

THE GOSPEL VOCATION.

The
Gospel
Call.

The Divine purpose of saving the world, accomplished in Christ, is made known to all men by a proclamation which, as containing the free offer of grace, and the command to accept it on certain conditions, is a Vocation or Call. However profound is the mystery involved in such a thought, that call must needs, in some sense, be as universal as the benefit of atonement, which embraces mankind. But it has had, in the mystery of the Divine will, an historical development. Before the fulness of time it proceeded by a principle of election on which vocation followed; but, under the last dispensation, the call is as wide as the preaching of the Gospel, and election follows vocation. In this meaning of the term, with which alone we now have to do, the Spirit's calling is efficacious, inasmuch as through the Word He renders all men who hear that Word conscious of their responsibility, and capable of obedience; but it is not irresistible. In the case of those who accept the Divine offer, the term is often used to express their Christian state and privileges generally: it gives them one of their designations as The Called.

The three words *καλεῖν* to call, *κλήσις* vocation, and *κλητός* called refer respectively to the Caller, the act of calling, and the result. The present section has mainly to do with the act and not with the result: the latter belonging rather to the Spirit's work in the preliminaries of salvation. It is obvious, also, that our subject must take no account of some limited applications of the word: for instance, those in which it refers to the Divine power calling *those things which be not as though they were*; those in which it is used as meaning simply designation, as *I have even called thee by thy name*; and, lastly, those in which it signifies a vocation to special office, such as that of St. Paul *called to be an Apostle*.

Termin

Rom. iv.

17

Is. xlv. 4.

Rom. i. 1.

of the apostleship. Though the distinction cannot be rigorously observed, we must limit the term as much as possible to the declaration of God concerning His purpose of salvation; and, while we do so, remember that we are dealing with a subject which is at present involved in impenetrable mystery.

Universal
Redemp-
tion.

VOCATION AND UNIVERSAL REDEMPTION.

The Divine call is based upon the Divine counsel for the salvation of mankind. This involves two important postulates. It requires, first, that we believe in the universality of the call, whatever difficulties this faith may encounter; and, secondly, it prepares us to expect that the call will, like the purpose of redemption, be gradually made manifest to all men.

For all
Men.
John iii.
16.
1 Tim. ii.
4.

1. Scripture establishes, as we have seen, the fact that the eternal purpose of redemption embraced the entire body of mankind. *God so loved the world, that He would have all men to be saved.* But there is only a step, and that a necessary one, to the universal declaration of His will in His Son. The Creator loved the world before He declared His love in Christ; He declared His will to save all, and that will is connected with the fundamental truth that as *there is one God*, so also *there is one Mediator between God and man*, that Mediator being *Jesus Christ, Man*, the Representative of mankind. What St. Paul, in his last word on this subject, calls the Philanthropy, or *the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man*, as such, *appeared* in the Gospel, no less than a catholic love to the entire race: the word *φιλανθρωπία* is the plainest and strongest argument for the universality of the salvation provided. Now, whatever difficulties may arise to baffle our finite faculties, we are bound to believe that the whole world, directly or indirectly, sooner or later, must receive the glad tidings of the Gospel.

Titus iii.
4.

Gradual.

2. As it has pleased God to make the revelation of His purpose gradual, so we might expect that the proclamation of His mercy in accordance with that purpose would be gradual. In

fact the two are one; and they are united in many passages. Its slow and partial and progressive announcement is bound up with the gradual development of the design of salvation itself. Here two things may be noted. The law of the Divine economy, according to which the education of fallen mankind has been conducted by a development of truth, and the orderly unfolding of one great mediatorial system, admits of no exception to it, and no appeal from it. But the gradual and slow progress of the call has reference only to the external proclamation. Known only to God are His internal communications with the spirits of men.

HISTORICAL PROCESS.

Historical
Calls.

The Divine Call, keeping pace with the unfolding of the redeeming purpose, is with reference to all mankind, and apart from revelation, general and indirect: in the universal influence of the Spirit upon the fallen spirits of men, and in His providential guidance of the nations. The direct Call through the Word has been twofold: first, during the ages of preparation, it was spoken to the people of the old covenant and of the election; secondly, in Christ Jesus, it is the Gospel Call proper addressed to all mankind, leading to the election of those who believe.

