mental infirmity," "a

f the constitutional weakness," and least of all "as a figment of the imperfectly enlightened, or theologically perverted, imagination," but always as the free act of an intelligent, moral and responsible being asserting himself against the will of his Maker, the supreme Ruler of the universe. That will the Bible takes for granted every person may learn, either from the law written on his own heart (Rom. 1:15); or from the revelation furnished by God to mankind, first to the Hebrew Church in the Old Testament Scriptures, and afterwards to the Christian Church and through it to the whole world in the New Testament Gospels and Epistles. Hence, sin is usually described in the Sacred Volume by terms that indicate with perfect clearness its relation to the Divine will or law, and leaves no uncertainty as to its essential character.

In the Old Testament (Ex. 34:5, 6; Psa. 32:1, 2) three words are used to supply a full definition of sin. (1) "Transgression" (pesha'h) or a falling away from God and therefore a violation of His commandments; with which exposition John agrees when he says that "sin is a transgression of the law" (1 John 3:4), and Paul when he writes (Rom. 4:15), "Where no law is, there is no transgression." (2) "Sin" (charaah) or a missing of the mark, a coming short of one's duty, a failure to do what one ought, for which reason the term is fittingly applied to sins of omission; with which again John agrees when he states (1 John 5:17) that "all unrighteousness [or defect in righteousness] is sin," or Paul when he affirms (Rom. 3:23), that "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God," and Christ when He charges the Scribes and Pharisees with "leaving undone the things they ought to have done" (Matt. 23:23; Luke 11:42). (3) "Iniquity" ('avon) or a turning aside from the straight path, curving like an arrow, hence perversity, depravity and inequality - a conception which finds an echo in the words of a later psalmist (78:5) who complained that Israel had "turned aside from Jehovah like a deceitful bow," and in those of the prophet Isaiah (53:6) who confessed that "all we like sheep have gone astray, and have turned every one unto his own way," and in those of his countryman Hosea (7:16) who lamented that Israel "like a deceitful bow had returned, but not to the Most High." The words employed in the New Testament to designate sin are not much, if at all, different in meaning - hamartia, a failure, fall, a false step, a blunder; and anomia, or lawlessness. Hence the Biblical conception of sin may be fairly summed up in the words of the Westminster Confession: "Sin is any want of conformity unto or transgression of the law of God;" or in those of Melancthon: "Pecatum recte definiture 'avopia, seu discrepantia a lege Deil, h. e. defectus naturae et actionum pugnans cum lege Dei."

**II. THE UNIVERSALITY OF SIN**

According to the Bible, sin is not a quality or condition of soul that has revealed itself only in exceptional individuals like notorious offenders - prodigals, profligates, criminals, and vicious persons generally; or in exceptional circumstances, as for instance in the early ages of man's existence on the earth, or among half developed races, or in lands where the arts and sciences are unknown, or in civilized communities where the local environment is prejudicial to morality; but different from this sin is a quality or condition of soul which exists in every child of woman born, and not merely at isolated times but at all times, and at every stage of his career, though not always manifesting itself in the same forms of thought, feeling, word and action in every individual or even in the same individual. It has affected extensively the whole- race of man in every age from the beginning of the world downward, in every land beneath the sun, in every race into which mankind has been divided, in every situation in which the individual has found himself placed; and intensively in every individual in every department and faculty of his nature, from the circumference to the center, or from the center to the circumference of his being.

Scripture utters no uncertain sound on the world-embracing character of moral corruption, saying in the pre-diluvian age of the world that "all flesh had corrupted its way upon the earth" (Gen. 6:12); in David's generation, that all mankind had "gone aside and become filthy," so that "there was none that did good, no, not one" (Psa. 14:3); in Isaiah's time, that "all we like sheep had gone astray and turned everyone to his own way" (53:6); in the opening of the Christian era, that "all had sinned and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23); and generally Solomon's verdict holds goods of every day, "There is no man that sinneth not" (1 Kings 8:46), not even the best of men who have been born again by the Spirit and the incorruptible seed of the Word of God, renewed in their minds and created anew in Christ Jesus. Even of these one writer says: "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:8); while another counsels Christians to mortify the deeds of the body, and to put off the old man which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts of the flesh (Rom. 7:13; Col. 3:5-10); and a third asserts that "in many things we all offend" (James 3:2). How true this is may be learned from the fact that Scripture mentions only one person in whom there was no sin, viz., Jesus of Nazareth, who not only challenged His contemporaries (in particular His enemies) to convict Him of sin, but of whom those who knew Him most intimately (His disciples) testified that He "did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth" (1 Pet. 2:22; 1 John 3:5). Of this exception of course the explanation was and is that He was "God manifest in the flesh" (1 Tim. 3:16). But besides Him not a single person figures on the page of Holy Writ of whom it is said or indeed could have been said that he was sinless. Neither Enoch nor Noah in the ante-diluvian age; neither Abraham nor Isaac in patriarchal times; neither Moses nor Aaron in the years of the Israelitish wanderings; neither David nor Jonathan in the days of the undivided monarchy; neither Peter nor John, neither Barnabas nor Paul, in the Apostolic age, could have claimed such a distinction, and these were some of the best men that have ever appeared on this planet.

