

THE SCOPE OF REDEMPTION AND MODERN THEOLOGY

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'Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you' (John 14:27).

'Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword' (Matt. 10:34).

'For he himself is our peace who has made the two one' (Eph. 2:14).

'Thus the people were divided (*schisma*) because of Jesus' (John 7:43).

Peace, fullness, health regained, all wounds healed, and the *sword*, that separates – these two terms evoke two series of texts and biblical themes associated with the message of salvation. It is hard to deny that they seem to be in opposition and that there is a paradox in their combination.¹ On the one hand, the 'total' vision of the knowledge of the Lord filling the earth as the waters cover the sea (Isa. 11:9; Hab. 2:14), the repeated word 'all', the promise of universal reconciliation (Col. 1:20), the assurance of the final completion, *anakephalaiosis*, in Christ (Eph. 1:10). On the other hand, the announcement of judgment which separates some from others, on the left and on the right of the Judge, the revelation of God's free choice who calls his elect from among the Jews and the Gentiles (Rom. 9:23ff), the irreducible antithesis between good and evil, between life and death (Deut. 30:15ff), between the two ways (which oblige us to make a decision), and finally the warning concerning the narrowness of the door and of the way (Matt. 7:13ff; Luke 13:23ff). Those theologians who reflect on the scope of redemption, on the extent of the area where the salvation wrought by Jesus Christ is operative, necessarily begin with this scriptural duality and the theoretical structures they build are best understood as so many attempts to deal jointly with the two terms, with wholeness and decision, with peace and the sword.

Three Positions

The main competing proposals can be situated at the three points of a logical triangle. Universalism gives preference to the gift of 'peace'; whatever goes against this is made subordinate to it. Texts are so interpreted that, in the end, none is left on the reprobate side.

¹ Tony Lane, 'The Quest for the Historical Calvin', *EQ* 55 (1983), p.96 writes of a tension between universality and particularity both in the Bible and in Calvin (the topic is the 'limited' atonement).

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Thorough universalists teach the final restoration (*apokatastasis*) of all human beings without exception, and even, as Origen, of the devil and the demons. We also call 'universalists' those who do not go as far as that, but who seriously expect that hell will be 'empty', or that the greater part of those who have not believed in this life shall be included among the redeemed. Symmetrically, the strict Augustinians, Calvinists and Jansenists take their bearings first of all from the theme of the 'sword': 'all' must be understood to mean all the elect, all the believers who choose the narrow way leading to salvation. The universality is circumscribed by particularity, from where comes the name of 'Particular Baptists', taken in the seventeenth century by the Calvinist Baptists.

Then come thirdly the mixed solutions. The one which bears the name of Moyse Amyraut (1596–1664), 'Amyraldian', but which both Catholics and Lutherans before him had taught, namely hypothetical universalism, articulates with the first duality yet another: the duality of the times, of the cross and of the end. In the decisive achievement of the cross, it is the 'all' that prevails: Jesus Christ has atoned for the sins of all human beings indiscriminately; he has taken their place and paid their ransom whether, in God's counsel, they belong to his chosen people or to the reprobates; there is no distinction, then, in the reference of his work. In the final judgment, however, only the elect, who will have believed, shall be saved. With Karl Barth, another mixed solution has appeared, namely universalism which may be called dialectic (although he disliked the label when he touched on the topic) or Christo-inclusive: the Yes and the No, saving grace and damnation, election and rejection, are not aimed at different categories; they concern all men and women at the same time in Christ, first of all Jesus Christ (the only concrete man) and all in him. In Amyraut's teaching, it would appear that division and particularity gain the upper hand, after all: in the end, only some are saved – that is what counts. It is the opposite with Barth, for whom the Yes of grace prevails mightily (non-dialectically in this sense) – yet without abolishing God's No altogether.

What is the present shape of the age-long debate on the scope of redemption? This we would delineate. Needless to say, our survey of modern theological trends in the last fifty years, with which we shall begin, does not pretend to be exhaustive! We have lacked the resources for a deeper study. Dr Richard J. Bauckham has made a superb start with the work, and we would refer the reader to his well-documented article.² In the second part, we shall try to

² 'Universalism: A Historical Survey', *Themelios* 4/2 (Jan. 1979), pp.48–54. We say 'start' since the article devotes only its last three pages (most informative ones) to the twentieth century.

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ascertain which factors have favoured the rise of universalism all around us, before sketching, in a third part of our development, a few elements in a possible Evangelical reply.

Protestant Universalists

'Tremendous advances all along the front': that is the victorious communiqué that the headquarters of the universalist army could issue in our century. Pockets of resistance are to be noted only on the flanks.

The heirs of the old-style liberalism remain strongly attached to the thought of an all-inclusive reconciliation. Just as Schleiermacher, they cannot envisage in God a more restrictive sympathy than that which can be found in the most noble of men. For John A.T. Robinson,³ for the Swedish-American theologian and philosopher Nels Ferré,⁴ for John Hick, the main advocate of universalism in English-speaking countries,⁵ it is unthinkable that the God of all compassion would leave his creatures, so feeble, made nevertheless in his image, to be swallowed up in the oblivion of nothingness; it would be abominable for him to let them suffer without end. The perdition of some people would mean God's failure, and evil would be made an everlasting reality.⁶ Excluding the ways of salvation proposed by other religions, they feel, smells of an arrogance unworthy of the gospel, and is tantamount to idolatry: the idolatrous worship of the form of religion which we have inherited from the Bible. Those who follow the teachers of this first tendency are wont to quote the words: 'In my Father's house are many mansions' (John 14:2).

The Barthian revolution did, for a time, make hearts tremble anew before the Lord's majesty. In principle, it denounces the audacity of a theology which imposes on God a preconceived notion of his love. It has unveiled the unbelief which disguises itself in the religion of natural humanity. Under this influence, men such as Hendrik Kraemer, Willem A. Visser't Hooft and Lesslie Newbigin have fought against a syncretistic and relativist universalism. But Karl Barth did not come back to the classic division of humanity. On the contrary, his Christological concentration led him to include all in

³ *In the End God* (London, 1950).

⁴ *The Christian Understanding of God* (New York, 1951).

⁵ *Evil and the God of Love* (London, 1966); *Death and Eternal Life* (London, 1976); *God Has Many Names* (Philadelphia, 1982).

⁶ So distinguished a writer as John Baillie, a very mild liberal indeed, would argue in this way: *And the Life Everlasting* (Oxford, 1934), pp.241ff.