THE INDIRECT CALL.

Indirect
Call.

The Universal Call, *Vocatio Catholica*, is that by which the Holy Spirit has moved upon the chaos of the nations through a secret influence to which the term call is only improperly applied. Whatever name, however, is applied to it there can be no doubt that the world has been under the secret and mysterious attraction of grace from the beginning, over and above the interior *Light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.* John i. 9.

1. The influence of the Holy Ghost, the gift of redemption to the fallen race, must not be limited. We have intimations in the early Scriptures that the Spirit strove WITH MAN; throughout the Old Testament the rebellious *vexed His holy Spirit*; and, though Universal Spirit. Gen. vi. 3 Is. lxiii. 10.

this was the special sin of the ancient people, we must assume that it was the secret of the commencing ungodliness of the world at large. In the New Testament we are told that the Gentiles universally had the law of God written *in their hearts*: and certainly there has been no universal sense of truth but as the fruit of the influence of Him who is *the Spirit of the truth*. He in every age HATH SHOWED it unto them.

Rom. ii. 15; i. 19.
John xvi. 13.
Tradition. 2. The early revelation which was given to the world before the first dispersion of its inhabitants was a sound *that went into all the earth*: issuing from the household of Adam and afterwards from that of Noah. And, however perverted became the traditions of primeval truth, they were in a certain sense a constant appeal to the world to remember its Creator in the days of its youth. In like manner, and this may be referred to by way of analogy, the most corrupt presentation of the Gospel in the darkest ages of Christendom carried with it the word of life.

Providential Guidance
Acts xiv. 17.
3. Moreover St. Paul tells us, in one of the few early discourses to the Gentiles that are recorded, of God's providential call to all nations. *Nevertheless He left not Himself without witness*. How this catholic preacher of a Catholic Christianity elsewhere dilated upon this theme we know not. But these words have a large meaning; and, if we collate the preacher in the Acts with the teacher to the Romans, we shall gather that the Apostle of the Gentiles magnified his office in this sense also.

THE DIRECT CALL.

Direct Call.

The history of the Gospel vocation, as direct through the Word, is in Scripture divided into two branches. In the Old Testament it was limited to one race, first elected and then called; in the New Testament it is universally to all men, first called and then elected: a distinction of great importance.

Old Testament. I. The Vocation of Abraham is the central point of Old-Covenant Election. But this looks back upon a previous historical development of the principle, and looks forward to its consummation and change in the Gospel.

Earliest type. 1. In the two sons of our first parents the separation of God's people had its first type; and in the salvation of one family the Flood was the second. Between the sons of Noah God put a difference

not altogether dependent upon their several personal acts ; and the special vocation followed a special election. For, though the dealings of God with the two classes respectively had reference to their moral character, especially as it respects the leading personages, such as Shem and Noah, yet we cannot but discern a direct and sovereign election of the peoples and nations who should carry on His central design.

2. The call of Abraham was the choice of a covenant people. Abraham. With him this special national or race election specifically began. The words of Jehovah to the children of Israel, *the whole family which I brought up from the land of Egypt, saying, You only have I known of all the families of the earth*, is the strongest expression of the fact. This election, as in the New Testament, is adoption : *Israel is My son, even My firstborn*. Hence the people thus distinguished were the *peculiar people*. The thought has a striking illustration in the words of the prophet concerning the typical chosen nation : *When Israel was a child then I loved him, and called My son out of Egypt* ; where the election is followed by vocation and adoption. Amos iii. 1, 2. Ex. iv. 22. Deut. xiv. 2. Hos. xi. 1.