Nor is it merely extensively that the reign of sin over the human family is universal, but intensively as well. It is not a malady which has affected only one part of man's complex constitution: every part thereof has felt its baleful influence. It has darkened his understanding and made him unable, without supernatural illumination, to apprehend and appreciate spiritual things. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. 2:14); and again, "The Gentiles walk in the vanity of their minds, having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their hearts" (Eph. 4:17, 18). It defiles the heart, so that if left to itself, it becomes deceitful above all things and desperately wicked" (Jer. 17:9), so "full of evil" (Eccl. 9:3) and "only evil continually" (Gen. 6:5), that out of it proceed "evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications and such like" (Matt. 15:19), thus proving it to be a veritable cage of unclean birds. It paralyzes the will, if not wholly, at least partially, in every case, so that even regenerated souls have often to complain like Paul that when they would do good evil is present with them, that they are carnal sold under sin, that what they would they do not, and what they hate they do, that in their flesh, i.e., their sin-polluted natures, dwelleth no good thing, and that while to will is present with them, how to perform that which is good they know not (Rom. 7:14-25). It dulls the conscience, that vicegerent of God in the soul, renders it less quick to detect the approach of evil, less prompt to sound a warning against it and sometimes so dead as to be past feeling about it (Eph. 4:19). In short there is not a faculty of the soul that is not injured by it, "Sin when it is finished bringeth forth death" (James 1:5).

**III. THE ORIGIN OF SIN**

How a pure being, possessed of those intellectual capacities and moral intuitions which were needful to make him justly responsible to Divine law, could and did lapse from his primitive innocence and fall into sin is one of those dark problems which philosophers and theologians have vainly endeavored to solve. No more reliable explanation of sin's entrance into the universe in general and into this world in particular has ever been given than that which is furnished by Scripture.

According to Scripture sin first made its appearance in the angelic race, though nothing more is recorded than the simple fact that the angels sinned (2 Pet. 2:4) and kept not their first estate (or principality) but left their own (or proper) habitation (Jude 6), their motive or reason for doing so being passed over in silence. The obvious deduction is that the sin of these fallen spirits was a free act on their part, dictated by dissatisfaction with the place which had been assigned to them in the hierarchy of heaven and by ambition to secure for themselves a loftier station than that in which they had been placed. Yet this does not answer the question how such dissatisfaction and ambition could arise in beings that must be presumed to have been created sinless. And inasmuch as external influence in the shape of temptation from without, by intelligences other than themselves, is by the supposition excluded, it does not appear that other answer is possible than that in the creation of a finite personality endowed with freedom of will, there is necessarily involved the possibility of making a wrong, in the sense of a sinful, choice.

In the case of man, however, sin's entrance into the world receives a somewhat different explanation from the sacred writers. With one accord they ascribe the sinful actions, words, feelings and thoughts of each individual to his own deliberate free choice, so that he is thereby with perfect justice held responsible for his deviation from the path of moral rectitude; but some of the inspired penmen make it clear that the entrance of sin into this world was effected through the disobedience of the first man who stood and acted as the representative and surety of his whole natural posterity (Rom. 5:12), and that the first man's fall was brought about by temptation from without, by the seductive influence of Satan, the lord of the fallen spirits already mentioned, the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience ( Gen. 2:1-6; John 8: 44; 2 Cor. 11:3; Eph. 2:2). Whatever view may be taken of the origin and authorship, literary form and documentary source of the Genesis story of the fall (on these points this paper does not enter) its teaching unmistakably is, to this effect: That the first man's lapse from a state of innocence entailed disastrous consequences upon himself and his descendants. Upon himself it wrought immediate disturbance of his whole nature (as already explained), implanting in it the seeds of degeneration, bodily, mental, moral and spiritual, filling him with fear of his Maker, laying upon his conscience a burden of guilt, darkening his perceptions of right and wrong, (as was seen in his unmanly attempt to excuse himself by blaming his wife,) and interrupting the hitherto peaceful relations which had subsisted between himself and the Author of his being. Upon his descendants it opened the floodgates of corruption by which their natures even from birth fell beneath the power of evil, as was soon witnessed in the dark tragedy of fratricide with which the tale of human history began, and in the rapid spread of violence through the pre-diluvian world.