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Jesus Christ. Double predestination, identical to the gospel, no longer separates humankind into two groups of individuals. Jesus Christ is the sole object: 'In the strict sense, only He can be understood and described as the "elected" (and "rejected"). All others are so in Him and not as individuals.'⁷ More precisely, 'God has ascribed to man the former, election, salvation and life; and to Himself He has ascribed the latter, reprobation, perdition and death', and 'when we look into the innermost recesses of the divine good-pleasure, predestination is the non-rejection of man. It is so because it is the rejection of the Son of God.'⁸ Barth combats all symmetry, all parallelism between the two parts, and stresses the transition from judgement to grace.⁹ What about the man who behaves as a rejected individual? 'He does it all in vain, because the choice which he thus makes is eternally denied and annulled in Jesus Christ'; he may place himself, with his like, under the threat, 'But it cannot now be their concern to suffer the execution of this threat, to suffer the eternal damnation which their godlessness deserves.... And this is the very goal which the godless cannot reach.'¹⁰

In tune with this interpretation, Barth never tires of repeating that every person is, in Christ, already justified and sanctified, whether he knows it or not. The town is liberated, all the inhabitants of the town are free, whether they continue to hide themselves in the cellars or whether they have discovered the reality common to all; so, among human beings, Christians are distinguished solely by their knowledge that all are free.¹¹ The *apokatastasis* seems therefore to

⁷ *Church Dogmatics* (hereafter *CD*) II:2, p.43. On the doctrine of election, one remembers that Barth had a forerunner in the person of his disciple Pierre Maury: he pays him a tribute in the preface to Maury's work, *La Prédestination* (Geneva, 1957), pp.5f.

⁸ *C.D.* II:2, pp. 163, 167.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 12f., 171, etc.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 317, 319.

¹¹ Many, many, are the texts which affirm these things and the 'unreality' of the man of sin. To take one volume only, vol. IV: in IV:1, pp. 77, 92f. – how Christians differ, 148 – objectively all men, 316f.; 661f. – how Christians differ, 742, 747, – ontological necessity, 758 – faith only cognitive; IV: 3/1, pp. 180f. – the world justified, 301-466 – total and definitive determination, – the man of sin nothing but a phantom evoked capriciously, IV: 3/2, pp. 486f. – the Christian only sees what is there for all. Barth happens to say that all people are saved *de jure* (IV: 3/1, p. 278) or 'potentially' (IV: 3/2, p. 492), but the context shows that his meaning is not Amyraldian.

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be an unavoidable conclusion. Karl Barth, however, resists the temptation of drawing the same.¹² Does he suspend judgment, due to lack of clear information? Does he consider it as a possibility without certainty? The matter would appear to be more complex. Barth rejects above all this kind of assurance about the future from which is born the security of the owners of grace (*beati possidentes!*); he tries to protect God's freedom.¹³ But, on the positive side, he would not be happy to envisage the *apokatastasis* as a possibility, a mere eventuality. In speaking of the dam of blindness, of unbelief, that many people set up against grace, he writes his conviction: 'The stream is too strong and the dam too weak for us to be able reasonably to expect anything but the collapse of the dam, and the onrush of the waters'.¹⁴ Rather than being agnostic, Barth's position would appear to correspond to a restrained, ambiguous, if not embarrassed, universalism – all that said with the deference due to genius! It is not astonishing that most of the Barthians have come to profess universalism without reticence, even Jacques Ellul, who cares most for biblical conformity.¹⁵ Bruce Nicholls is of the opinion that 'the trend to universalistic thinking in Asia stems more from the influence of Barth than from any other source'.¹⁶

In the whole area of Barthian influence, Barth having purified himself only in part from this post-Kantian stereotype, theologians have been apt to oppose 'objective', theoretical information to the truths 'of faith'. Under the spell of this influence, Emil Brunner, though a sharp critic of Barth and a vigorous preacher of personal decision, managed not to exclude the possibility of universal salvation.¹⁷ Gerrit C. Berkouwer has distanced himself progressively

¹² *Ibid.*, IV: 1, p. 118; IV: 3/1, pp.461-78, especially 477f..

¹³ This is already his intention in his comments on *apokatastasis* in his monograph *Die Botschaft von der freien Gnade Gottes* (1947) quoted by Heinrich Ott, *Eschatologie. Versuch eines dogmatischen Grundrisses* (Zollikon, 1958), p. 72.

¹⁴ *CD* IV: 3/1, pp. 355f..

¹⁵ *Un chrétien pour Israël* (Monaco, 1986), pp. 29f, with special application to Israel refusing to believe in Jesus.

¹⁶ 'The Exclusiveness and Inclusiveness of the Gospel', *Themelios* 4/2 (Jan. 1979) p. 63.

¹⁷ In *The Christian Doctrine of God (Dogmatics I; London, 1949)*, pp. 346ff., Brunner severely criticizes the Barthian doctrine of election, but, pp. 352ff, he does not reject the *apokatastasis* (renouncing logical conclusions). He returns to this in *Dogmatics III (The Christian Doctrine of the Church...)*, London, 1962), pp. 415-24 in a similar way.

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from traditionally orthodox positions. He has yielded to the same opposition between objectivity and faith, while showing leanings towards a Barthian (rather than Brunnerian) understanding of grace, laying stress on its all-determinative victory to which faith adds nothing. In 1953, as his views discreetly begin to change, he avoids entering the debate on the extent of Christ's substitution, even though the question belongs to his subject. He deals with the *apokatastasis*, with the relationship between the work of reconciliation and faith; he concludes that this relationship cannot be exactly analysed, but he is careful not to appear as a Barthian.¹⁸ In 1954, he explains more fully, in connection with the covenant promise, what function he gives to faith: it adds nothing, 'certainly not the application to one's life' (against Klaas Schilder).¹⁹ After his most evolutionary years, in 1961, Berkouwer ascribes a purely subjective import to the announcements of punishment: they are to be heeded as threats, they do not predict future events. As far as faith is concerned, if one imagines it as 'creating a situation that did not exist', it is a 'total misunderstanding'; he considers hell to have been exorcised through faith, and he declares his hostility to 'particularism'.²⁰

A new and less powerful revolution, of Hegelian inspiration just as the former was Kierkegaardian, has modified Protestant theology at the beginning of the 1960s. The thought of Jürgen Moltmann, the most representative in our opinion, surely the most influential in the *oikoumene*, also promotes universalism. At first somewhat hazy, it becomes more open in *The Crucified God*: since God, in Jesus, has identified himself with the poor, with criminals, with the ungodly (those without God), since the Son was abandoned of God, the ungodly *qua* ungodly are justified and integrated into his fellowship.²¹ Nothing indicates, in Moltmann's context, that he would deem faith a requisite to that end. On the contrary, he celebrates the abolition of differences including that 'between Christians and non-Christians' and refuses the idea of an 'enclave of redemption in an unredeemed world'.²² The third volume of Moltmann's famous trilogy is powerfully carried along by the hope of totalisation, of universal reconciliation, when all flesh *together*

¹⁸ *The Work of Christ* (Grand Rapids, 1965), pp. 288–94.