3. Throughout the development of the Old-Testament Election there runs the mystery of a Divine purpose of unfathomable wisdom ; in the contemplation of which, however, two things must be remembered : first, that this choice was never altogether without respect to the moral character of its objects, and, secondly, that it always was connected with a prophecy of a universal call in the Gospel. Though the Supreme God used occasionally the instrumentality of the ungodly He carried on the great purposes of His grace by men who responded to His internal call, and were morally fit agents of His will. Abel, Noah, Abraham, are instances of this ; nor is Jacob an exception. It is true that *the gifts and calling of God are without repentance* ; and that, having chosen a lineage out of which His Son should arise, He did not vary from His purpose in consequence of much unfaithfulness on the part of the elect people. But it is true also that the leading personages on whom the absolute election fell were among the foremost saints of history. Moreover, in His government of the people of His special election God was a jealous God ; and often chastised them by the very heathen whom He passed by in their Election and Adoption. Rom. xi. 29.

favour. Above all, He failed not always to let them know that they were only the temporary Election of His counsel, and that
 Mal. i. 11. His Name should one day *be great among the Gentiles*. But, after every qualification, the profound mystery remains untaken away, nor is it altogether removed in the more catholic dispensation of the Gospel.

The Gospel. II. The direct call of the Gospel after the coming of Christ, or rather after the Day of Pentecost, is distinguished from that of the Old Testament by not being national, and by preceding the election. But this leads us onward to the nature of the vocation itself.

The Call. THE NATURE OF THE GOSPEL CALL.

The Gospel Call is the universal offer of salvation and command to submit to its Author; proclaimed by the Spirit through the Word committed to the keeping and ministry of the Christian Church; containing the glad tidings of the earnest purpose of God towards every individual of mankind; effectual through the Spirit's grace to all who yield; but declared not to be irresistible, and in fact resisted, even finally resisted, by unbelief.

THE OFFER OF SALVATION.

Its Threefold Nature. The Call is the PROCLAMATION of the redemption accomplished by Christ; the OFFER of its blessings on certain conditions; and the COMMAND to submit to the authority of Christ the Mediator of these blessings. These three are one in the embassy of the New Covenant; and the Gospel is not fully preached unless equal prominence is given to all. The model of this preaching is found in the Acts of the Apostles, where St. Peter and St. Paul are the leading examples. The Proclamation and the Offer and the Command must be united in every true delivery of the Gospel Call, as they are invariably united in the original examples. The first
 Acts v. 32. sound of that Vocation ends with such a note as this: *and we are His witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, Whom*

God hath given to them that obey Him. Here are the three elements to which we have given prominence: the testimony given; the terms prescribed, and the submission demanded. St. Paul's first recorded sermon contains them all with equal precision: *Be it known unto you, . . . all that believe; . . . beware therefore!* Were there no theory to be served it must be admitted that the call of the Gospel is a witness to everyone of a blessing offered on terms open to all, and enforced by a command to submit to the Mediatorial Authority of Him Who is raised up to dispense it. The NAME is preached as a Testimony of salvation, as the Object of faith, and the Authority to which universal submission is due. Acts xiii. 38,39,40

IN THE CHURCH THROUGH THE WORD

The second proposition contains three points: the Spirit is the Agent of the Call; it is connected with the Word; and that Word is ordinarily committed to the ministry of the Christian Church. The doctrine of the Gospel Vocation demands a careful adjustment of the relations of these three. The Calling.

I. Generally, He Who calleth is God, though not specifically as the Father. *We preached unto you the Gospel of God*—a phrase which seldom occurs—*Who hath called you unto His kingdom and glory.* Christ also, though only as upon earth, declares: *I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.* The Holy Spirit is now permanently the manifestation of the God of the Gospel Vocation: *The Spirit and the Bride say, Come,* where the invitation to sinners follows the invocation of the Lord Himself to return. He is the Preacher in the name of Christ to the world: *He shall testify of Me.* But this in the unity of the Three-One Author of redemption: *All things that the Father hath are Mine: therefore said I, that He shall take of Mine, and shall show it unto you.* The Spirit 1 Thess. ii. 9—12. Matt ix. 13. Rev. xxii 17. John xv. 26. John xvi. 15.

II. The call of the Gospel is ordinarily through the Word. But the Word is both the letter and the substance of the letter: these are united in the instrument which the Holy Ghost employs. The Word.

