

# A letter on the Sin against the Holy Ghost

James Arminius

March 3rd, 1599

Translated by J Nichols

London: Longman Hurst Rees Orme Brown and Green  
1828

TO JOHN UYTENBOGARD, HIS MOST DEAR AND PECULIARLY BELOVED BROTHER IN CHRIST, JAMES ARMINIUS WISHES HEALTH AND HIS WELFARE THROUGH CHRIST

*Most Friendly Of Mankind:*

As You intend soon to preach before the members of your church on *The Sin against the Holy Ghost*, you request that I will disclose to you my meditations and musings on that subject, on which you had also previously asked my opinion; but at that time, it was not in my power to comply with your request; for I had formed no distinct conception in my mind respecting it, neither have my sentiments upon it yet attained to any certain and full persuasion. But my slight musings and meditations, I neither feel any desire of denying to you, nor would it be my duty to withhold them from one to whom I have long ago transferred the plenary right of requiring and even commanding any thing from me. Nor will I suffer myself to be seduced from this desire of obeying you by any false and rustic shame, though I know that my contemplations on this question, are such as cannot satisfy you, since, in fact, they are not much approved by myself. For, of what kind soever they may be, I am aware that they deserve to obtain some excuse, as they are concerning that question, than which scarcely any one of greater difficulty can be found in the whole Scripture, as St Augustine testifies when professedly treating upon this subject (tom. 19, fol. 9), in his explication of Matt. xii. 31, 32. Besides, I hope and feel fully persuaded, that you will so polish these, my rough notes, that I may afterwards receive them from you not only with interest, but also others which will be able entirely to complete my wishes.

But I will not at present examine what St Augustine has produced on the same passage, when writing about this sin; nor what is found on this subject in the writings of other authors, whether among the ancients or in our own times, lest I should be unnecessarily prolix, especially as you are yourself extremely well furnished with their works, and are ready to make the necessary inquiry into their sentiments. I will transcribe for you my own meditations, not in that order which is suitable to the nature of the thing itself, (for how is it possible for me to do this, when it is not fully known by me?) but in the order which it is possible for me to observe in the confusion of various thoughts.

It will not be useless, in the first place, to prefix to this investigation those passages of Scripture in which mention is made of this sin, or in which it seems at least to be made.

Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men; but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men. And whosoever speaketh against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him; but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world nor in the world to come (Matt. xii. 31, 32).

Verily I say unto you All sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men, and blasphemies wherewithsoever they shall blaspheme; but he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost, hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation (Mark iii. 28, 29).

And whosoever shall speak a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him; but unto him that blasphemeth against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven (Luke xii. 10).

There are, besides, two passages in the Epistle to the Hebrews, the first of them in the Sixth chapter, the other in the Tenth, which it seems possible to refer to this subject without any great detriment.

For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again to repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame? (Heb. vi. 4–6).

He that despised Moses' law, died without mercy under two or three witnesses; of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace? (x. 28, 29).

To these may be added a passage from St John's First Epistle:

If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it? (1 John v. 16).

Let the following passage also, from the Epistle to the Hebrews, be added, for the sake of explanation, not because it is on exactly the same subject:

For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him, God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will? (Heb. ii. 2–4).

To these, let another passage be subjoined from the Acts of the Apostles:

Ye stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost. As did your fathers, so do ye (Acts vii. 51).

But about the same persons, it was said, in a preceding chapter,

And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which Stephen spake (vi. 10).

And all that sat in the council looking steadfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel (vi. 15).

I unite these passages for no other reason than that I may be able to contemplate them all together at one glance, and may direct my thoughts according to them.

And, first, we must see the appellations which the sin receives about which we are here treating.

The Evangelists Matthew, Mark and Luke call it ‘the blasphemy of the Spirit,’ or ‘the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost.’ In the Sixth chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews, it is called ‘a prolapsing’ or ‘falling away,’ and in the Tenth chapter of the same Epistle, it is called ‘contumely poured on the Spirit of grace,’ or ‘a doing despite to the Spirit of grace.’ I might add, from the Sixth chapter, ‘the crucifying afresh of the Son of God,’ and ‘the putting of him to an open shame;’ and from the tenth, ‘the treading under foot of the Son of God,’ and ‘the profanation of the blood of the covenant,’ unless they were capable of being referred to some other thing, which we shall afterwards discuss. In 1 John v. 16, it is designated as ‘a sin unto death.’ The sin which is described in Hebrews ii. 2–4, is denominated ‘a neglecting of the salvation which was first announced by Christ and his apostles,’ and confirmed by God with infallible testimonies. In Acts vii. 51, it is called ‘a resisting of the Holy Ghost.’ We are permitted thus to employ these passages, because an inquiry is instituted into the *genus* of the sin.

He, against whom the sin is committed, is styled by St Matthew, Mark and Luke, ‘the Holy Spirit;’ and, in Hebrews x., he is called the ‘Spirit of grace;’ by this addition of the epithet ‘of grace’ to the Spirit, seems to be intimated that the person of the Holy Spirit himself is not so much the object of consideration in this passage, as some gracious act of his. The same Evangelists make a distinction between this sin and that against ‘the Son of Man,’ while in Hebrews vi. and x., the same sin is said to redound to the ignominy of the Son of God and of his blood — two declarations which must afterwards be reconciled, for each of them is true.

But when the men who commit this sin are described, in Hebrews vi., as ‘those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of that heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come,’ in Hebrews ii., salvation is said to have been announced to them, and confirmed by indubitable testimonies. In Acts vi., it is attributed to them that ‘they were not able to resist the wisdom and Spirit by which Stephen spoke,’ and that they ‘saw his face as that of an angel.’ From these particulars, it seems proper to collect by what cause they were impelled who committed this sin.