¹⁹ *The Sacraments* (Grand Rapids, 1969), pp. 157, 186.

²⁰ *The Return of Christ* (Grand Rapids, 1972), pp. 409, 414ff, 408, 421, 409, 412.

²¹ *The Crucified God* (London, 1974), pp. 178, 248.

²² *Ibid.*, respectively pp.194f. and 101 (convergence with Ben-Chorin, 100).

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shall see the glory of God (Isa. 40:5, a verse often quoted there). Exalting the universality of the new covenant,²³ Moltmann states precisely in an important footnote that biblical particularism is subordinated to universalism.²⁴ The church, he claims, does *not* consist only of people having the same faith ('fellow-believers'), it cannot be defined as the 'community of the saved'.²⁵ He invites non-Christians to the Lord's Table, and he pleads that 'no religion (must be) extinguished'.²⁶ In his later works, Moltmann finds fewer opportunities to spell out his feeling; yet, in *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, he opposes the principle of judicial retribution: 'The guilt-expiation complex increases suffering and gives it permanence through the archaic religious idea of a world order that has been spoilt and has to be restored'; 'for love, there is only innocent suffering...'.²⁷ If Moltmann's caution, and eloquent use of biblical language in many parts of his writings, had left the shadow of a doubt on the reader's mind, these affirmations dispel it: the Tübingen theologian falls on the universalist's side.

Catholic Universalists

Catholic theology has, for a long time indeed, stressed universality. 'Universal' is one of the possible meanings of the word 'catholic' itself. Leonardo Boff well summarises the anthropo-cosmic interpretation of catholicity that is much in fashion today: 'The Christian faith... presents itself as the response to the totality of human aspirations and as the fulness of all the cosmic dynamisms working towards a final convergence.'²⁸ Used to cultivating the seeds of the *logos spermatikos* and to considering natural religions as a *praeparatio evangelica*, Catholic religion easily understands itself as the fulfilment and crowning glory of pagan hopes. The last decades have been marked by an evolution towards an even greater universalism. On non-Christian beliefs and modern unbelief, minds have changed at an accelerated pace; Hendrik Nys shows how in his *Saulchoir* (the most prestigious Dominican seminary in France)

²³ *The Church in the Power of the Spirit. A Contribution to Messianic Ecclesiology* (London, 1977), p. 252.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 375 n. 49.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 189, 293. Only on p. 230 can one read a sentence which seems to link justification to faith.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 246, 163.

²⁷ *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God* (London, 1981), p. 51.

²⁸ 'Mission et universalité concrète de l'Eglise', *Lumière et Vie* 27/137 (April-May 1978), p. 34.

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thesis, under the provocative title: *Salvation Without the Gospel*.²⁹ The publisher, we are told, suppressed a question mark which the author had added;³⁰ was the publisher a prophet?

Let us turn our searchlight to a few significant examples. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin surely worked in the universalist direction, he who loved to speak of 'pleromisation' and coined the adage: 'All that ascends converges.' He would foretell, e.g., a 'general convergence of Religions'.³¹ In 1926–27, he did maintain the reality of hell (was it to propitiate the censorship? He sounds quite sincere);³² in 1938–40 (in a text revised in 1948), he envisages as a hypothesis an ultimate 'ramification', that is to say, a division of humanity.³³ But in 1944, in a paper written without any hope of publication, when he wonders 'whether the salvific work (can) have a one hundred per cent profit', that is, if all shall be saved, he gives as his answer that 'Christianity will not decide that and does not deny it altogether'.³⁴

Since then, the doubt concerning the reality of hell has lessened! Such a distinguished theologian as Karl Rahner does not consider himself under any obligation, either by the doctrine of the church or by Scripture, to believe that 'at least some men are certainly damned'.³⁵ He is the most famous exalter of universal grace. Grace, as he is wont to say, is not 'rare'; grace so penetrates the world that it constitutes for all a 'supernatural existential', an ontological determinant of *Dasein*, the human condition.³⁶ 'All human realities, even when seen from their natural side, thus have in fact a "Christian soul"'.³⁷ 'God is the most inward dynamism of the world and of

²⁹ *Le Salut sans l'Évangile. Étude historique et critique du problème du 'salut des infidèles' dans la littérature théologique récente (1912–1964)* (Paris, 1966).

³⁰ This information comes from Bernard Bro, *Faut-il encore pratiquer? L'homme et les sacrements* (Paris, 1967), p. 415.

³¹ 'Comment je crois' (1934), *Oeuvres X* (Paris, 1969) p. 150 (cf. pp. 138–150).

³² *Le Milieu Divin*, (London, 1960), pp.140ff.

³³ *The Phenomenon of Man* (London, 1959), pp. 288f.

³⁴ 'Introduction à la vie chrétienne', *Oeuvres X*, p. 192.

³⁵ 'The Hermeneutics of Eschatological Assertions', in *Theological Investigations IV* (London, 1966), p. 339 n. 15.

³⁶ Charles Muller and Herbert Vorgrimler, *Karl Rahner* (Paris, 1965), pp. 81, 83; Nys, *op. cit.*, pp. 163ff.

³⁷ *Mission et grâce I: XXe siècle, siècle de grâce? Fondements d'une théologie pastorale pour notre temps* (Tours, 1962), p. 80.