This is what theologians call the doctrine of "Original Sin," by which they mean that the results of Adam's sin, both legal and moral, have been transmitted to Adam's posterity, so that now each individual comes into the world, not like his first father, in a state of moral equilibrium - "born good," as Lord Palmerston of England used to say, or in the words of Pelagius - "born without virtue and without vice, but capable of both" (capaces utriusque rei, non pleni nascimur, et sine virtute ita et sine vitio procreamur), but as the inheritor of a nature that has been disempowered by sin.

That this doctrine, though frequently opposed, has a basis in science and philosophy, as well as in Scripture, is becoming every day more apparent. The scientific law of heredity by which not only physical but mental and moral characteristics are transmitted from parent to child seems to justify the Scripture statement, that "by one man's disobedience sin entered into the world and death by sin, and so death passed upon all men, because that all have sinned" (Rom. 5:12), The following words of the late Principal Fairbairn in his monumental work, "The Philosophy of Religion" (p. 165), go to support the Scriptural position: "Man is to God a whole, a colossal individual, whose days are centuries, whose organs are races, whose being as corporate endures immortal amid the immortality (mortality?) of its constituent units... Hence there must be a Divine judgment of the race as a race, as well as of the individual as an individual." But in any case, whether confirmed or contradicted by modern thought, the doctrine of Scripture shines like a sunbeam, that man is "conceived in sin and shapen in iniquity" (Psa. 51:5), that children are "estranged from the womb and go astray" (Psa. 58:3), that all are by nature "children of wrath" (Eph. 2:3), that "the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth" (Gen. 8:21), and that everyone requires to have "a new heart" created in him (Psa. 51:10), since "that which is born of the flesh is flesh" (John 3:6), and "no man can bring a clean thing out of an unclean" (Job 15:14). If these passages do not show that the Bible teaches the doctrine of original, or transmitted and inherited, sin, it is difficult to see in what clearer or more emphatic language the doctrine could have been taught. The truth of the doctrine may be challenged by those who repudiate the authority of Scripture; that it is a doctrine of Scripture can hardly be denied.

**IV. THE CULPABILITY OF SIN**

By this is meant not merely the blameworthiness of sin as an act, inexcusable on the part of its perpetrator, who, being such a personality as he is, endowed with such faculties as are his, placed under a law so good and holy, just and spiritual, simple and easy as that prescribed by God, and having such motives and inducements to keep it as were offered to him - to the first man and also to his posterity, - ought never to have committed it; nor only the heinousness of it, as an act done against light and love bestowed upon the doer of it, and in flagrant opposition to the holiness and majesty of the Lawgiver so that He, the Lawgiver, cannot but regard it with abhorrence as an act abominable in His sight, and repel from His presence as well as extrude from His favor the individual who has become chargeable with it; but over and above these representations of sin which are all Scriptural, by the culpability of sin is intended its exposure to the penalty affixed by Divine justice to transgression.

That a penalty was affixed by God in the first instance when man was created, the Eden narrative in Genesis declares: "The Lord God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil thou shalt not eat of it, for in the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" ( Gen. 2:16); and that this penalty still overhangs the impenitent is not only distinctly implied in our Saviour's language, that apart from His redeeming work the world, i.e., every individual therein, was in danger of perishing and was indeed already condemned (John 3:16-18); but it is expressly declared by John who says, that "the wrath of God abideth" on the unbeliever (3:16), and by Paul who asserts that "the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23).