It is, moreover, attributed to this sin by Matthew, Mark and Luke, that it is irremissible, or not to be forgiven; by St John that it is unto death. The same thing is affirmed in Hebrews vi., but, as it appears to me, it is in the cause; for it is said to be impossible that he who has thus ‘fallen away should be renewed again unto repentance.’ In Hebrews x., in the application of the comparison, this sin is said to deserve a more severe punishment than the despising of the law of Moses; and in the commencement of the same passage, the certainty of punishment is signified by these words: ‘He died without mercy,’ which seems also to be placed in the antapodosis, the repetition or summing up. In Hebrews ii., he who neglects this salvation is said ‘to receive a just recompense of reward.’

Besides, the cause why that sin is irremissible, unto death, and why the man who thus sins cannot be renewed unto repentance, seems to be rendered in Hebrews vi., in the following terms: ‘... seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame.’ And in Hebrews x., in the following words: ‘... who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing.’ For it does not seem to me that these expressions can be placed collaterally with falling away and doing despite to the Spirit of grace; but I think they must be placed in subordination among themselves.

Lastly, in Hebrews ii. and x., is instituted a comparison between this sin and the violation and the despising of the law of Moses; for this likewise is worthy of consideration, that we may correctly determine concerning the kind of sin. From this comparison of it appears that the sin about which those passages treat, is not committed against the law of Moses.

But from the contexture of those things which precede, and from a comparison of those which follow, is to be taken the occasion through which Christ, in the Evangelists, St Paul in the Epistle to the Hebrews, and St John in his first Epistle, have made mention of this sin.

Let us now commence an inquiry into the matters which come under consideration in this sin, following, as far as possible, the guidance of those passages which we have premised and prefixed to this our disquisition. But to me it appears possible, most commodiously to circumscribe them within the following bounds: Let us, in the first place, enter into a discussion

1. on the Genus or Kind of this sin;
2. its Object and Mode;
3. Those who commit the sin;
4. the Impelling Cause;
5. the End of this sin;
6. the Degrees of this sin;
7. the peculiar Attribute of this sin — its Irremissibility or unpardonableness, and its Cause.

To these we shall subjoin the three other questions, which you mention in your letter.

1. Can this sin be known by the human judgment, and what are the marks?
2. Are those who are commonly considered to have perpetrated this sin, to be held as being guilty of it or not?
3. Does not this distinction between the sin against *the Son of Man*, and that against *the Holy Spirit*, contribute to the confirmation of the truth of the personality of the Holy Ghost?

1. With respect to the GENUS or Kind, it is a subject of much regret that a disquisition upon it is a matter of great difficulty. For it is produced from no other source than the too great fertility of sin, and its deduction and derivation into various species; yet it is not necessary to refer all the distributions and distinctions of sin to this point; we must descend commodiously by those degrees which may bring us down to this kind of sin. In order to do this, we must commence with that which is the highest. Sin, therefore, is the transgression of the Divine Law, of whatever description that law may be; for we are treating upon a sin of this kind. A transgression of the law is either *Special*, against one or more of the precepts of the law; or it is *Universal*, against the whole and entire law, which is called a rejection and abrogation of the law, and a defection from it, and which is as much against what is commanded or forbidden in the law, as against Him who directly commanded it, through contempt for Him. This kind of sin, I suppose, is signified in the Old Testament by the phrase, *to sin with a high or elevated hand*; for the Moral Law consists of a Preface which is contained in these words: 'I am the Lord thy God, who brought thee out of the land of Egypt,' etc., and of an enumeration of the Precepts. Either the Preface itself is rejected and God directly despised, or sin is committed against the precepts, none of which can in fact be violated without bringing ignominy on the Divine Majesty and pouring contempt upon God. But every sin is not from a contempt for God. David committed adultery, which may be reductively or consequently referred to a contemning of God, and resolved into it; but he did not commit that sin through a contempt for God.

The law of God is now two-fold, the one of Works, the other of Faith; or, the precepts of the law are of two kinds: some, of the Law properly so called, and others of the Gospel. But this sin about which we are treating is not of the kind of those which are perpetrated against the law of God, whether it be a special or universal transgression and an apostasy from the law. This is evident from Hebrews x. 28, 29; for this sin is there compared with the violation or abrogation of the law of Moses, as a greater sin with a smaller one. It is also evident from Hebrews ii. 2–4. This sin is also called 'a doing despite unto the Spirit of grace,' which is not that of the law, but the Spirit of Christ and of his Gospel. It is easy to perceive the same thing in the Evangelists; for, in St Matthew's gospel, Christ says, 'but if I by the Spirit of God cast out devils, then the kingdom of God is come unto you' (xii. 28). This sin, therefore, is committed against the Spirit who testifies that the kingdom of God has arrived; and, on this account, it is not committed against the law of God, but against the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The same thing may be rendered evident from Hebrews vi., in which the apostle treats about a falling away from those gifts which are there enumerated, and which are the gifts of the Gospel of Christ. Christ is also said 'to be crucified afresh and put to an open shame' by this 'falling away;' and, in Hebrews x., he is said to be 'trodden under foot,' and 'the blood of the covenant is said to be profaned.' All these are sins committed, not against the law, but against the Gospel of Christ.