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man's spirit.³⁸ Hence Rahner's assurance that we are surrounded by many 'anonymous Christians'; they are really Christians without knowing it if they sacrifice themselves for others, if they face death with serenity – even though they may deny God, Christ, and the church.³⁹ No appearance to the contrary will discourage Rahner's confidence here.⁴⁰ The statement that other religions have positive elements is left far behind; they have become legitimate options, and even *obligatory*, for 'man has the right and even the duty to realise his relationship with God *in* and *through* the religion which is offered to him in his concrete and historical situation'.⁴¹

After Teilhard and Rahner, we observe no reversal in the main tendencies of Catholic theology; many today repudiate the 'pessimistic' theology of Augustine and Jansen, and, of course, of the Protestant Reformers, and they acclaim an optimistic soteriology attributed to Irenaeus – with an explicit reference, sometimes, to Origen, to Gregory of Nyssa, whom they praise, and to *apokatastasis* as the hope they entertained.⁴²

Catholic universalism shows its defenders' skill: it is a fine, delicate, piece of work! It does not forsake Cyprian's dictum, which was, for centuries, the very formula of intolerance: *Extra ecclesiam nulla salus*; but now the church is universalised.⁴³ It does not discard tradition, and it proceeds with caution and reserve: Karl Rahner eschews any massive affirmation of *apokatastasis*, while he does allow (with Romans 11:32, he thinks) that we hope for it.⁴⁴ The threat of perdition still hovers over those who close their hearts to their neighbours: a residue, perhaps, of the need of works for

³⁸ *Le Courage du théologien*, dialogue with Karl Rahner published by Paul Imhof and Hubert Biallowons (Paris, 1985), p. 94.

³⁹ *Mission et grâce I*, pp. 79, 102, 158, 215, 223; *Mission et grâce III: au service des hommes. Pour une présence chrétienne au monde d'aujourd'hui* (Tours, 1965), pp. 22, 28; *Le Courage du théologien*, pp. 112, 183, 189, Nys, *op. cit.*, pp. 264ff (234ff for Schillebeeckx).

⁴⁰ *Mission et grâce III*, pp. 61ff.

⁴¹ Nys, *op. cit.*, p. 179.

⁴² Cf. Jan-Hendrik Walgrave, *Un salut aux dimensions du monde* (Paris, 1970), pp. 90f, 93; although he is fairly conservative, the French Jesuit Gustave Martelet has written in the same anti-augustinian sense, *Libre Réponse à un scandale. La faute originelle, la souffrance, la mort* (Paris, 1986), pp. 44, 49, 73, 79f, 136; also 62: impenitent sinners only bring upon themselves God's mercy.

⁴³ *Le Courage du théologien*, pp. 141f.

⁴⁴ *Mission et grâce III*, p. 74.

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justification. And how subtle! Karl Rahner would deserve in his turn Duns Scotus's title of *doctor subtilis*! His argument makes the most of the complexity of human souls, of the hiatus which may obtain between levels of consciousness and unconsciousness. It detects the germ of implicit faith under strata of misunderstandings, of corrupted information, of emotional blockages. It follows a logic of gradation: it does not contrast the Yes and the No, unbelief and faith, but minuscule unconscious beginnings and final fullness, with the whole gamut to run in between. One of the most sober of all, himself, Yves Congar, admits of a faith before faith, such an embryo of faith that suffices for salvation and resides in the person's choice of values and the person's attitude to the neighbour – the 'sacrament of the neighbour'.⁴⁵

Opponents of Universalism

Resistance to universalism is to be found in two streams each far distant from the other. Some neo-liberal theologies (if that name be accepted) have scarcely any room for a general reconciliation at the end of time. Bultmannian theology, by disposing of all belief in the beyond as mythological, by reducing the *eschaton* to the *nunc* of the *kerygma*, brings into sharp focus the theme of decision: decision means division, and it is clear that not all arrive at authentic existence. The most radical among political theologies, gripped by the urgency of earthly combats leading to revolution, rediscover the need to take sides, as well as the relevance of judgment.⁴⁶ One can discern, moreover, in the surrounding culture, in reaction against totalitarian ideologies, a new mistrust of all-incompassing schemes, even of claims to universal validity.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ *Vaste Monde ma paroisse. Vérité et dimensions du salut* (Paris, 1966), p. 142; the first edition included the phrase 'the sacrament of the neighbour' which was later suppressed.

⁴⁶ Georges Casalis, *Les idées justes ne tombent pas du ciel. Eléments de théologie inductive* (Paris, 1977), pp. 175f, 180; and 172 against 'tolerance shown to "another gospel" (Gal. 1:9)'.

⁴⁷ Henri Bourgeois, 'Jésus, l'universel du pauvre', *Lumière et Vie* 27/137 (April–May 1978), pp. 119, 122, has felt this well. The work of Pierre Gisel, *La Création. Essai sur la liberté et la nécessité, l'histoire et la loi, l'homme, le mal et Dieu* (Geneva, 1980), is significant in this respect. He preaches constantly for difference, otherness, rupture. On pp. 233ff, he mentions Calvin's doctrine of predestination positively because 'it shows that difference is paramount, that God is special, that he takes sides' (234).

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Evangelical theology, at the opposite corner, continues firmly to resist universalism. The concerns of evangelisation are close to its heart, as the statements emanating from great congresses or conferences prove (Berlin 1966, Amsterdam 1971, Lausanne 1974, Pattaya 1980, Stuttgart 1988, Lausanne II in Manila 1989). The Indian theologian Ajith Fernando's plea stands as a representative example. An important cleavage remains, however, in relation to hypothetical universalism. Rigorous Calvinists would fight against it, and defend the so-called 'limited' atonement.⁴⁸ Benjamin B. Warfield highlighted, at the beginning of this century, the solidarity of 'limited' atonement with the principle of *sola fide*, and with free access to God without any intermediary.⁴⁹ John Murray has gathered exegetical insights in a remarkable dogmatic synthesis.⁵⁰ Roger Nicole, the major authority on Amyraut in the world, has refuted him in his Harvard dissertation.⁵¹ James Packer has warmly commended John Owen's still relevant treatment.⁵²

On the other side, the advocates of the Amyraldian 'hypothesis' reject, in Calvinism, what, in their eyes, narrows and impoverishes divine grace.⁵³ With Fernando, Pinnock, and others, they feel that a horrible doubt is cast upon God's love for all people. They fear that the universal offer of salvation be deprived of its necessary foundation, and that the unbeliever should appear not as responsible for his fate, but as the victim of the obscure *fatum* of God's decree. Was Calvin himself, on this issue, a Calvinist? The controversy has started afresh recently concerning this point. It would seem difficult to overthrow Roger Nicole's demonstration, so closely argued and painstaking⁵⁴ – but each writer interprets Calvin as he does the

⁴⁸ The English phrase 'limited atonement' is less happy than the French 'expiation définie'. Contrary to the Calvinists' intention, it suggests an insufficiency in redemption, a lesser grace. The aim is rather to contest what is indefinite, and therefore weak, ineffective.

⁴⁹ *The Plan of Redemption* (Philadelphia, 1915).

⁵⁰ *Redemption: Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids, 1955).

