

Mr. *WHITEFIELD*'s

S E R M O N

O N T H E

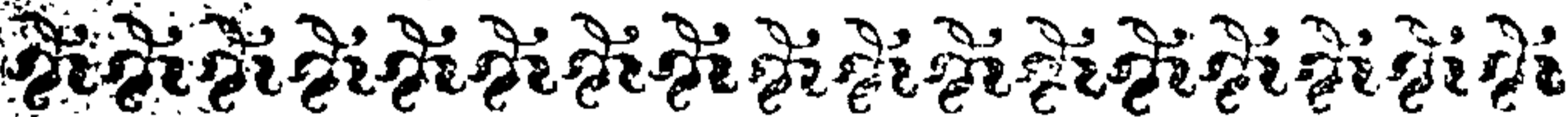
B E N E F I T S *of an* E A R L Y P I E T Y ;

P r e a c h ' d a t

B O W - C h u r c h , L O N D O N ,

B E F O R E T H E

R E L I G I O U S S O C I E T I E S .



[Price Six-pence.]

*The Benefits of an Early
Piety.*

11/15/1737

A
S E R M O N

Preach'd at

BOW-Church, LONDON,

BEFORE THE

RELIGIOUS SOCIETIES,

At One of their

QUARTERLY Meetings,

On WEDNESDAY, *September 28. 1737.*

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The Benefits of an Early Piety, &c.

ECCL. xii. 1.

*Remember now thy Creator in the Days
of thy Youth.*

THE Amiableness of Religion in itself, the innumerable Advantages that flow from it to Society in general, as well as each sincere Professor of it in particular, cannot but recommend it to the Choice of every considerate Person, and make even wicked Men, as they wish to die the Death, so, in their more sober Intervals, envy the Life of the Righteous. And indeed we must do the World so much Justice as to confess, that the

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Question

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Question about Religion does not *usually* arise from a Dispute whether it be necessary or not (for most Men see the Necessity of doing something for the Salvation of their Souls); but when is the best Time to set about it. Persons are convinc'd by universal Experience, that the first Essays or Endeavours towards the Attainment of Religion are attended with some Difficulty and Trouble, and therefore they would willingly defer the beginning such a seemingly ungrateful Work as long as they can. The wanton Prodigal, that is spending his Substance in riotous Living, cries, A little more Pleasure, a little more Sensuality, and then I'll be sober in Earnest. The covetous Worldling, that employs all his Care and Pains in "heaping up Riches, tho' he cannot tell who shall gather them," does not flatter himself that this will do always; but hopes with the rich Fool in the Gospel to lay up Goods for a few more Years on Earth, and then he'll begin to lay up Treasures in Heaven. And, in short, thus it is that most People are convinc'd of the Necessity of being religious some Time or another; but then, like *Felix*, they put off
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the acting suitably to their Convictions, till (what they imagine) a more convenient Season: Whereas, would we be so humble as to be guided by the Experience and Counsel of the wisest of Men, we should learn that Youth is the fittest Season for Religion; “Remember now thy Creator, says *Solomon*, “in the Days of thy Youth.” By which Word Remember, we are not to understand a bare speculative Remembrance, or calling to Mind, (for that, like a dead Faith, will profit us nothing) but such a Remembrance as will constrain us to Obedience, and oblige us out of Gratitude to perform all that the Lord our God shall require of us. For as forgetting God, in Scripture Language, implies a total Neglect of our Duty, in like Manner Remembering him signifies a perfect Performance of it: So that, when *Solomon* says, “Remember thy Creator in the Days “of thy Youth,” it is the same as if he had said, Keep God’s Commandments; or in other Words, Be religious in the Days of thy Youth, thereby implying that Youth is the most proper Season for it.

I SHALL in the following Discourse, *First*, endeavour to make good the wise Man's Proposition imply'd in the Words of the Text, and to shew that Youth is the fittest Season for Religion.

Secondly, by way of Motive, I shall consider the many unspeakable Advantages that will arise from remembering our Creator in the Days of our Youth.