From these observations, it is evident, that those persons who assert that this sin is committed against the acknowledged truth concerning God, and concerning His will and works, have not taught concerning it with sufficient distinctness; they ought to have subjoined 'against the truth of the Gospel.' But the commands of the Gospel are two — that of Faith in Christ, and that of Conversion to God. Concerning Faith it is

manifest. About Conversion let us now inquire; for as aversion from God is produced by sin, the law accuses him who is thus averse or turned aside, and condemns him to cursing, without any hopes of pardon; but the Gospel requires conversion and promises pardon. Therefore, conversion to God is an evangelical command, and not legal. But impenitence is opposed to conversion to God; and this, when final, condemns a man through the peremptory decree of God, that is, through that which is evangelical. This final impenitence, however, cannot be called ‘the sin against the Holy Ghost,’ which is the subject on which we are now treating. For

- a) final impenitence is common to all those who are to be condemned; while the sin against the Holy Ghost attaches to certain persons, or, rather, to very few.
- b) Final impenitence is not committed except at the closing period of life; but this sin is perpetrated while he is still running the space of life. This is apparent from 1 John v. 16: ‘There is a sin unto death; I do not say that he shall pray for it.’
- c) Concerning him who commits the sin unto death it is said that ‘it is impossible for him to be *renewed again to repentance*,’ but this would be a useless expression respecting one who was finally impenitent; for it is well known that all hopes of pardon are terminated by the short course of the present life.
- d) Respecting the sin against the Holy Ghost, it is affirmed that ‘it shall not be forgiven, neither in this world nor in that which is to come;’ that is, it shall never be forgiven. But it is unnecessary to make such an affirmation concerning final impenitence.

This sin, therefore, is a transgression of the precept which commands faith in Jesus Christ. But as the doctrine concerning faith in Jesus Christ is not only entire, but likewise consists of certain parts; from this may be assumed a difference in the transgression, that one is Universal, the other Special. The UNIVERSAL is that by which Christ is simply rejected and refused, and which may receive the general appellation of ‘Infidelity’ or ‘Unbelief.’ The SPECIAL is that by which Christ is not universally rejected, but is merely not accepted as He has been manifested in his word; and this is called ‘a heresy,’ that term being employed concerning those who, after having professed faith in Christ, do not preserve his doctrines entire and unsullied, but corrupt them. But the sin about which we are treating does not lie in this SPECIAL transgression. It belongs, therefore, to the UNIVERSAL transgression of this precept concerning faith in Christ; and it is infidelity or unbelief. It is not all unbelief, of which there are various kinds.

- a) The infidelity of those who have heard nothing respecting Christ; but such persons do not commit the sin against the Holy Ghost.
- b) That of those persons who have indeed heard of Christ, but have not understood (Matt. xiii. 19); neither does the sin against the Holy Ghost attach to these men.
- c) The unbelief of those who have understood, but who have not been certainly persuaded and convinced in their consciences respecting the truth of the things understood; but these persons are not guilty of the sin against the Holy Ghost.
- d) That of those men who, being convinced in their consciences that Jesus is the Christ, by their infidelity still reject him; and, according to my judgment, to this

class of persons belongs the sin against the Holy Ghost, about which we are now treating.

Therefore, the Genus or Kind is a repulsion and rejection of Christ in opposition to conscience. It is not a mere abnegation or disowning; for that is the part of him who has previously made a profession. It is not an oppugnation or attack; for that belongs to further progress, [in the sin], as we shall, afterwards perceive. But it is worthy of observation, that in reality it is one and the same thing, whether it be called ‘a refusal of Christ,’ or ‘a rejection of the truth concerning Christ,’ provided a universal rejection be understood, and not a particular rejection in one doctrine or more.

2. Let us now come to the OBJECT. The object of this sin is said to be a person against whom the offense is committed, whether that person be God, or the offending mortal himself, or his neighbour. But we must take into our consideration not only the OBJECT, but also its MODE, which the School-men denominate ‘the Formal Reason.’ This Mode, when added to the Object, causes the latter to be proper, adequate, and peculiar or suitable. A surface is an object of sight, but it is one which is coloured. An offense is committed against God by ingratitude, but it is against him as having merited better returns from us. We also sin against God by disobedience and contempt, as against him commanding, forbidding, promising, threatening, chastising, correcting, etc. Apostasy is committed against God, but it is against Him when acknowledged as God, and to whose Deity and Name he who falls away had devoted himself by oath. But, in this place, the Object of the sin about which we are treating is Jesus Christ, and He immediately. This is the reason why I add the word ‘immediately,’ because he who rejects the Son, rejects also the Father. The Mode of Formal Reason has been manifested and proved, [to the man who commits this sin], nay, it has been known to be the Messiah and Redeemer of the world. This is evident from Hebrews vi. 6, in which those who thus ‘fall away’ are said to ‘crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh and put him to an open shame.’ It is also evident from Hebrews x. 29, in which such persons are said to ‘tread under foot the Son of God, and to count the blood of the covenant an unholy thing.’ This is still more apparent from the words of the Pharisees, who said, ‘He casteth out devils by Beelzebub, the prince of devils,’ which are thus related by St Mark: ‘For they said, he has an impure spirit,’ whether by these words they committed this sin, or not; for they contain the occasion on which Christ began to speak about the sin against the Holy Ghost. But because this Mode agrees with the Object through some gracious act, which proceeds principally and immediately from the Holy Spirit or the Spirit of grace; on this account this sin is called ‘the sin against the Holy Ghost’ or against ‘the Spirit of grace;’ because the offense is committed against that act of the Holy Spirit, either by despising the act, or by treating Him also with ignominy. But that act of the Spirit is the act of testifying concerning Christ and the coming of his kingdom; an act not only *sufficient* to prove that Jesus is the Christ; but also *efficacious*, and assuredly convincing the mind and conscience of him to whom the testification is communicated concerning Christ; the operation and complete effect of which, in the mind of man, are an assured knowledge and persuasion of this truth, that ‘Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.’ But of this sin the Holy Spirit is not the Object; for [*non tendit*] it is not directed against his person. This is apparent from the End of the testifying and the object; for the END of this testification is Christ. But the Object of this sin committed against the testification,

and the Object of the testification itself, are one and the same. And the End of the testifying is, not that the Holy Spirit, but that Jesus, be acknowledged and accepted for the Son of God and for the Anointed of the Lord. This is declared by Christ in the following words: 'If I by the Spirit of God cast out devils, then is the kingdom of God come unto you.' It also conduces to the same purpose that, not the Spirit out of Christ, but Christ himself in and through the Spirit, performed the miracles. From this, it appears, that the performing of miracles serves to prove the truth of the preaching of Christ concerning Himself.