Without entering on the vexed question as to how far Adam's posterity are legally responsible for Adam's sin, in the sense that apart from their own transgressions they would be adjudged to spiritual and eternal death, it is manifest that Scripture includes in the just punishment of sin more than the death of the body. That this does form part of sin's penalty can hardly be disputed by a careful reader of the Bible; but equally that that penalty includes what theologians call spiritual and eternal death, Scripture unmistakably implies. When it affirms that men are naturally "dead in trespasses and in sins," it obviously purposes to convey the idea that until the soul is quickened by Divine grace it is incapable, not of thinking upon the subject of religion, or reading the Word of God, or of praying, or of exercising faith, but of doing anything spiritually good or religiously saving, of securing their legal justification before a Holy God, or of bringing about their spiritual regeneration. When Scripture further asserts that the unbeliever shall not see life (John 3:36), and that the wicked shall go away into everlasting punishment (Matt. 25:46), it assuredly does not suggest that on entering the other world the unsaved on earth will have another opportunity of accepting salvation (Second Probation), or that extinction of being will be their lot (Annihilation), or that all mankind will eventually attain salvation (Universalism). (On these three modern substitutes for the doctrine of future punishment see next section.) Meanwhile it suffices to observe that the words just quoted seem to teach that the penalty of sin continues beyond the grave. Granting that the words of Christ about the worm that never dies and the fire that shall not be quenched are figurative, they unquestionably signify that the figures stand for some terrible calamity, - on the one hand, loss of happiness, separation from the source of life, exclusion from blessedness, and, on the other, access of misery, suffering, wretchedness, woe, which will be realized by the wicked as the due reward of their impenitent and disobedient lives, and which no revolving years will relieve. The pendulum of the great clock of eternity, as it swings through the ages, will seem to be ever saying: "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still, and he that is filthy, let him be filthy still; he that is righteous, let him be righteous still, and he that is holy, let him be holy still."

**V. THE REMOVAL OF SIN**

Heinous and culpable as sin is, it is not left in Scripture for the contemplation of readers in all the nakedness of its loathsome character in God's sight, and in all the heaviness of its guilt before the law, without hope of remedy for either; but in a cheering and comforting light it is set forth as an offence that may be forgiven and a defilement that will or may be ultimately cleansed.

As for the pardonableness of sin, that indeed constitutes the pith and marrow of the "Good News" for the publication of which the Bible was written. From the first page in Genesis to the last in Revelation an undertone, swelling out as the end approaches into clear and joyous accents of love and mercy, proclaiming that the God of heaven, while Himself holy and just, of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, and unable to clear the guilty, is nevertheless merciful and gracious, long-suffering and slow to wrath, abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression and sin (Ex. 34: 6); announcing that He has made full provision for harmonizing the claims of mercy and justice in His own character by laying help upon One that is mighty, (Psa. 89:19), even His only begotten and well-beloved Son, upon whom He had laid the iniquity of us all (Isa. 53:6), that He might once for all, as the Lamb of God, take away the sins of the world (John 1:29), intimating that the whole work necessary for enabling sinful men to be forgiven has been accomplished by Christ's death and resurrection, and that now God is in Him "reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing unto men their trespasses" (2 Cor. 5:19), inviting men everywhere to repent and be converted, that their sins may be blotted out (Acts 3:19); telling men that nothing more is required of them in order to be freely and fully justified from all their transgressions than faith in the propitiation of the cross (Rom. 3:25); and declaring that nothing will shut a sinner out from forgiveness except refusal to believe in the great redemption and accept the freely offered forgiveness - though that will, since it is written that he who believeth not on the Son of God "shall not see life" (John 3:36).

The ultimate removal of sin from the souls of the believing and pardoned is left by Scripture in no uncertainty. It was foretold in the name given to the Saviour at His birth: "Thou shalt call His name Jesus, because He shall save His people from ["out of," not "in"] their sins." It was implied in the object contemplated by His incarnation: "He was manifested to take away our sins." It is declared to have been the purpose of His death upon the cross: "He gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity and purify unto Himself a peculiar people zealous of good works." It is held up before the Christian as his final destiny "to be conformed to the image of His [God's] Son," to be presented "faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy," and to be a dweller in the heavenly city "into which there can enter nothing that defileth."

Whether sin will be ultimately extirpated if not from the universe, then from the family of man, is a different question, upon which the pronouncement of Scripture is thought by some to be less explicit. Its complete and permanent removal from the race is considered by certain interpreters to be taught in Scripture. That texts can be cited which seem to lend support to the theories of Annihilation, Second Probation, and Universal Salvation need not be denied; but a close examination of the passages in question will show that the support derived from them is exceedingly precarious.