⁵¹ Unpublished doctoral thesis, Harvard Divinity School, 1966.

⁵² Introduction to a new edition of John Owen, *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ* (1648; London, 1959).

⁵³ See the symposium, Clark Pinnock (ed.), *Grace Unlimited* (Minneapolis, 1975). In Calvinist eyes, of course, Amyraldian and Arminian grace is limited: by the autonomous power of human free-will, which can frustrate God's grace.

⁵⁴ 'John Calvin's View of the Extent of the Atonement', *Westminster Theological Journal* 47 (1985), pp. 197–225; see EQ 55

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Bible, compelled carefully to weigh data quite diverse in a complex whole!

Analysis: Factors at Work

It is rare that a doctrine makes disciples in proportion to its merits (success, sometimes, is inversely proportional to its value!). Many non-theological factors play their part. We will not try to explain the favour that universalism enjoys today; rather, more modestly, to discern the motivations, orientations and connected choices of the *theologians* of universalism, in order to understand it better. As will surprise no one, the various factors that we will isolate are concretely combined, to different degrees, in the authors mentioned.

The sentimental, even the visceral, factor seems to push most people towards universalism. We speak of a moral sensitivity, and emotional attachment to *values*. A mutation has taken place in the attitude towards the sufferings of others, even sufferings that have been well-deserved, as R. Bauckham writes.⁵⁵ We quoted earlier Moltmann's eloquent statement to that effect. The law of retribution is shattered or denied, and, with it, the penal understanding of Christ's death on the cross.⁵⁶ The French Protestant philosopher Paul Ricoeur calls for 'the preacher who would only

(1983), pp. 65-128, and Paul Helm, 'The Logic of Limited Atonement', *SBET* 3 (1985) pp. 47-54, mainly a reply to James B. Torrance. We have come across recently a passage which is not mentioned in Roger Nicole's full and careful review and would seem to be strongly in favour of hypothetical universalism: in his 28th Sermon on Deuteronomy, Calvin distinguishes between several loves of God for men; while God's third love, regenerating love, is only for the faithful, the first love 'extends to all men' and it involves Christ having been made a curse in order to reconcile us to his Father (*Opera Calvini*, XXVI, col. 216, as quoted at length by Pierre Marcel, 'L'Actualité de la prédication', *La Revue Réformée* no. 7 (1951), p. 53).

⁵⁵ *Op. cit.*, p. 51.

⁵⁶ Cf. the large-scale offensive launched by Paul Ricoeur, 'Interprétation du mythe de la peine', in *Le Conflit des interprétations. Essais d'herméneutique* (Paris, 1969), pp. 348-69. The penal interpretation, that Bossuet preached, meets with an almost total hostility among Catholics today; cf. Martelet, *op. cit.*, p. 160; also Bernard Sèsboue, 'Equisse d'une théologie de la Rédemption', *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* 106 (1984), pp. 801-16 and 107 (1985), pp. 68-86. These authors are among the more moderate!

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atheist... We listened to this language,⁶⁴ and it deserves to be heard. But the consequences are stupendous. Let anthropology add its word about personhood as shaped by culture, as a product of social intercourse and influence, and all religions will be legitimate: 'Man's nature requires the divine invitation as well as the human acceptance to have a social structure. God does not come to man, and man does not come to himself, except *in* and *through* the world and others'; therefore every established religion is *rightful* for those who are born within its sphere of influence.⁶⁵ If we take into account 'implicit' orientations and stress the collective dimension of human life, how easy it is to include, how difficult to exclude!

The condition whereby these different factors produce their universalist effect is the modern drift away from the ancient reception of Scripture. One must loosen first the sovereign authority of the canonical text. Richard Bauckham rightly insists: 'Thus the modern universalist is no longer bound to the letter of the New Testament.'⁶⁶ We know of no great theologian who has slipped towards universalism while maintaining a strictly orthodox attitude to Scripture (Berkouwer is no exception). Modern universalists put forward hermeneutical considerations (the weight of which they often tend to overestimate) to distance themselves from the text. Its cultural conditioning, the abundance of imagery, and especially its 'existential' intent, allegedly authorise a departure from the 'obvious sense'.⁶⁷ Origen already explained that Scripture should say 'many' and not 'all' by its desire to 'leave the simpler and slacker an incentive for striving for salvation'.⁶⁸ Universalists build their case on the *a priori* opposition between religious or biblical language, with its 'kerygmatic' mode and aims, and the language of objective information. This *a priori* is foreign to Scripture, and it works as a Procrustean bed when applied to biblical theology; it renders possible emancipation under respectful forms.

⁶⁴ Cf. Nys, *op. cit.*, pp. 135ff, 153ff.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 179.

⁶⁶ *Op. cit.*, p. 52.

⁶⁷ This is what Karl Rahner develops with finesse and circumspection in the article quoted above (note 35). More brutal versions are to be found in the works of J.A.T. Robinson.

⁶⁸ Quoted by Berkouwer, *The Return of Christ*, p. 406 n. 51.

Towards a Reply: Some Considerations

The noble task of framing an Evangelical reply to universalism exceeds the bounds of our present study. We shall content ourselves with making some remarks, which we hope will be relevant and that will deal in reverse order with the factors just outlined.

The attitude to Scripture, once again, decides the course that one will take. Without revisiting the issue of bibliology here, we would draw attention to the scientific quality of much material that was published in the last ten years or so, especially in symposia: they can sharpen our discernment, they dispel misunderstanding, they update arguments.⁶⁹

More specifically, the nerve centre in the universalist treatment of the Bible is the reduction of condemnatory prophecies to the category of mere threats and warnings (which will never come about). The primary response should be the exegesis of particular passages, such as 2 Thessalonians 1:6–10 and 2:10–12, to measure in detail the degree of adequacy or inadequacy of their suggested interpretation; the work that has already been done by orthodox scholars does not yield a favourable verdict. The coherence of the universalist logic should, then, bear scrutiny; Paul Helm's implacable analysis uncovers the flaws in the constructions of Hick, of Robinson (briefly), and it is convincing on what it calls *soft universalism*, universalism admitting of independent free-will.⁷⁰ Above all, those presuppositions should be brought to light which, uncritically (but not above criticism!), divide between objective information and kerygmatic or existential intent.