From these remarks, I think, we may easily solve the difficulty which lies in the words of Christ, who distinguishes this 'sin against the Holy Ghost' from 'the sin against the Son of Man,' and who declares that the former is irremissible or unpardonable, but that the latter is capable of forgiveness. For the sin against the Son of Man, without this testification of the Spirit, is remitted to many men; and it appears from the whole of this discussion, that regard is not had so much to the person against whom the sin is committed, as to the act of testification proceeding from the Holy Spirit, against whom the sin is perpetrated. With respect to the ACT, therefore, it is said to be perpetrated against the Holy Ghost, not against the Son of Man, but, with respect to the OBJECT, against the Son of Man, but who is known from the Act of testifying. Since, then, regard is had rather to the Act than to the Object, in this respect this sin is called by Christ 'the sin against the Holy Ghost,' and is distinguished from the sin which is committed against Christ without any consideration of this Mode and Formal reason. I know there are among the fathers those who understand the appellation, 'Son of Man,' through a reduplication or reflection, to signify Jesus as he is *the Son of Man*, and the epithet, 'Son of God,' to signify Jesus as he is *the Son of God*. They also consider, that, when a sin committed against Jesus as he is *the Son of Man*, the offense is another and a less one than when he is sinned against as *the Son of God*. But such a consideration has no place here; for the testification of the Holy Spirit conduces to this end — that the person who is sometimes denominated *the Son of Man* and sometimes *the Son of God*, be received as the true and only Messiah. Yet if any man be desirous of referring this consideration of some of the Ancient Fathers to the point under discussion, he will be able to say that a sin is committed against *the Son of Man* when Jesus is not recognized as *the Son of God*, but that a sin is committed against *the Son of God*, when it has been already proved, by undoubted testimonies, that he is the Son of God. The expressions in the Evangelist 'Whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him,' serve to favour this consideration, as do also those in the Epistle to the Hebrews, 'Crucifying to themselves the Son of God,' and they who have 'trodden under foot the Son of God,' that is, Jesus, whom, through 'the enlightening' of the Holy Spirit, they had previously accounted as 'the Son of God.' For it is manifest from the Scriptures that it was necessary to believe this attribute concerning Jesus of Nazareth, that he was the Christ, the Son of God, the saviour and Redeemer of the world, etc.; and as the Object and the Acts occupied about it have a mutual relation so that from an adequate object we can determine concerning the act, and from an act we can form a conclusion respecting the adequate object, it appears possible for us to conclude, from the acts which the apostle enumerates in Hebrews vi. and x., that those persons who had thus sinned against Jesus, not only acknowledged him as the Son of God, but



also sinned against him as against the Son of God whom they had so acknowledged. For, no one is said to ‘crucify the Son of God afresh,’ and to ‘tread him under foot,’ except that man who acknowledges him as the Son of God, and who sins against him under that consideration. For instance, the American Indians cannot be said to have ‘trodden under foot the gospel of Christ,’ when they trampled under their feet, and threw into the fire, the small volume of the four Gospels, which was shewn to them by the Spaniards, who, in a boasting manner, represented it to them as the true Gospel.

3. Let us now proceed to THE DESCRIPTION OF THE PERSONS who commit this sin, that is, such as they are defined to us according to the Scriptures. But, generally, they are those who, through the testification of the Holy Spirit in their minds and consciences, are convinced of this truth — that Jesus, the son of Mary, is Christ the SON OF GOD. Yet these persons may differ among themselves, and in reality do differ; for, after having been convinced of this truth, they either immediately reject Christ, never tendering him their names to be enrolled among his followers; or, having for a season embraced and professed Christ, they decline from Him and fall away.

- Of the FIRST of these two classes were the Pharisees, if, at the time when they said that ‘Christ cast out devils through Beelzebub,’ they were convinced in their consciences that such ejection of the devils was truly the work of the Holy Spirit, as Christ had laid down his argument, ‘If I by the Spirit of God cast out devils, by whom do your sons cast them out?’
- Of the SECOND class, are those of whom mention is made in Hebrews vi. and x. For they who embrace Christ even with a temporary faith, do this through the illumination of the Holy Spirit; because ‘no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, except by the Holy Ghost’ (1 Cor. xii. 3). To these persons has been granted some ‘taste of the heavenly gift, of the good word of God, and of the powers of the world to come;’ for the testification of the Holy Spirit concerning Jesus Christ the Son of God, when impressed with a full persuasion on the mind, can be followed by no other effect than the excitement of joy and gladness in the heart of him who professes Christ, as Christ himself declares, in Matthew xiii. 20, ‘But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon WITH JOY receiveth it,’ and as he also declares, in John v. 35, concerning those who ‘were willing for a season to rejoice in the light of John the Baptist.’

But on this subject consult CALVIN’S *Institutes* (lib. 3, cap. 2, sec. 11). With regard to what is added in Heb. vi. 5, that the same persons ‘were made partakers of the Holy Ghost,’ this may be understood to relate to those extraordinary gifts of the Holy Spirit which at that period flourished in the church. This is likewise declared in Heb. ii. 4: ‘God likewise bare them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and GIFTS OF THE HOLY GHOST, according to his own will.’ In these persons, that abnegation or renouncing of Christ occurs which, in Hebrews vi, is denominated ‘a falling away,’ that is, from the truth which they have acknowledged, and from the confession of the name of Christ which they have made. About this renunciation of himself, Christ treats in a general manner in Luke xii. 9, subjoining to that passage a special mode in the particular deed which we are now discussing, and says, ‘Whosoever shall speak a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him; but

unto him that blasphemeth against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven.' To this *genus* of renunciation belongs the deed of Peter; but it is distinct, and differs greatly from this *species*, as will be very apparent in the next member that comes under our consideration. Therefore, the sin against the Holy Ghost is distinguished according to the Mode of Efficient Causes, of which we have already adduced a distinction.