1. St. Paul says that *faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God,* where he evidently means the doctrine preached: the summary of truths *as the truth is in Jesus.* That the Gospel proclamation is intended seems obvious from the connection of Rom. x. 17; 14, 18. Eph. iv 21.

- that word with what precedes: *How shall they hear without a preacher?* But there is a substantial truth of which the Word written or spoken is only the vehicle. Hence the Apostle adds:
- Rom x 18. *Yes verily, their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world.* And the original passage of the prophet proves that there is a voice of God's Will which is not in written language: *I was made manifest unto them that asked not after Me.*
- Isa lxxv. 1. In this sense there may be a Word *without the Word.*
- 1 Peter iii. 1. 2. Now the call through the Gospel is not limited either to the oral or to the written announcement. It is a silent effectual voice accompanying the truth, wherever the truth is. The Holy Ghost is the Life of the doctrine which is the letter; and most certainly the letter is never without the accompanying Spirit. The letter is not only written; there may be a spoken letter also. Wherever the truth is declared in the name of Jesus it is the instrument of His energy. But the Spirit is not dependent either on the written or on the spoken letter as such. It is the truth which He uses as His instrument. He is *the Spirit of truth.*
- John xvi. 13. The Church. III. The relation of the Church to the Spirit's efficiency through the Word is everywhere made prominent in the New Testament.
- Acts i. 2. The Saviour gave His commission *unto the Apostles whom He had chosen.* Their authority He declared to be from Himself and the reflection or continuation of His own: *As My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you.* The extent of their commission is *all nations*; and the matter of the vocation is the preaching *the Gospel to every creature.* These Apostles to whom the Lord gave commandment themselves in turn gave commandment *through the Holy Ghost* to their successors as responsible for preaching that Gospel to the end of time. But the call is committed really to the Church in a wider sense than this: all who receive the glad tidings must freely give as they have freely received. We read in the Acts that the disciples went everywhere preaching the Word. And the last saying of Scripture on the subject is *The Spirit and the Bride say, Come,* where the mystical fellowship is represented as uniting with the Spirit in beseeching the Saviour to come to His people, and in beseeching all who thirst to come to Him. This general truth may be further unfolded as pointing to the mystery of the Divine law of vocation; impressing deeply the responsibility of
- John xx. 21. Matt. xxviii. 19. Mark xvi. 15. Acts i. 2. Rev. xvii. 17.

the Church ; and carrying in it the prophecy of the eventual proclamation of the Gospel to all men.

1. In every age the work of the Spirit in extending the Kingdom of God has been bound up with human agency. Individuals in the old economy were prominent in every dispensation of it, teaching His will and uttering His prophetic words and carrying on His work generally. The history of ancient revelation is bound up with a series of eminent men ; and not only individuals but the covenant nation itself was elected and called to preach in some sense to the outside world His present and coming Kingdom. The Christian dispensation has introduced no new law : it has only widened the application of the law that operated from the beginning. As Man was taken up into the Godhead to be the procurer of redemption, so that Man who is God uses His brethren for the diffusion of His grace.

Human
Agency.

2. There is no fact more sure, while there is no mystery more profound, than the connection between the fidelity of the Church and the spread of Christ's kingdom. The Call is heard where the Church sends it ; but where the messengers are not sent from among men, there are no angels *having the everlasting Gospel to preach*. *How shall they hear without a preacher ?* was a question which might leave all to the secret arrangements of arbitrary grace. But it is followed by another, which leaves the responsibility with the living Church : *How shall they preach except they be sent ?* Not indeed that the Holy Spirit is, or has ever been, absolutely bound to human instrumentality. The dew of His grace *turrieth not for man, nor waiteth for the sons of men* ; but the gradual and slow spread of Gospel preaching most plainly shows that the energy of the Church has much to do with the term of the final consummation. Our Lord must reign *till He hath put all enemies under His feet* ; but He does not wait for any set time apart from the accomplishment of His Church's mission. Though we dare not limit the operation of grace to the sphere of missionary preaching, we know of no Christianity which the successors of the Apostles do not establish. Hence it is well to fall back upon a double call,—not so dishonourable to the Divine perfections as the external and internal, the former resting on an official will of Heaven, so to speak, and the latter on the private feeling of our heavenly Father,—

Fidelity of
Church.