Thirdly and *Lastly*, I shall conclude with a Word or two of Exhortation to the younger Part of this Audience.

AND *First* then, I am to make good the wise Man's Proposition implied in the Words of the Text, and to shew that Youth is the fittest Season for Religion: "Remember now
 " thy Creator in the Days of thy Youth.—
 But in order to proceed more clearly in this Argument, it may not be improper, first, to explain what I mean by the Word *Religion*. By this Term, then, I would not be understood to mean a bare outward Profession or Naming the Name of Christ; for we are
 told,

told, that many that have even prophesied in his Name, and in his Name cast out Devils, shall notwithstanding be rejected by him at the last Day: Nor would I understand by it barely being admitted into Christ's Church by Baptism; for then *Simon Magus*, *Arius*, and the Herefiarchs of old might pass for religious Persons, for these were baptized; nor yet the receiving the other Seal of the Covenant, for then *Judas* himself might be canoniz'd for a Saint; nor indeed do I mean any or all of these together, consider'd by themselves; but a thorough, real, inward Change of Nature, wrought in us by the powerful Operations of the Holy Ghost, convey'd to and nourish'd in our Hearts, by a constant Use of all the Means of Grace, evidenc'd by a good Life, and bringing forth the Fruits of the Spirit.

THE attaining this real, inward Religion, is a Work of so great Difficulty, that *Nicodemus*, a learned Doctor and Teacher in *Israel*, thought it altogether impossible, and therefore ignorantly asked our Blessed Lord, How this Thing could be? And *truly* to rectify a

a disorder'd Nature, to mortify our corrupt Passions, to turn Darknes to Light, to put off the old Man, and put on the new, and thereby to have the Image of God re-
stamp'd upon the Soul, or in one Word, to be born again, however light some may make of it, must after all our Endeavours be own'd by Man impossible. 'Tis true indeed, Christ's Yoke is said to be an easy or a gracious Yoke, and his Burthen light; but then it is to those only who have been accustomed to bear and draw in it. For, as the wise Son of *Sirach* observes, "At first Wisdom walketh with her Children in crooked Ways, and brings them into Fear; and torments them with her Discipline, and does not turn to comfort and rejoice them, till she has tried them and prov'd their Judgment." -- No; we must not flatter ourselves, that our depraved Natures can be renewed, unless we submit to a great many Difficulties. The spiritual Birth is attended with its Pangs, as well as the natural: For they that have experienc'd it, (and they only are the proper Judges) can acquaint you, that frequent Acts of Self-denial must be exercised,

exercised, a constant regular Discipline kept up, lest, after all, when we come to the Birth, we should want Strength to bring forth.

BUT if “ these Things are so ; ” if there are Difficulties and Pangs attending our being born again, and Discipline must be called in, what Season more proper than that of Youth ; when, if ever, our Bodies are robust and vigorous, and our Minds active and courageous ; and consequently we are then best qualified to endure Hardness as good Soldiers of Jesus Christ ?

WE find in secular Matters People commonly observe this Method, and send their Children abroad among the Toils and Fatigues of Business, in their younger Years, as well knowing they are then fittest to undergo them. And why do they not act with the same Consistency in the grand Affair of Religion ? Because, as our Saviour has told us, “ the Children of this World are wiser in their Generation, than the Children of Light.”

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BUT, *Secondly*, if pure Religion and undefiled consists in the total Renewal of our corrupted Natures, then 'tis not only a Work of Difficulty, but of Time: For, as the old was not, so neither is the new Creation completed in a Day. No, good Men know by certain Experience, that it is a long while ere old Things can pass away, and all Things become new in them. The strong Man arm'd has gotten too great Possession of their Hearts to be quickly driven out, and they are obliged to combat many a weary Hour, ere their Corruptions, which is the Armour in which the strong Man trusted, be wholly taken from him. Nay, they find their whole Lives short enough to perfect the Work of Regeneration, which they were sent into the World to do, and never expect to say 'tis finish'd, till with their blessed Master they bow down their Heads, and give up the Ghost.