4. It follows that we now institute an inquiry into the CAUSE of this sin. The cause of all sin is commonly represented to be either Ignorance, Weakness, or Malice. IGNORANCE, not negative, but privative of the knowledge which ought to be within, and, therefore, ignorance of the law. WEAKNESS, too infirm to resist vehement passion and temptation, and the seductions which impel men to sin. MALICE, by which any one knowingly and willingly, being enticed indeed by some temptation, but which can be easily resisted by the will, and which the will is able readily to overcome, is induced to sin. Though Ignorance and Infirmitude are not directly and immediately the Causes of sin, yet they are causes through the mode of prohibiting absence

- IGNORANCE, through the mode of the absence of right knowledge and reason, which might be able to hinder from sin by instructing the will
- INFIRMITY, through the mode of the absence of [*virtutis*] strength and capability, which might hinder from sin by confirming and invigourating the will.

If, therefore, we be desirous accurately to examine this matter, the will is the proper, adequate and immediate cause of sin, and has two motives and incentives to commit sin, the one Internal, the other External. *The Internal*, which lies in man himself, is the love of himself and a concupiscence or lusting after temporal things, or of the blessings which are visible. *The External* motive is an object moving the appetite or desire; such objects are honours, riches, pleasures, life, health and soundness, friends, country, and similar things, the contraries to which the man hates and execrates, and is afraid of them, if he imagine them to be impending over him. But these motives do not move the will so efficaciously that the will is necessarily moved; for, in this case, the will would be excusable from sin; but they move the will through the mode of suasion and enticement. But now, when, through love of himself and the desire of some apparent good, (in which is included an avoiding or hatred of an apparent evil), man is solicited or enticed to some act, which is indeed forbidden, but which he does not know to be sinful, then the will, following the appetite and erroneous reason, is said to sin *through Ignorance*. But when, through the same motives, he is tempted to an act which he knows to be sin, then the will, following the appetite, sins indeed knowingly; but whether such sin is committed *through Infirmitude* or *through Malice*, ought to be decided chiefly from the necessity of that good which the man is pursuing, and from the deep heinousness of the evil which he avoids. On this point, a judgment must also be formed from the vehemence of the appetite or passion, as well as from the inclination towards the person who seems desirous to hinder the completion or fulfilling of the desire, (a circumstance which does not on every occasion occur, but which for a certain reason I thought must be added in this place), where a discrimination of the mode by which he endeavours to hinder, comes under consideration, whether it be good, lawful, and commanded, or whether it be evil, unlawful and forbidden.

Let us now apply these remarks to our purpose. Paul persecuted the church of Christ, but he did it ignorantly, being inflamed with too great a zeal and desire for the law, as many of the Jews also crucified Christ, being ignorant that He was the Lord of glory; otherwise they would have refrained from such a nefarious crime. By those men, therefore, the sin about which we are treating was not committed.

- Peter denied Christ his Lord, whom he knew to be the true Messiah and the Anointed of the Lord, and his knowledge of this was obtained through an immediate revelation from the Father; but his conduct proceeded from a desire of life and a fear of death — feelings which may attack even the bravest of mankind. he did it, therefore, *through Infirmity*.
- Through fear of banishment, prescription, condemnation to the mines or to perpetual imprisonment, some persons have shrunk back from a confession of the name of Christ; and they must be considered as having thus sinned *through Infirmity*.
- In order to recover the dignity of the sword, the official girdle, etc., which the Emperor had threatened to take away from them unless they abjured Christ, some of the early Christians retained all their honours at the expense of denying Christ; yet still even these must be said to have sinned *through Infirmity*.
- Some individual, having been vehemently tormented, afflicted, injured and stripped of his goods by a Christian prince, or by Christian people, breaks forth into passionate expressions of blasphemy against God and Christ; yet he must be considered as having acted thus *through Anger and dreadful Commotion of spirit*.

But if the persons in the preceding instances were to add, to this their sin, hatred against Christ Himself and his doctrine, according to my judgment they would not be far from committing the sin against the Holy Ghost. To express and conclude the whole in one word, I affirm that this sin against the Holy Ghost is properly committed *through Malice*. I understand, here, malice of two kinds:

- The ONE, by which no resistance is offered to concupiscence or desire, when that can easily be done, without much inconvenience;
- the OTHER, by which Christ himself is hated, either because he endeavours, by his precepts, to hinder the completion or fulfillment of the unlawful desire; or because the enjoyment of such illicit desire is not permitted, on account of his cause and name.

Both kinds of this malice were in those Jews with whom Christ had the transaction which is mentioned in Matthew xii. But they do not seem then to have been fully convinced in their consciences, that Jesus was the Christ and the promised Messiah. Let us add, therefore, to the other parts of the definition of this sin, that it is committed through malice and hatred against Christ, or through hatred of Christ and of the Truth concerning him. This hatred I think is included in the words employed by the apostle in Hebrews vi. and x.; for such persons are there said ‘to crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh and put him to an open shame, to tread under foot the Son of God, to count the blood of the covenant an unholy thing, and to do despite unto the Spirit of grace.’ I suppose, by these words, are signified, not *the Results* which happen to those who, beyond expectation, fall away or decline from Christ through

their sin; but *the Acts* which, of themselves, and by their own nature are allied to their sin, and which have an affinity with, and are consequences from, the same sin, not without the fixed purpose of those by whom it is committed.

5. To this Cause, we will commodiously subjoin an END; for they correspond, for the most part, between themselves, and in a certain respect agree with each other. The end, therefore, is twofold.
  - The ONE is the obtaining and the enjoyment of an apparent good which has been desired;
  - The OTHER is the completion of hatred, and the rejection of Christ and of his acknowledged truth, which Calvin has enunciated in these words:’ — for this purpose, that they may resist.’