For instance, in Rahner's most skilful plea, we may note that his idea of humanity's historicity leads him abstractly to exaggerate the mysterious, hidden, character of the *eschaton*, to the benefit of pure unforeseeableness, and so to shut himself up in an alternative which is too hard and artificial: either a report on the future which no longer concerns our today existentially, or else: 'Man, even by revelation, only knows about this still absent future what he can, prospectively, decipher in his present state *from* and *in* his historic experience of salvation.'⁷¹ What a strange *Diktat*! Is it not possible

⁶⁹ D.A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge, ed., *Scripture and Truth* (Grand Rapids, 1983) and *Hermeneutics, Authority and Canon* (1986); Paul Wells, ed., *Dieu parle! Etudes sur la Bible et son interprétation* (Aix-en-Provence, 1984).

⁷⁰ 'Universalism and the Threat of Hell', *Trinity Journal* 4 (1983), pp. 35–43.

⁷¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 155. On the other points mentioned, pp. 148, 150f, 153 (n. 2).

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to know about facts to come that cannot be extrapolated from the present alone and which, nevertheless, do concern this present time? If someone discloses to me that my house will be on fire (because he knows of an arsonist's scheme, yet impossible to prevent), my present existence is affected indeed; I try to protect my belongings, I buy a fireproof safe, *etc.* If Scripture discloses that Jesus Christ is coming in glory to judge 'the quick and the dead', the knowledge of this fact, of this fact as an objectively certain fact, yet which we could hardly prognosticate from the mere deciphering of the present, urges us to make sensible choices today. Such a God-given knowledge is a guide for decision; it does not stifle decision-making. If everything were foretold, down to the smallest detail, with a complete time-table, both the full programme of eschatology and all historical events before, one could fear, perhaps, the asphyxiation of human freedom. But the wisdom of our God does not proceed in this way: although he does embrace in his Design all our moves – he *can* do so without wounding their true freedom owing to the radical interiority of his action – the Lord judges that our finite freedom, in order to work consciously, needs to know *enough* without knowing *all*. Rahner argues as if human freedom were infinite, and could only tolerate in front of itself a total vacuum, so as to create the future *ex nihilo*! Freedom is a creature; it receives its measure, and that is *the good* for freedom.⁷²

With regard to the appraisal of faith, studied empirically, we confess that the reply is difficult. The first step would be, perhaps, for Evangelicals, to recognise this difficulty and to learn a little more subtlety from those who would appear to have too much of it! We should recall, however, that Evangelical theologians are of diverse opinions, with various shades and nuances, on such an issue as the fate of those who have no access to the explicit gospel, in oral or written form.⁷³ We propose that God's general revelation, in creation and providence (*cf.* Matt. 5:45), provides *enough light* to enable men and women, if the Holy Spirit is at work (as in all conversions), to put their trust in Jesus Christ for salvation – without knowing more about him than the humblest Old Testament believers.⁷⁴ This is in no way a concession to syncretist confusion. On the basis of Scripture, solid analyses have rightly exposed the

⁷² In the shaping of Rahner's thought, we would incriminate his philosophical idealism and the humanistic antimony Nature-Freedom.

⁷³ *Cf.* the competent survey by Malcolm J. McVeigh, 'The Fate of Those Who've Never Heard? It Depends', *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 21 (1985), pp. 370–79.

⁷⁴ This comes from Sir J. Norman D. Anderson's view, *loc. cit.*

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dodging of major incompatibilities between religions.⁷⁵ On the delicate question of the role of faith in salvation, of this faith whose 'too human' reality does not seem to be able to bear such a great weight, the reply cannot but refer to the *divine* reality of faith. Only if faith is the gift and the work of God, creating a vital, organic, union with Christ, is it understandable that it makes all the difference.

The criticism of the major speculative schemata would require volumes. We would wish to underline two points particularly: the need for the unequivocal treatment of the problem of evil that brings out the historical character of evil, foreign to the first perfection of God's created work; and, then, the solidity of the Evangelical anchoring of the doctrine of penal substitution, so strongly attested in Scripture and so persistently attacked by modernist theologies.

What is the bearing, in our debate, of the historicity of evil? Denouncing evil as a historical intrusion is the original feature of the biblical account (of the 'Adamic myth', Paul Ricoeur says when he compares it with the myths of nations), and the church confessed it until the advent of modern rationalism. Nobody would have raised doubts, and alleged literary clues in Genesis, had it not been for the pressure of a rival discourse on origins. Only when another reconstruction of human beginnings swayed the minds of many did a symbolic, non-historical, interpretation of Eden gain much ground. If the Bible, then, does reveal a 'Fall' in space and time, at a second stage, what is the significance? It draws the distinction between evil and the metaphysical constitution of reality. If evil has arisen afterwards, it does not belong to being (or to the simple negation of being), it is not part of the human condition as such. Whosoever denies that, and disavows the real succession of blessed integrity, to start with, and inexcusable transgression, later, shall end with the ascription of a metaphysical, first-principle, character to evil. Under close scrutiny, all the speculative systems which we have mentioned verify this rule. *Now the cure corresponds to the disease.* To save us from an unpleasant metaphysical determinant, a metaphysical operation will be in order (and no longer the payment, once, of our debt to justice, the bearing of our sins by the Lamb that was slain, as the apostles preached). Atonement or redemption will be understood as the *assumptio* of the human by the divine, with divinising effects, or as the incorporation of the negative into God... Such operations will apply to human nature or condition as such, and therefore will

⁷⁵ Cf. the excellent article of Harold Netland, 'Religious Pluralism and Truth', *Trinity Journal* 6 (1985), pp. 74-87, esp. 82-86 refuting Hick; of Netland also: 'Exclusivism, Tolerance and Truth', *Evangelical Review of Theology* 12 (1988), pp. 240-60.

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affect equally *all* human beings. It is a universalist slope. Some may stop half-way, but one starts sliding as soon as one balks at confessing *as an event* that 'sin entered into the world'.⁷⁶

That the cross of Calvary was the punishment that brought us peace, because Jesus the Christ was thus bearing our sins on the tree of torment, that he thus paid our debt and ransomed us from the curse, is the primary meaning of his death for Evangelical theology. Since the Reformation, it is the privileged emphasis when salvation is preached, and it outshines other biblical aspects of the work of redemption. Its warrants in Scripture have been repeatedly set forth in scholarly studies;⁷⁷ even critics who refuse to subscribe to the doctrine have acknowledged its rootage: Bultmann, for instance, openly defines the New Testament understanding of the cross as a 'mythical interpretation' which 'is a mixture of sacrificial and juridical analogies'.⁷⁸ Bultmann rightly perceives what he dislikes indeed! While it has been largely misinterpreted or ignored by the incarnational theology of Catholic tradition, by the subjective choice of Socinians and of their Liberal posterity, by speculations of Hegelian style, the atonement effected by Christ's penal substitution is the heart of the message.