AND if this be the Case, if the Renovation of our Nature be not only difficult, but requires so long a Space to complete it in; then
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it highly concerns every one to set about it betimes, and to *work their Work while it is Day, before the Night cometh, when no Man can work.*

COULD we, indeed, live to the Age of *Methuselah*, and had but little Business to employ ourselves in, we might then be more excusable, if we made no other Use of this World, than, what too many do, *take our Pastime therein*: but since our Lives are so very short, and the working out our Salvation requires so much Time, we have no Room left for Trifling, lest we should be snatch'd away while our Lamps are untrimmed, and we are intirely unprepared to meet the Bridegroom.

DID we know a Friend or Neighbour, who had a long Journey of the utmost Importance to make, and yet should stand *all the Day idle*, neglecting to set out till the Sun was about to go down, we could not but pity and condemn his egregious Folly: and yet it is to be feared most Men are just such Fools; they have a long Journey to take,

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nay, a Journey to Eternity, a Journey of infinite Importance, and which they are obliged to dispatch before the Sun of their natural Life be gone down; and yet they loiter away their Time allotted them to perform their Journey in, till Sickness or Death surprizes them; and then they cry out, *What shall we do to inherit eternal Life?* But, alas! is this a proper Season to ask such a Question? Is this a Time to *begin* their Journey, when they should be at the *End* of it; or to inquire what they must do, when perhaps they have hardly any Strength or Ability left to do any thing to Purpose, and when they should be waiting with humble Patience, in Hopes of speedily receiving their Wages for Work already done? *O foolish People and unwise! If ye offer the Blind for Sacrifice, is it not evil? and if ye offer the Lame and Sick, is it not evil? Offer it now unto thy Governor, will he be pleased with thee, or accept thy Person? saith the Lord of Hosts.* But leaving such to the Mercies of God, I pass on to

THE Second general Thing proposed, *viz.*
 To shew the Advantages that will arise from
remembering

remembering our Creator in the Days of our Youth; which may serve as so many Motives to excite and quicken all Persons immediately to set about it.

AND the *first* Benefit resulting from thence is, that it will bring most Honour and Glory to GOD. This, I suppose, every serious Person will grant, ought to be the Point in which all our Actions should centre; for to this End were we born; to this End were we redeemed by the precious Blood of Jesus Christ, that we should promote God's eternal Glory. And as the Glory of God is most advanced by paying Obedience to his Precepts, they that begin soonest to walk in his Ways, act most to his Glory: For the common Objection against the Divine Laws in general, and the Doctrines of the Gospel in particular, is, that they are not practicable, that they are contrary to Flesh and Blood, and that all those Precepts concerning Self-Denial, Renunciation of and Deadness to the World, are but so many arbitrary Restraints imposed upon human Nature. But when we see mere Striplings not only practising,

but delighting in such religious Duties, and in the Days of their Youth, when, if ever, they have a Relish for sensual Pleasures, subduing and despising the *Lust of the Flesh, the Lust of the Eye, and the Pride of Life* — This, this is acceptable with God; this vindicates his injur'd Honour; this shews that his Service is perfect Freedom, *that his Yoke is easy, and his Burden light.*

BUT, *Secondly*, as an early Piety redounds most to the Honour of God, so it will bring most Honour to ourselves: For those that honour God, God will honour. We find it therefore remark'd to the Praise of *Obadiab*, that he served the Lord from his Youth: Of *Samuel*, that he stood, when young, before God in a linen Ephod: Of *Timothy*, that from a Child he had known the Holy Scriptures: Of St. *John*, that he was the youngest and most beloved Disciple; and of our Blessed Lord himself, that at Twelve Years old he went up to the Temple, and sat among the Doctors, both hearing and asking them Questions.