By this very circumstance, is signified the malice of the man who thus sins, which, not content with obtaining the apparent good through the act of sin, is delighted even with the very act of sin as with its End or Intention. This is a certain sign, that the will of this man has not been impelled by inclination or passion to perpetrate this crime, but that it has freely followed the inclination, and has added of its own this other thing — hatred against Christ, from which, this hatred may be said to be entirely voluntary, and, therefore, arising from malice. For as Appetite or desire is attributed to *the Concupiscible Faculty*, Infirmity to *the Irascible*, and Ignorance to *the Reason or Mind*, so is Malice attributed to *the Will*.

But from these things, considered in this manner, it seems the sin against the Holy Ghost may be thus defined:

The sin against the Holy Ghost is the rejection and refusing of Jesus Christ through [*destinata*] determined malice and hatred against Christ, who, through the testifying of the Holy Spirit, has been assuredly acknowledged for the Son of God, (or, which is the same thing, the rejection and refusing of the acknowledged universal Truth of the Gospel), against conscience and committed for this purpose — that the sinner may fulfill and gratify his desire of the apparent good which is by no means necessary, and may reject Christ.

6. Let us subjoin these observations concerning the DEGREES of this sin. The following degrees of this sin, it seems to me possible to lay down in a commodious manner:
  - The FIRST is the rejection and refusal of Christ acknowledged, or of the acknowledged truth of the Gospel. This degree is universal and primary; and it holds good under every circumstance, whether he who rejects and refuses Christ have for a season professed himself to be a disciple of Christ, or not — a point which we have already discussed under the Third head.
  - The SECOND degree is blasphemy against Christ the Son of God, and against the acknowledged truth of the Gospel.
  - The THIRD is the assaulting and persecution of Christ, either in his own person or in those of his members, or the extirpation of the truth acknowledged.

- A FOURTH degree may be added, from the difference between the object, and the act by which that object is demonstrated and manifested; and this is blasphemy against the Spirit himself, or against the act of the Holy Spirit. For he who calls Christ ‘*a wine bibber,*’ ‘*a friend of publicans and sinners,*’ ‘*a seducer and false prophet,*’ while he owns him to be the Son of God, sins in a different manner from him who says, that those miraculous operations of the Holy Spirit were performed by Beelzebub and were diabolical.
7. We have now arrived at the *Seventh Division*, which relates to the ADJUNCT or ATTRIBUTE peculiar to this sin, that is, its being irremissible or unpardonable, and the cause why it is thus incapable of being forgiven. This sin is called ‘the sin unto death,’ not in the sense in which all sins merit death eternal, and that are, notwithstanding, remitted to many persons, as they have believed in Christ and are converted to God, but because no one who has committed this sin against the Holy Ghost, or who shall hereafter commit it, has at any time had the felicity, nor will he have it, of escaping death eternal. It is called ‘irremissible,’ not in the same manner as that in which unbelief and final impenitence are unpardonable, through this decree of God: ‘He that believeth not on the Son of God, is condemned,’ and ‘Unless ye repent and be converted, ye shall all likewise perish,’ etc. For these are conditions, without which sin is forgiven to no man. But it is called ‘unpardonable’ in this sense, that, when it has once been perpetrated, the sinner never obtains remission from God, and never can obtain it, through the definitive and peremptory statute and decree of God, even though the offender should live many ages afterwards. But the proximate and immediate cause why this sin is unpardonable, seems to me to be comprehended in these words of the apostle in the Epistle to the Hebrews: ‘It is impossible for those who shall thus fall away, to be renewed again unto repentance.’ The efficacy of this cause proceeds from the perpetual and immutable decree of God concerning the nonforgiveness of sins without repentance. But the mind cannot rest here; for it is further asked, ‘Why is it impossible for those who thus sin to be renewed again unto repentance?’ The solution of this question, as it seems to me, must be taken partly from the Causes of this ‘renewing again unto repentance,’ and partly from the Heinousness of this sin, as described by the apostle in Hebrews vi. and x. From a collation of these passages, it will be manifest why those who thus sin ‘cannot be renewed again to repentance.’
- a) Let us treat on the CAUSES of this renewing again. Renewing again to repentance seems to proceed from the mercy or grace of God in Christ, on account of the intercession of Christ, through the operation of the Holy Spirit, or the Spirit of grace. But this mercy of God, intercession of Christ, and operation of the Holy Spirit, are not infinite, that is, they do not operate according to the infinite omnipotence of God and Christ, and of his Spirit; but they are circumscribed by a certain mode of the equity and will of God, of Christ, and of the Spirit of God. This is apparent from particular passages of Scripture. Concerning *the Mercy of God*, ‘God has mercy on whom he will have mercy; and whom he will, he hardeneth.’ Concerning *the Intercession of Christ*, ‘I pray not for the world.’ Concerning *the Operation of the Holy Spirit*, ‘whom the world cannot receive.’
  - b) Let us now consider the HEINOUSNESS of this sin from the description of this

