HANS URS VON BALTHASAR

DARE WE HOPE "THAT ALL MEN BE SAVED"?

With a
SHORT DISCOURSE ON HELL

Translated by Dr. David Kipp
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A SHORT DISCOURSE ON HELL

If our truth is to belong to God's, then it has to remain fundamentally open to God's. For anyone who excludes the prospect of hope from his faith, that faith becomes closed knowledge. Perhaps, however, the decisive thing has always lain in what is hidden, and it is necessary to dismantle one's judgments and to reassemble everything anew from the standpoint of the hidden. And then it seems as if faith has its deepest roots in hope and as if the light of temporal day draws its entire luster from what is hidden in the day of revelation.

Adrienne von Speyr

1. ON THE SITUATION

Be warned, dear reader, that this concerns a theologians' quarrel! And yet it is one whose nature will hardly leave any Christian cold. My little book *Was dürfen wir hoffen?* (*Dare We Hope "That All Men Be Saved"?*)[1] was cut to pieces, almost interminably, in the journal *Theologisches*,[2] with very strong collaboration from the journal *Der Fels*[3]—before me lies a related heap of angry letters, entreaties to return to the true Faith and so on. What is this all about? About the duty to have hope for all men. The opposing side holds: No, our hope for ultimate salvation is limited, since we *know*, indeed, it is dogma, that a number of men languish in eternal hell. Consequently, I am a heretic for refusing to accept a Church doctrine.

To anticipate, it is necessary to take seriously the constantly recurring objection that such a

This section was translated by Dr. David Kipp.

[1] To which this "Short Discourse" has been added in the present edition.—Ed.

[2] Eight issues from September 1986 to April 1987. In what follows, *Theologisches* = *Th.*

[3] March 1987, with reference back to 1984, pp. 250ff., 316ff.

hope, such a "presumptuously false trust in God", lends support to "the salvation optimism that is rampant today and is both thoughtless and a temptation to thoughtlessness":[4] since God, after all, is Love, everything will be well in the end. My work as a whole (for anyone who knows it) certainly has nothing to do with this sort of thoughtlessness. I think that the most serious thing that exists is not God's punitive justice but rather his love. More will be said about this.

For my opponents, things do not become really serious until I know with certainty that there are eternally damned men; they firmly dispute my personal, existential conception of the thought that I—precisely I—must unremittingly ask myself whether I will be able to qualify when brought before Jesus Christ's throne of judgment. No, they say: things do not become truly serious until I *know* that hell is full. I quote once again from the *Katholischer Erwachsenen-Katechismus* (*The Church's Confession of Faith: A Catholic Catechism for Adults*), written by Walter Kasper, which was discussed sentence by sentence in Rome: "Neither Holy Scripture nor the Church's Tradition of faith asserts with certainty of any man that he is actually in hell. Hell is always held before our eyes as a *real possibility*, one connected with the offer of

[4] *Th*, 1986, p. 7255.

conversion and life."[5] I found that the transformation of this "real possibility" into "objective certainty" occurred with the great Church Father Augustine, whose opinion (whether traceable back to his ten years of Manichaeism may be left open here) has cast an enormous shadow over the history of Western theology, to the extent that the biblical warnings against taking our ultimate fate lightly have been transformed—indeed, actually vitiated—into information about the outcome of the judgment by God that awaits us.

I had, in the aforementioned book, posed some important theological questions: for example, the one about the separability (or inseparability) of God's qualities of justice and mercy.[6] Could God's love one day lose its patience, with the result that he would be forced to proceed on the basis of sheer (punitive) justice? The answer was: yes, certainly![7] The solution that I had suggested, namely, that God does not damn anyone, but that the man who irrevocably refuses love condemns himself, was not considered at all. I had also offered for

[5] Issued by the German Bishops' Conference in 1985, English edition: *The Church's Confession of Faith: A Catholic Catechism for Adults* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987), p. 346.

[6] Above, pp. 134ff.

[7] "God [is] incontestably just in rewarding and punishing, at the same time, however, full of love for those who deserve it" (!) (*Th*, 1986, p. 7331).

consideration the fact that, along with the words of threat, Holy Scripture also contains many words of hope for all, and that to transform the former into objective facts would mean that the latter would lose all sense and force: this, too, was left unnoticed in the polemic.