NOR, *Thirdly*, will an early Piety afford us less Comfort than Honour, not only because it renders Religion habitual to us, but also because it gives us a well-grounded Assurance of the Sincerity of our Professions. Was there no other Argument against a Death-bed Repentance but the Unsatisfactoriness and Anxiety of such a State, that would be sufficient to deter all thinking Persons from deferring the most important Business of their Life to such a dreadful Period of it. For supposing a Man be sincere in his Professions of Repentance on a Death-bed, (which is very much to be doubted) yet he can take no great Comfort in them, because he is uncertain whether his Convictions and Remorse proceed from a true Sorrow for Sin, or a servile Fear of Punishment. ——— But a young Saint need fear no such Perplexity; he knows that he loves God for his own Sake, and is not driven to him by a Dread of impending Evil: He does not decline the Gratifications of Sense, because he can no longer *hear the Voice of Singing-Men and Singing-Women*; but willingly takes up his Cross, and follows his Blessed Master in his Youth; and therefore
must

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must have great Confidence of his Sincerity towards God. But farther, as an early Piety assures the Heart of its Sincerity, so likewise it brings its present Reward with it, as it renders Religion, and all its Duties, habitual and easy. A young Saint, was you to ask him, would joyfully tell you the unspeakable Comfort of beginning to be good betimes: As for his Part, he knows not what Men mean by talking of Mortification, Self-Denial, and Retirement, as hard and rigorous Duties; for he has so accustomed himself to them, that they are now become even natural, and he takes infinitely more Pleasure in practising the severest Precepts of the Gospel, than a luxurious *Dives* in a Bed of State, or an ambitious *Haman* at a Royal Banquet. And, oh! how happy must that Youth be, whose Duty is become a second Nature, and to whom those Things, which seem terrible to Others, are grown both easy and delightful!

BUT the greatest Advantage of an early Piety is still behind, *viz.* That it lays in the best Provision of Comfort and Support against such Times as we shall stand most in need thereof,

thereof, *viz.* all Times of our Tribulation, and in particular against the Time of old Age, the Hour of Death, and the Day of Judgment.

THIS is the Argument the Wise Man makes Use of in the Words immediately following the Text: *Remember now*, says he, *thy Creator in the Days of thy Youth, while the evil Days come not, nor the Years draw nigh, wherein thou shalt say, I have no Pleasure in them.* Observe, the Time of old Age is an evil Time, Years wherein there is no Pleasure; and ask those that are grown old, and they will inform you so. Cordials surely then must be exceeding proper to support our drooping Spirits: And, oh! What Cordial comparable to the grateful Review of a well-spent Life? When the Eyes, like *Isaac's*, are grown dim with Age; when *the Keepers of the House*, i. e. the Hands, shall tremble; as the Wise Man goes on to describe the Infirmities of old Age; when *the strong Men bow themselves*, i. e. When the Legs grow feeble; and *the Grinders*, i. e. the Teeth, shall cease to do their proper Office,

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fice, because they are few ; for a Person then to hear the Precepts of the Gospel read over to him, and to be able to lay his Hand on his Heart, and to say sincerely, *All these have I kept from my Youth* : This must fill him with such unspeakable Comfort, that I want Words to express, and Thoughts to conceive it. But, supposing it was possible for us to escape the Inconveniences of old Age, yet still Death is a Debt we all must pay ; and, what is worse, it generally comes attended with such dreadful Circumstances, that it will make even a *Felix* tremble. But as for the Godly, that have served the Lord from their Youth, it is not so with them ; no, they look upon Death not as a *King of Terrors*, but as a welcome Messenger, that is come to conduct them to their wish'd-for Home. All the *Days* of their *appointed* Time have they waited, and it has been the Business of their whole Lives to prepare themselves for the coming of their great Change ; and therefore they rejoice to hear, that they are called to meet the heavenly Bridegroom. Thus dies the early (I mean the early, if persevering) pious ; whose

Path

Path has been as the shining Light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect Day. But follow him beyond the Grave, and see with what an holy Triumph he enters into his Master's Joy; with what an humble Boldness he stands at the dreadful Tribunal of Jesus Christ; and can you then forbear to cry out, Let me die the Death of the Righteous, and let my latter End, and future State, be like his?