That those who depart this life in impenitence and unbelief will be annihilated either at death or after the resurrection is deemed a legitimate deduction from the use of the word death as the punishment of sin. But as "applied to man death does not necessarily mean extinction of being." Bishop Butler long ago drew attention to the fact that various organs of the body might be removed without extinguishing the indwelling spirit, and argued that it was at least probable that the immaterial part of man would not be destroyed though the entire material frame were reduced to dust; and only recently Sir Oliver Lodge from the presidential chair told the British Association that the best science warranted belief in the continuity of existence after death. Solely on the assumption that mind is merely a function of matter can the dissolution of the body be regarded as the extinction of being. Such an assumption is foreign to Scripture. In the Old Testament David expected to "dwell in the house of the Lord forever;" Asaph at the end of life hoped to be "received into glory;" and Solomon wrote: "Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was, and the spirit shall return to God who gave it." In the New Testament Christ took for granted that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, though long dead were still living, and in His parable assumed that Dives and Lazarus still existed in the unseen world, although their bodies were in the grave. He also assured the dying robber that when the anguish of the cross was over they would pass together into Paradise, and counselled men generally to be afraid of "him who could destroy both soul and body in hell." Paul, too, had no hesitation in writing that to be "absent from the body" meant to be present with the Lord," nor had Stephen any doubt in praying as he closed his eyes in death: "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." None of these citations suggest that the soul is simply a function of the body, or that it ceases to be when the body dies.

But now, conceding that the souls of the impenitent are not annihilated at or after death, may it not be that another opportunity of accepting the Gospel will be afforded them, and that in this way sin may be removed even from them. This theory of a Second Probation, is commonly thought to derive countenance from two passages of Scripture of doubtful interpretation- 1 Pet. 3:19; 4:6. Were the best scholars agreed as to the exact import of the two statements that Christ "by the Spirit went and preached to the spirits in prison" and that "the Gospel was preached also to them that are dead," it might be possible to make these texts the basis of a theological doctrine. But scholars are not agreed; and well informed students of the Bible are aware that both statements can be explained in such a way as to render them useless as a basis for the doctrine of a second probation. In judging concerning this, therefore, dependence must be placed on texts which admit of no dubiety as to their meaning. Such texts are Matt. 12:32: "Whosoever speaketh a word against the Holy Ghost it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, nor in that which is to come" - no second chance in this case. Matt. 25:48: "These shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal." Not much hope here of the ultimate destruction of sin through a second probation. Every attempt to find room for the idea shatters itself on the unchallengeable fact that the words "everlasting" and "eternal" are the same in Greek (aionion) and indicate that the punishment of the wicked and the blessedness of the righteous are of equal duration. 2 Cor. 6:2: "Behold, now is the day of salvation" - not hereafter in a future state of existence, but here in this world. Nor is it merely that the doctrine of a second probation is devoid of support from Scripture, but, contrary to all experience, it takes for granted that every unsaved soul would accept the second offer of salvation, which is more than anyone can certainly affirm; and, if all did not, sin would still remain. It may be argued that all would accept because of the fuller light they would then have as to the paramount importance of salvation, or because of the stronger influences that will then be brought to bear upon them; but on this hypothesis a reflection would almost seem to be cast on God for not having done all He might have done to save men while they lived, a reflection good men will be slow to make.

The third theory for banishing sin from the human family if not from the universe is that of Universalism, by which is signified that through reformatory discipline hereafter the souls of all will be brought into subjection to Jesus Christ. That the universal headship of Christ is taught in Scripture is true: Paul declares that all things will yet be subdued unto Christ (1 Cor. 15:28) and that it was God's purpose in the fulness of the times "to gather all things into one in Christ" (Eph. 1: 10). But these statements do not necessarily demand the inference that all will surrender in willing subjection to Christ. Subject to Him must every power and authority be, human and angelic, hostile and friendly, believing and unbelieving. "He must reign till all His enemies have been placed beneath His feet" - not taken to His heart, received into His love and employed in His service. This does not look like universal salvation and the complete extinction of moral evil or sin in the universe. Solemn and sad as the thought is that sin should remain, if not in many, yet in some of God's creatures, it is the teaching of Scripture. In the resurrection at the last day, it is written, "All who are in their graves shall come forth, they that have done good unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation," or "judgment" (R. V.) (John 5:29).

A dark and insoluble mystery was the coming of sin into God's universe at the first: as dark a mystery is its remaining in a race that was from eternity the object of God's love and in time was redeemed by the blood of God's Son, and graciously acted on by God's Spirit. Happily we are not required to understand all mysteries: we can leave this one confidently in the Divine Father's hand.