Rev. xiv. 6.
Rom. x. 14.

Rom. x. 15

Mic. v. 7

1 Cor. xv
25.

one that is open and known and another that is hidden and unknown. There is a secret call in which generally speaking man is not co-operant: which, like the sun, extends its influence to the evil and the good.

Universal. 3. Nothing is more certain in prophecy than that the Vocation of the Gospel in its stricter meaning shall be universal. Both the Old Testament and the New concur to present a perspective in which *this Gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations.*

Matt.
xxiv.14.

THE DIVINE INTENTION IN THE CALL.

Vocatio We may pass with more confidence to the third proposition.
Seria. The Gospel Call contains the earnest purpose of God to save every man who hears it.

A priori. 1. Here if anywhere the a priori style of argument is valid. However the contrary assertion may be disguised it involves dishonour to the truth and faithfulness of God. Many mysteries crowd around the subject, beneath which our reason must bow down; but the superfluous mystery that makes the Righteous Judge utter the gracious offers of His mercy with a secret reserve is one from which every feeling of our reverence and charity recoils. The teaching that finds it necessary to distinguish between an official call for all men and an efficacious call for the elect is self-condemned.

Scripture. 2. We need not defend the honour of God: we have only to interpret His sayings. Our Lord's words ought to be enough: *Compel them to come in!* illustrated as they are by His sorrow over Jerusalem: *How often would I! and ye would not!* And our Lord's will is the will of God, *Who will have all men to be saved*, Who in the Old Testament said, *I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live.* In the New Testament the Gospel is the appearance of the *kindness and love of God our Saviour toward MAN*, or His philanthropy.

Luke xiv.
23.
Matt.
xxiii.37.
1 Tim.ii.4.
Ezek.
xxxiii.11.
Titus.iii.4.

All Com- 3. Such a genuine call implies that the offer of salvation is
mand with always accompanied by sufficient grace for its acceptance. This
Promise. has already been seen in relation to the Word, and will again be considered in the next topic of Preliminary Grace. *Meanwhile,*

there is no need of argument; nor is any specific text necessary. Every Divine commandment is virtually a commandment with promise: with promise not only of blessing to follow obedience but of grace to precede it. The Gospel of Christ is *the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth*. By the special appointment and will of God the Word has grace connected with it, sufficient for every purpose for which it is sent. So it was anciently said: *it shall not return unto Me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please*

Rom. i. 16

Is. lv. 11.

CALLING AND ELECTION.

Those who accept the Divine call through the Word are in the language of Scripture the Elect. And both terms, Calling and Election, or the Called and the Elect, are sometimes used to designate the Christian Estate as such.

The Elect

1. Of a Vocatio Interna, as distinguished from the Vocatio Externa, there is no trace in Scripture: INTERNAL CALLING and EFFECTUAL CALLING are phrases never used. The distinction implies such a difference as would have been clearly stated if it existed; and all that is meant by the internal call finds its expression, as we shall see, in other offices of the Holy Spirit of enlightenment, conviction, and conversion. Each of these terms carries the meaning of an external summons made effectual by interior grace; but never in the sense that sufficient interior grace is denied to any. It may be said that the true internal vocation is election in the strict sense. *Muny be called, but few chosen*. This states a fact over which the Saviour mourns. *I have chosen you out of the world*. This states a fact over which the Saviour rejoices. The term, however, is used in some passages with the same wide application as the term call: for instance, *God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise*, and *Have not I chosen you twelve?* While therefore our Saviour's first word establishes the distinction, and we are warranted in saying that election is the result of accepting the call, we must remember that the New Testament often uses the terms interchangeably. Election always presupposes the call; but the call does not always issue in election.

Effectual Calling.

Matt. xx. 16.
John xv. 19.