NEED I then, after having shewn so many Advantages to arise from an early Piety, use any more Arguments to persuade the younger Part of this Audience, to whom in the Third and last Place I address myself, to *remember their Creator in the Days of their Youth?*

WHAT! will not a Desire of bringing Glory to God, Honour and Comfort to themselves; will not the Pleasure of an habitual Piety, and the comfortable Assurance of being sincere; above all, will not the Hopes of an honourable old Age, a peaceful Death, and a glorious Appearance at the tremendous

dous Day of Judgment; will not these, I say, prevail with them to leave their Husks, and return home to eat of the fatted Calf? What, will they thus requite their Saviour's Love? That be far from them! Did he come down and shed his precious Blood to deliver them from the Power of Sin; and will they spend their youthful Strength and Vigour in the Service of it, and *then* think to serve Christ, when they can follow their Lusts no longer? Is it fit, that many who are endowed with excellent Gifts, and are thereby qualified to be Supports and Ornaments of our sinking Church, should notwithstanding forget the God that gave them, and employ them in Things that will not profit? O why will they not arise, and, like so many *Phineas's*, be zealous for the Lord of Hosts? Doubtless, when Death overtakes them, they will wish they had: and what hinders them, but that they may live as well now, as they will wish they had when they leave the World? Think you that any one yet ever repented that he began to be good too soon? But how many, on the contrary, have repented that they began to be good too late? May we not well
imagine,

imagine, that young *Samuel* now rejoices that he waited so soon at the Tabernacle of the Lord? Or young *Timothy*, that from a Child he knew the Holy Scriptures? And if you wish to be Partakers of their Joy, let me persuade you to be Partakers of their Piety.

I could still go on to fill my Mouth with Arguments; but the Circumstances and Piety of those amongst whom *I am now preaching the Kingdom of God*, remind me to change my Style; and instead of urging any more Dissuasives from Sin, to fill up what is behind of this Discourse, with Encouragements to persevere in Holiness.

Blessed, for ever blessed be God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! I am not speaking to Persons inflamed with youthful Lusts, but to a Multitude of young Professors, who by frequently assembling together, and forming themselves into religious Societies, are in a ready Way to be of the Number of those *young Men* who have *overcome the wicked One*.

BELIEVE me, it gladdens my very Soul, to see so many of your Faces set heavenwards; and the visible happy Effects of your uniting together, cannot but rejoice the Hearts of all sincere Christians, and oblige them to *wish you good Luck in the Name of the Lord.* The many Souls that are nourish'd weekly by the spiritual Body and Blood of Jesus Christ by your Means; the weekly and monthly Lectures that are preached by your Contributions; the daily Incense of Thanksgiving and Prayer which is publickly sent up to the Throne of Grace by your Subscriptions; the many Children which are trained up *in the Nurture and Admonition of the Lord* by your Charities; and lastly, the commendable and pious Zeal you exert in promoting and encouraging divine Psalmody, are such plain and apparent Proofs of the Benefit of your religious Societies, that they call for a publick Acknowledgment of Praise and Thanksgiving to our blessed Master, who has not only put into your Hearts such good Designs, but enabled

enabled you also to bring the same to good Effect.

IT is true, it has been objected, “ That
“ young Mens forming themselves into reli-
“ gious Societies, has a Tendency to make
“ them spiritually proud, and think more
“ *highly of themselves than they ought to*
“ *think.*” And perhaps the imprudent im-
perious Behaviour of some Novices in Reli-
gion, who, *though they went out from you,*
were not of you, may have given too much
Occasion for such an Aspersion.

BUT *you, Brethren, have not so learned*
CHRIST. Far, far be it from you, to look
upon yourselves as righteous, and despise
others, because you often assemble your-
selves together. No, this, instead of create-
ing Pride, ought to beget an holy Fear in
your Hearts, lest your Practice should not
correspond with your Profession, and that,
after you have benefited and edified others,
you yourselves should become Cast-aways.