But what is the connection with the issue of universalism? It is easy to perceive the bonds of solidarity with the historical character of evil which we have just stressed, but does a vicarious atonement

⁷⁶ For fuller developments we may refer to what we have written elsewhere, especially *In the Beginning. The Opening Chapters of Genesis*, transl. by David G. Preston (Leicester, 1984), chapter VII; 'Evangile, mythe ou histoire?' in Henri Blocher and F. Lovsky, *Bible et Histoire* (Lausanne, 1980) for the confrontation with myths; *Le Mal et la Croix. La pensée chrétienne aux prises avec le mal* (Méry-sur-Oise, 1990) for a critical analysis of main theories.

⁷⁷ John R.W. Stott's synthesis, *The Cross of Christ* (Leicester, 1986), has been rightly praised as a most representative defence of the evangelical view; half of Leon Morris' admirable scholarly work, since *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross* (London, 1955), is devoted to the same doctrine in the New Testament; a dense and rigorous demonstration is set forth by James I. Packer, 'What Did the Cross Achieve? The Logic of Penal Substitution', *Tyndale Bulletin* 25 (1974) pp. 1-45. See also I. Howard Marshall, *The Work of Christ* (Exeter, 1969); G.C. Berkouwer, *The Work of Christ*; and still Benjamin B. Warfield, *The Person and Work of Christ* (Philadelphia, repr. 1950).

⁷⁸ In his famous 1941 lecture 'The New Testament and Mythology' in H.-W. Bartsch (ed.), *Kerygma and Myth* (London, 1972), p. 35.

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for sin *exclude* that salvation, in the end, should actually reach all human beings?

The consequences of the biblical doctrine of redemption, as to its 'scope', cannot be drawn if we do not settle the question of *hypothetical* universalism. Even without becoming a Barthian (for Barth disowns the orthodox doctrine of substitution),⁷⁹ one can conceive of such a penal substitution that would efficiently secure the final justification of all. Since the biblical data furnish a superabundant proof that, alas! such is not the case, we must carefully reexamine the 'articulation' of redemption accomplished and redemption applied.

Amyraldian, hypothetical universalism raises some serious difficulties. It has, to be sure, important assets: it enables one to highlight two truly biblical 'universalities', that of the love of God, who does not want anyone to perish, and that of the offer of salvation, which is made to all, indiscriminately. But it stumbles over a first problem: if Christ *did pay* the judicial debt of a reprobate, God cannot condemn and punish this person: for God would be unjust! He cannot require twice the same price. It is not enough to reply that the reprobate refuses God's grace and that he condemns himself, for Scripture underlines that the judgment is *of God*, that punishment is inflicted *of him*. The popular comparison with a cheque that requires the payee's endorsement to bring about its effect cannot apply: for the precious blood of the divine ransom *has been shed*. Seventeenth-century Arminians, following Grotius, tried to solve the difficulty by toning down the idea of the debt paid; they retained only a solemn illustration (on Calvary) of the deserts of sin *generally*. But it was no longer strictly true that Christ *bore our sins*.

The second major obstacle in the way of hypothetical universalism is the *trinitarian* dissonance it implies: the Father chooses the elect, the Holy Spirit works in the same only the willing and doing of faith, and the reference of the Son's sacrifice would remain undefined. Moysse Amyraut, who claimed to be a Calvinist on election and the gift of faith, must have sorely felt the force of that point. But it is not lost on Evangelical Arminians, contrary to what some could expect: for Arminians do not deny election and the Spirit's work as particular; they only make them dependent on an independent human

⁷⁹ CD IV:1, p. 253: 'We must not make this [i.e. suffering our punishment] a main concept..., either in the sense that by His suffering our punishment we are spared from suffering it ourselves, or that in so doing He "satisfied" or offered satisfaction to the wrath of God. The latter thought is quite foreign to the New Testament.'

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decision (through foresight or passive foreknowledge in the case of election) without erasing the particular character. For them also, therefore, coherence would be greater if the Son had died for the same beneficiaries, whose faith God had foreknown! For them also (we may recall), it is infallibly certain, before the foundation of the world, it is unchangeably written in the book of God, that this man, John or Peter or Andrew, will harden himself to the end and be lost; it is true of all reprobates on Arminian premises, and hypothetical universalism cannot alter the fact. This somewhat harsh reminder suggests that Amyraldian universalism fails as a strategy for avoiding the 'hard' core of biblical teaching – and, so, is it worth paying the price of its difficulties?

The rejection of the so-called 'limited' atonement (non-indefinite atonement) often stems from misunderstanding, or from acquaintance with a mere caricature. Thus, the *sufficiency* of Christ's sacrifice for all human beings is not denied by true Calvinists; with Calvin himself writing on 1 John 2:2, they are able to say *sufficient* for all and *efficient* for believers only. One may render justice to 'universal' texts, to the biblical theme of peace, by considering humankind as an organic whole – although most Calvinists have sadly neglected that dimension and missed theological riches. The Lamb of God truly took upon himself, and took away, the sin of the world as a global entity. The New Adam does assume and save Humankind and, together with Humankind, the infra-human cosmos that depends on him. Abraham Kuyper was able to bring to light this universality of redemption, that lies too often hidden:

If we liken mankind, thus, as it has grown up out of Adam, to a tree, then the elect are not leaves which have been plucked off from the tree that there may be braided from them a wreath for God's glory, while the tree itself is to be felled, rooted up and cast into the fire; but precisely the contrary, the lost are the branches, twigs and leaves which have fallen away from the stem of mankind, while the elect alone remain attached to it.⁸⁰

All images have their limitations, and this one is not perfect: but it has the advantage of reminding us of the apostle's illustration of Israel: the olive-tree enjoys salvation (the organic aspect), while unbelieving Jews are cut off from the tree *individually*. To transfer this apostolic piece of symbolism as Kuyper does is all the more

⁸⁰ *E Voto Dordraceno* II, p. 178, as quoted by B.B. Warfield, *Biblical and Theological Studies* (Philadelphia, 1952), p. 336; Saint Augustine, *On Rebuke and Grace* XIV, 44, affirms of the elect: 'The whole human race is in them' (*omne genus hominum est in eis*).

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justified since Israel represents the entire human race, both in grace and in judgement – the key feature in Israel's mystery. Even apart from this global, organic view, Calvinists who hold to a particular atonement *can* add that Christ died, in some respects, 'for all human beings', even for the reprobates: he did not settle their judicial debt, but he secured for them the benefits of this earthly life (the reprieve which God grants to the 'old' sinful world logically depends on redemption), and his sacrifice validly grounds an offer of salvation which they could receive – *if only they wanted to*.