apostle, who says, Those who thus sin, ‘crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame; they tread under foot the Son of God, count the blood of the covenant an unholy thing, and do despite unto the Spirit of grace.’ But I account these acts to be so black and diabolical, that we must affirm, the mercy of God in Christ is circumscribed by no bounds whatsoever, the intercession of Christ is concluded within no space, and the Spirit of grace can be hindered by no malice, if God does not deny his mercy to such persons, if Christ intercedes for them, and if the Spirit of Grace is not deterred from them so as not to exert upon them his gracious efficacy. Take into consideration the difference of the sin which is committed against the law of God, and that against the Gospel and the grace of God in Christ; and reflect how much more heinous it is to reject the remedy of the disease than to fall into the disease itself! To remove from his hearers their despair of pardon, St Peter says to them, after having been convicted of the sin which they had committed against Christ, ‘Now, brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did it’ (Acts iii. 17). St Paul says to the Corinthians, ‘For had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory’ (1 Cor. ii. 8). He also says, concerning himself, ‘but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief’ (1 Tim. i. 13). Christ, when hanging on the Cross, and as the Scriptures express it in Isaiah liii. 12, while making intercession for the transgressors, said, ‘Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do’ (Luke xxiii. 34). The Scriptures declare, respecting the Holy Spirit, that He is capable not only of being grieved (Ephes. iv. 30), but likewise of being vexed (Isa. lxiii. 10), and of being quenched (1 Thess. v. 19). Whosoever they be who answer this description, and crucify Christ long acknowledged by them as the Son of God, and who tread under foot his blood, that blood by which God hath redeemed the church unto Himself, which is the price of redemption, than which nothing is more precious, and by which alone the gratuitous covenant between God and men is confirmed and established — who, against their consciences, treat the Holy Spirit with the greatest contempt and disgrace, and who sin so grievously against him that no sin can equal this in heinousness; it follows that, to people of this class, is [*jure*] justly and equitably denied their being renewed again to repentance, unless we completely divest God of Justice, and remove from his free will the administration of Divine Mercy. When we have done this, and have ascribed the dispensing of salvation to the infinity of the Divine Mercy or Goodness only, the very foundations of religion are then overturned, and by this means, life eternal is assigned to all men universally, and even to the Devils.

If any one supposes that the affirmations which are made in Hebrews vi. and x., belong only to those who, after their open profession of Christianity, shall relapse and fall away, let him know that contumely and reproach are poured on ‘the Spirit of grace,’ by those who have never made a profession of Christianity, and that these words — ‘*to renew them again unto repentance,*’ and ‘*the blood through which he was sanctified,*’ seem properly to belong [*talibus*] to those who have not made a profession, and that the remaining parts of the description belong to the entire order of those who sin against the Holy Ghost.

Having considered the preceding matters in this hasty and slight manner, let us now proceed to investigate those three questions which you proposed.

1. With regard to the FIRST, I think it may be known when any one has committed this sin; because, if this had been impossible, John would not have forbidden us to pray for that man. For we ought to pray for all those to whom, with even the least semblance of probability, the mercy of God has been manifested, for whom the intercession of Christ has been prepared, and to whom the grace of the Holy Spirit has not been denied. The Ancient Church formed a similar judgment, when she not only accounted it improper to pray for Julian, the Apostate, but also actually prayed against him. But, according to my judgment, an indication of the knowledge of this sin is afforded by acts on the part of those who commit it.

- The FIRST Act is that profession of the name of Christ which is neither forced nor affected, but voluntary;
- the SECOND is the rejection of Christ and the abandonment of all profession.

If to these two acts be added blasphemy, opposition, etc., the judgment concerning this sin is rendered still more evident.

From these remarks, it is manifest that the judgment of man can be formed only concerning those persons who have, at some time or other, made an open profession of Christianity, and have afterwards relapsed and fallen away. For it is impossible for us to know, except through [an act of] Divine Revelation, what effects the testification of the Holy Spirit has produced in the minds of those who reject Christ before they make an open profession of Him and his religion. This seems to be intimated by St John, when he says, 'If any man shall see his brother,' that is, one who has made an open profession of faith in Christ, 'sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life;' and it appears to be immediately repeated on the general principle, 'There is a sin unto death,' which, if a *brother* commit, 'I do not say that he shall pray for it.' Let the whole history concerning Julian, the Apostate, be taken into consideration, and it will be rendered manifest that the judgment of the church in that age was founded on the two acts which we have enumerated

- the FORMER being the public profession of Christianity,
- and the LATTER the act of desertion, blasphemy and persecution.

2. The SECOND question is — 'Have Cain, Saul, Judas, Julian, Francis Spira, etc., perpetrated this crime?'

In regard to this, I say, without any prejudice to the judgment of those who hold other and perhaps more correct sentiments on the subject, it seems to me that CAIN did not perpetrate this crime. For this, a probable reason may, I think, be rendered: For he did not sin against grace through hatred to it, but through a perverse jealousy for grace, and through envy against his brother, because Abel had obtained that grace which was denied to himself, he committed crime of fratricide. Concerning the despair which is attributed to him, we know that interpreters differ in their opinions; and though he may have despaired of the mercy of God, yet it cannot be concluded from this that he had committed the sin about which we are treating; for despair is also a consequence of other sins, and not always, I think, an attendant on this sin.

The sin of SAUL was against David as a type of Christ, whom he persecuted in opposition to his conscience; but he committed it with this intention — that he might

afterwards preserve the kingdom safe and unimpaired for himself and his posterity. But as it is another thing to sin against the type of Christ, than to sin against Christ himself, (for Saul was in all likelihood ignorant of David being such a type), and as he did not entirely decline from the Jewish religion, it has to me the air of probability that Saul did not commit the sin against the Holy Ghost.

My opinion is different respecting JUDAS ISCARIOT; for I think that he sinned against the Holy Ghost, and this by the two indications which we have previously laid down. For as he lived three whole years in familiar converse with Christ, heard his discourses, saw his miracles, was himself sent forth with his fellow-disciples to preach the Gospel, and was so far enlightened by the Holy Spirit as to be capable of executing that office, and actually did perform its duties, and, having been made a partaker of the Holy Ghost, he himself performed miracles, cast out devils, healed the sick, and raised the dead in the name of Christ, it cannot remain a matter of uncertainty that he assuredly and undoubtedly acknowledged his teacher, Jesus Christ, as the true Messiah and the Son of God. However, he not only deserted Him whom he had thus acknowledged, but also delivered Him up to his enemies, that sought to put Him to death; and he did this not through weakness or some excusable necessity, but merely out of malice and pure hatred of Christ. This is evident from the history of the Evangelists, who relate that, at the moment when the 'very precious ointment' was poured on the head of Christ, Judas departed and went to the Chief Priests, and bargained with them concerning the reward of his treason, which conduct was undoubtedly adopted by him to revenge himself upon Christ for the loss of the three hundred pence, for which the ointment might have been sold, and which were taken away from him, by Christ's permission. To this must be added, that the Scriptures reckon him among those against whom David, the type of Christ, formerly uttered the same petitions as those which St Peter enumerates in that passage (Acts i. 2), as having had their accomplishment in Judas.