WORLDLY

WORLDLY-MINDEDNESS, my Brethren, is another Rock against which we are in Danger of splitting. For, if other Sins have slain their Thousands of professing Christians, this has slain its Ten thousands. I need not appeal to past Ages ; your own Experience, no Doubt, has furnish'd you with many unhappy Instances of young Men, who, after (as one would have imagin'd) they had escap'd *the Pollutions which are in the World through Lust, and had tasted the good Word of Life, and endured for a Season, whilst under the Tuition and Inspection of others ; yet when they have come to be their own Masters, through a Want of Faith, and through too great an Earnestness in labouring for the Meat which perisheth, have cast off their first Love, been again entangled with the World, and returned like the Dog to his Vomit, and like the Sow that was washed, to her wallowing in the Mire.* You would therefore do well, my Brethren, frequently to remind each other of this dangerous Snare, and to exhort one another to begin, pursue and end your
christian

christian Warfare, in a thorough Renunciation of the World, and worldly Tempers; so that, when you are oblig'd by Providence to provide for yourselves, and those of your respective Households, you may continue to walk by Faith, and *still seek first the Kingdom of God, and his Righteousness*; not doubting but *all other Things, upon your honest Industry and Endeavours, shall be added unto you.*

AND now *what shall I say more?* To speak unto you, Fathers, who have been in Christ so many Years before me, and know the Malignity of Worldly-mindedness, and Pride in the Spiritual Life, would be altogether needless. To you, therefore, O young Men, (for whom I am distressed, for whom I fear as well as for myself) do I once more address myself, in the Words of the beloved Disciple, *Look to yourselves, that we lose not those Things which we have wrought, but receive a full Reward. Be ever mindful, then, of the Words that have been spoken to us by the Apostles of the Lord and Saviour. Give Diligence to make*
your

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your Calling and Election sure. Beware, lest ye also being led away by the Error of the Wicked, fall from your own Stedfastness. Let him that thinketh he standeth, take Heed lest he fall. Be not high-minded, but fear. But we are persuaded better Things of you, and Things that accompany Salvation, tho' we thus speak. For God is not unrighteous, to forget your Works and Labours of Love. And we desire that every one of you do shew the same Diligence, to the full Assurance of Hope unto the End: That ye be not slothful, but Followers of them who thro' Faith and Patience inherit the Promises. 'Tis true, we have many Difficulties to encounter, many powerful Enemies to overcome, ere we can get Possession of the promis'd Land. We have an artful Devil, an ensnaring World, and above all, the Treachery of our own Hearts, to withstand and strive against. For streight is the Gate, and narrow is the the Way that leadeth unto eternal Life. But wherefore should we fear? since he that is with us is far more powerful, than all who are against us. Have we not already

ready

ready experienced his almighty Power, in enabling us to conquer some Difficulties which seemed as insurmountable then, as those we struggle with now? And cannot he who deliver'd us out of the Paws of those Bears and Lions, preserve us also from being hurt by the strongest *Goliath's*?

BE stedfast therefore, my Brethren, be immoveable. Consider the infinite future Rewards as well as present Comforts that attend an Early Piety. Be not *ashamed of the Gospel of Christ: For it is the Power of God unto Salvation.* Fear not Man; fear not the Contempt and Revilings which you must meet with in the Way of Duty: For *one of you shall chase a thousand; and two of you put Ten thousand of your Enemies to Flight.* And if you will be content to be abus'd for a short Time here, *I speak the Truth in Christ, I lye not;* then shall ye be exalted to sit down with the Son of Man, when he shall come in the Glory of his Father with his holy Angels to Judgment hereafter. May Almighty God give every one of us such a
E Measure

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Measure of his Grace, that we may not be of the Number of those that draw back unto Perdition, but of them that believe and endure unto the End, to the Saving of our Souls.

Which God, &c.

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