It is impossible here to review all the relevant biblical passages; it has been done elsewhere. The foregoing considerations enable us to harmonise Calvinism with a great number of those statements in Scripture which hypothetical universalists are wont to put forward; in most other cases, contextual hints favour, or, at least, allow, an interpretation different from theirs. On the opposite side, particularistic texts also abound. If the reference (scope) of Christ's substitution were simply universal, without any distinction, why would it be said so regularly 'for us' (believers), for the church, *etc.*? It is the seed of Abraham that he took on himself (Heb. 2:16). Far from any collusion with Calvinism, Albert Schweitzer deemed it to be historically established that Jesus thought he would die for a well-defined community, the community of the elect.⁸¹ The Qumran scrolls, which help us better to understand the language of the Gospels, provide us with a new piece of evidence. The Qumran Essenes, as we read in their *Community Rule*, loved to call themselves 'the Many' (1 QS, the rendering of most interpreters, including Dupont-Sommer): they borrowed the term from the Isaiah 52–53 prophecy, where *hârabbîm* is insistently repeated to designate the beneficiaries of the Servant's death. We cannot doubt that they gave the word a particularist meaning, for they passionately claimed to be, and they alone, the true Israel of God, the elect people; on the apostate nation, on the sons of Belial, they would call fire down from heaven. Now, Jesus uses the same term, as is obvious from its Greek equivalent, *hoi polloi*, when he also alludes to Isaiah 53 and tells of the gift of his Servant's life as a ransom substituted for 'the Many' (Matt. 20:28). This is a weighty argument. One more scriptural consideration opposed to hypothetical universalism: occurrences with 'all' are not found in any greater number in connection with the Cross than they are with the End; on Amyraldian terms, there should be a clear-cut disproportion! This element adds to the others and strengthens the suspicious feeling that an indefinite atonement might not turn out to be as biblical as it looked at first sight.

⁸¹ *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle* (London, 1931), p.58.

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Ultimately, what convinces us relates to the concrete conditions of Christ's substitution. That a given individual should judicially 'pay' for another raises serious objections: is it not the typical denial of justice? As long as one affirms, in the abstract, that Jesus Christ bore the criminal's penalty instead of him, something of a scandal arises: 'The soul that sins, *it* shall die.' In biblical perspective, substitution is possible, is rightful, when we do not deal with isolated individuals: when communal bonds allow a transference of responsibilities, when the head of the community makes himself accountable for the deeds of his own or acts on their behalf, whether for good or for ill – all members shall bear the consequences, as the people had to bear them when David sinned. Jesus Christ achieved the work of redemption in such a capacity, and there was nothing undefined. He delivered himself concretely as the Shepherd for *his* sheep, as the King for *his* people, as the Master for *his* friends, as the Head for *his* body, as the Bridegroom for *his* bride, as the New and Last Adam for the *new* humanity, that is regenerate humanity. The community whose head is Christ, the new humanity, is constituted by all those who believe in his name: in the end, the elect.

Why the uneasiness of not a few with this doctrine? One source, we suggest, is the intermingling of two points of view that it is better to distinguish (without separating them). Let us beware of interference: either we consider things according to chronology, as they happen in time, as we experience them in history; or *sub specie aeternitatis*, but not both in mixed (mixed-up) fashion. In time, on earth, Jesus Christ makes atonement as the Man, the vicarious Sinner, the Head of a body yet to be built, whose members have not yet been determined *in time*. They will so determine themselves in coming to faith (the Holy Spirit working), and they will benefit from the work of their Head, the Servant, in joining themselves to him. It is offered them universally, with unequivocal sincerity. From the point of view of eternity (of which God's revelation grants us a few glimpses), the plan of salvation, as God conceived it, is a unified whole leading to the goal that God has set; God the Father chooses, out of the mass of justly condemned humanity, those whom he will redeem; he sends his Son that he may yield his life as a ransom for *them*, and his Spirit that he may generate in *them* saving faith, through the Word.

Why has not the Father elected all men and women for salvation, leaving none outside? The theologian's humble stance is borne out when he confesses his ignorance, when he consents to the mystery of such a free, sovereign, grace that dominates him absolutely. Theopneustic Scripture reveals the solemn truth of perdition; we would be foolish if we claimed to know better. It behoves us, as *viatores*, to add our 'alas!' – hoping that we shall not even remember

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it when we reach the fullness of Light... For the time being, we can only try to dispel misunderstandings: knowing that our affections, our sensitivity, are little permeable to argument, we can correct mental images and inadequate ideas of eternal punishment.

Scripture, for instance, never suggests the idea that it is a divine defeat, or that sin continues, that evil perpetuates itself in Gehenna. On the contrary, evil, vanquished and crushed by judgement shall no longer exist! Every tongue shall confess (Phil. 2:10f), all creatures shall be 'reconciled' (Col. 1:20): this must mean that *all* human beings, without any exception, in the blaze of that Day, shall see at last in truth. They will render to God the homage he requires: a sincere Amen assenting to judgement. The ungodly shall condemn their own ungodliness, in agreement with God; they will wish for nothing else than for punishment as they will *see* that punishment alone can right them with God; the consuming desire of their conscience shall be to satisfy the divine justice. It will be *good* for them to glorify God in and through their judgement; they will thus fulfil, in spite of a lost life, the essential calling of all creatures – to glorify the Lord – and they will know it. It might happen that this doctrine be more merciful, in the end, to them, than theories which have been framed to elude the clarity of biblical teaching.⁸²

Even if it is interpreted more accurately, the revelation of the destiny of impenitent sinners, lost for ever, will continue to grieve and to baffle our sense. Our limitations in this earthly pilgrimage, and the influence of the age make us vulnerable indeed. Only a biblical counter-culture and a devotional life soaked through in the fear of the Lord can make us strong to resist undue impulses. The sadness that will not subside, soundly so, will foster a true gospel zeal – knowing the fear of the Lord... the love of Christ constrains us (2 Cor. 5:11, 14) – and a sober mind, *sophrosune*, in theology. A sober theology acknowledges that it can discern only *en ainigmati* the things that are revealed; it moves ahead with the trust of forgiven sinners in God the Only Wise, and Love sovereign.

⁸² See further our article 'La doctrine du châtement éternel', *Ichthus* 32 (April 1973), pp.3–9.