1 Cor. i. 27.
John vi. 70.

The Called. 2. The acceptance of the Call, and the Election that follows it are both metonymically used to designate the state of Christians, presumed according to their profession to stand in the grace of God. They are *The Called of Jesus Christ . . . beloved of God, called to be saints, or called saints*. Christians are Saints by designation as well as by internal character; and they are Called by designation, as having accepted the external appeal. So also they are the Elect as separated from the world both outwardly and inwardly. St. Peter writes his Catholic Epistle to *The Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father*, whom he terms a *chosen generation*. St. Paul speaks of *the faith of God's elect*; and St. John of *thy elect sister*. The phrase *The Election* is used for the company of God's chosen among the Jews; but not now generally of all Christians. *God's Elect, or The Elect of God*, are those who belong to the household of faith. The predominant allusion in the Word is to the collective character of the Church which has taken the place of the privileged nation; and that governs the use of the term everywhere, precisely like the denomination the Sanctified or the Saints. Christians are the *Election of Grace* in opposition to the ancient people gathered out of the world; they are the sanctified as separated, instead of them, to God. The word Church or Ecclesia literally means the same as The Called and the Elect: it expresses the result of that which Election means as in the purpose of God.

Rom.i.6,7.
1 Pet. i. 1,
2; ii. 9.
Titus i. 1.
2 John 13.
Rom.xi.7.
Rom. viii.
33.
Col.iii.12.
Rom.xi.6.

CONTINGENCY.

Resistible. The Gospel Call may be resisted and finally resisted; even the Election connected with it may after obedience be forfeited; and, with regard to both classes of the disobedient, the term reprobation is used, though never as the result of a fixed decree.

Matt. xx. 1. *Many be called, but few chosen*. This sufficient word, which should be an end of all controversy, is explained by our Lord Himself: *Ye will not come to Me*. There is nothing more constantly and consistently declared in the older and later Scriptures than the power of man to oppose and oppose successfully the influence of grace. *Ye do always resist the Holy Ghost!* Surely it is dishonourable to the name of God to suppose that He would

Matt. xx.
16.
John v.40.
Acts vii.
51.

charge on sinners a resistance which was to them a necessity, and complain of outrage on His Spirit Whose influences were only partially put forth.

2. There are some passages of Scripture which indicate that the blessings of Election itself may be forfeited: this sacred word is not shielded, nor is its special grace inviolable. Judas was one of the elect: *have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?* When our Lord speaks of the *very elect* being deceived, *if it were possible*, He does not intimate that delusion leading to apostasy was impossible in their case. Though the words might seem to bear that meaning, we must otherwise interpret them. For, at the commencement of the discourse He had said: *Take heed that no man deceive you!* and at the close, *He that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.* St. Peter, whose Epistles dwell much on the privileges of the Election, does not number among those privileges the security against falling: on the contrary he bids his readers *give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall.*

Election
not In-
volute.
J. hn vi.
70.
Matt.
xxiv.24

Matt.
xxiv.
4, 13.

2 Pet. i. 10.

3. Lastly, the Word of God speaks of the possible Reprobation of both these classes,—the Called and the Chosen—but of the reprobation of no other. The vocation of the Word is a mysterious test of their state before God and the truth; and they have failed to sustain that test. They are ἀδοκίμοι. (1.) The called who resist are reprobates. *God gave them over to a reprobate mind who did not like to retain God in their knowledge.* They who resist the truth are the reprobate concerning the faith. (2.) St. Paul speaks of the possibility of the saints being reprobates: *Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?* When we read of the final signature of the *called and chosen and faithful* we are taught that the end is not yet when the called are also chosen. The third word in the great sentence remains: fidelity must seal the eternal grace of election. (3.) There is no reprobation as fixed in the decree of God throughout the Scriptures of mercy and truth. The idea is inconsistent with everything but a probation and a wilful failure in probation.

Repro-
bation.

Rom. i. 28.
2 Tim. iii.
8.

2 Cor. xiii.
5.

Rev. xvii.
14.

The only
ἀδοκίμοι.