I entertain a similar opinion respecting JULIAN the Apostate, whom I consider to have completed every branch of this sin through consummate malice and the most bitter enmity against Christ. For he abandoned Christianity, poured infinite contumelies on Christ, and persecuted Christian people and the Christian Truth in various ways, nay, by every method which it was possible for him to devise. He also attributed the miracles of Christ more to the Devil than to the Son of God, for which reason, the church, in those early days, prayed against him, and her prayers were heard by God, and answered.

With respect to FRANCIS SPIRA, it would be with great reluctance that I should venture to pronounce him guilty of the sin against the Holy Ghost. On the contrary, I incline to the opposite opinion respecting him, and in this I follow the judgment of some learned men of the present age, who not only acquit him from the guilt of being charged with this sin, but who likewise do not even exclude him from the pardon of his sins.

For

- a) he did not deny Christ himself, but declined to make such a confession of Christ as the Papists disapproved.



- b) He did not avoid this Protestant confession through malice and hatred of the truth known by him, but through weakness and too intense a desire for a good which appeared to him in some degree necessary; for he feared the forcible seizure and loss of his goods, without which he supposed it to be utterly impossible for him to gain a livelihood for himself and family.
- c) In the very agonies of his despair, he made frequent and honourable mention not only of Christ, but likewise of his Truth which he had professed.
- d) Being asked by those who stood around him if he wished God to grant him pardon for that offense and to impress the assurance of it upon his mind, he replied, that there was nothing of which he was more desirous, nay, that he wished it could be purchased even by the greatest torments. The purchase of it, however, he knew to be an impossibility — that no one might suppose that, by this his desire, he inflicted an injury on the blood of Christ.
- e) He diligently and seriously admonished those who visited him to apply themselves to the mortification of the flesh, to renounce the good things of the present life, and also to despise life itself if the cause of Christ and of Truth were to be forsaken, lest they, having followed his example, should rush into the same abyss of despair and damnation.

All these particulars [in His case] served as inducements to many persons [in the Venitian states] to withdraw from the Papal church, and to unite themselves with the Evangelical or Reformed church; and to some of those who had entered into this union, they served as reasons for persevering in their profession.

3. With respect to the THIRD Question, I answer, that this sin is not directly committed against the Holy Ghost himself, but that it is primarily, properly and immediately perpetrated against his gracious act. Yet this so redounds to the disgrace and contumely of the Holy Spirit himself, that he is said to be blasphemed and to be treated with ignominy by this sin; and that not accidentally, but *per se*, of itself. But I think, from this, by good consequence, may be deduced that the Holy Spirit is not some property, virtue, or power in God, usually considered by us under the mode of quality, but that it is something living, intelligent, willing and acting, distinct from the Father and the Son; upon which men are accustomed to bestow the appellation of ‘a Person.’ To me, this seems possible to be proved by many arguments.

- a) Because He is distinguished in opposition to the Son, which ought not to be done, if he were a virtue or power not subsisting, communicated to Christ by the Father, by which he might perform miracles, as through a principle from which he has the dominion and power of his own act, and not through a principle which itself possesses such a dominion and power.
- b) Because it is said that men sin against the Holy Ghost, and blasphemy is said to be uttered against the Spirit, and He is treated with scorn and contempt.

These phrases do not seem to me to indicate the in-being of the Holy Ghost within God and Christ, but the existence and subsistence of the Holy Spirit; especially as this sin is distinguished from the sin against the Son of Man, which ought not to be done if this sin had been perpetrated against an act of the power which exists within Christ and is employed by Him, and not against the act of the powerful and operating Holy

Spirit himself; for as there are *acts* that appertain to Persons, (though they operate through some natural property of their own), so are there also *passions* belonging to persons. If any man rejects the gracious invitation of God to repentance, that sin is said to be committed against an act of the Mercy of God; and, in this manner, he who has so sinned is said to sin against the Mercy of God, but so that, by this very act the sin is properly committed against God, who is, Himself, the Author of this gracious invitation according to his own gratuitous mercy. Neither could he who thus sins against the mercy of God be said *not to sin against God, but against his mercy*; as he who sins against the gracious act of the Holy Spirit, is said, in this passage (Matt. xii. 31, 32) to sin, not against the Son of Man, against the Holy Spirit.

4. To these three questions might be added a FOURTH:

Can the mere thinking upon the perpetration of this sin, and the serious deliberation about its commission, come under the denomination of *the sin itself*, and receive such an appellation, in the same way as he is called *a murderer* who is angry with his brother, and as that man is said to have *committed adultery in his heart* who has looked upon the wife of his neighbour to lust after her?

I reply, that this does not seem to me to be the sin itself; for, as long as this deliberation continues, so long flourishes in that man the efficacy of the Holy Spirit employed to hinder that sin, until he finally and absolutely concludes about the commission of this sin, having spurned and rejected the resistance offered by the Holy Spirit. Such a conclusion is followed by the sin in that very moment, with regard to the refusing and rejection of Christ, not with regard to the other devotees enumerated, which the man produces at his own opportunities, even if his malice and hatred of Christ did not cease to impel him to the completion of those degrees.

AMSTERDAM  
*March 3d, 1599.*