On the other hand, my words were continually twisted with a view to claiming that he who hopes for the salvation of all his brothers and sisters "hopes hell empty" (what an expression!). Or that he who voices such a hope advocates the "universal redemption" (*apokatastasis*) condemned by the Church—something that I have expressly rejected: we stand completely and utterly *under* judgment, and have no right, nor is it possible for us, to peer in advance at the Judge's cards. How can anyone equate hoping with knowing? I hope that my friend will recover from his serious illness—do I therefore know this?

But: if I hope for you, for others, for everyone, then in the end I am also allowed to include myself. (Not the reverse: I hope for me; but I do not know with certainty whether you are among the chosen.) Cardinal Daniélou has put this splendidly:

> Too often we think of hope in too individualistic a manner as merely our personal salvation. But hope essentially bears on the great actions of God concerning the whole of creation. It bears on the destiny of all humanity. It is the salvation of the world that we await. In reality hope bears on the salvation of all men—and it is only in the measure that I am immersed in them that it bears on me.[8]

I might add here that, together with Daniélou during our theological studies, I immersed myself in the works of the Greek Fathers, Origen and also, above all, Gregory of Nyssa and Maximus the Confessor, and that Daniélou was later able to continue his studies far more thoroughly than I was.

This took place long before my meeting Adrienne von Speyr, whose theology of Holy Saturday (Christ's descent into the netherworld) was utterly condemned by my critics. According to Bökmann, it is "questionable at least here",[9] while Besler detects "numerous contradictions" in it[10] and concludes that "its teaching stands in contradiction to Christian revelation and to the Church's Magisterium".[11] Unfortunately for Besler, the Holy Father takes quite another view, as is evident from his address to the symposium on Adrienne von Speyr[12] that he wanted held in

[8] *Essai sur le mystère de l'histoire* (Paris, 1953), p. 340.

[9] *Th*, 1986, p. 7255. That her commentary on John was rejected in Rome (ibid.) is pure invention; I have already pointed that out once before.

[10] Ibid., p. 7260; the objections on p. 7261 are utterly fatuous.

[11] Ibid., p. 7263. That A[drienne] "is an authentic mystic . . . is surely to be denied" (*Th*, 1987, 3/44).

[12] *Adrienne von Speyr und ihre Kirchliche Sendung* [Adrienne von Speyr and her mission in the Church]. Akten des Römis-

Rome. Thus, it would seem to be high time to burn the witch before she is beatified. In the case of Edith Stein, to whom I will leave the final word in this little book, they would, unfortunately, find it already too late for this.

My critics act as though I were alone in the limbo to which they banish me. But lo and behold, I discover myself in the best of company here. Present are (as I showed earlier) my two great teachers Erich Przywara and Henri Cardinal de Lubac; my old teacher Rondet; my friend Fessard; His Eminence the Cardinal Archbishop of Paris;[13] the great Blondel; the former socialist Péguy, who wants to be a Catholic only if he may have hope for all; Claudel in his famous *Cantique de Palmyre* (*Prose*, Pléiade, pp. 703f.); Gabriel Marcel; the tempestuous Léon Bloy ("No creature is excluded from redemption, for otherwise there would be no community of saints. The exclusion of a single soul from the wondrous concert of the world is inconceivable and would pose a threat to the universal har-

chen Symposions [Documents of the Roman Symposium] (1986), pp. 181f.

[13] Cf. his statement on Judas' fate: "Jesus' request for forgiveness, spoken with respect to all who were instruments of his Passion . . . , is an utterance of mercy, not a facile, irresponsible amnesty. Mercy is the other face of true justice": *Wagt den Glauben* [Dare to believe] (Einsiedeln: Johannesverlag, 1987), pp. 97–98.

mony");[14] but also clearly Cardinal Ratzinger, Hermann-Josef Lauter, Walter Kasper, Gisbert Greshake, and Hans-Jürgen Verweyen. And whoever reads closely the text by Reinhold Schneider that was cited as evidence against me[15] will see how much his view is the same as that held by all of us. Guardini is certainly not absent,[16] nor also, last but not least, Karl Rahner, who has expressed many sound ideas on the subject.[17] In *summa*: a company in which one can feel quite comfortable.

The last word, here as well, will go to the saints. Regardless of whether they think that there are or are not men in hell, the thought of that possibility remains unbearable to them: "If we see

[14] In: *Méditations d'un Solitaire en 1916* (Oeuvres IX, Mercure de France), p. 240.

[15] *Th*, 1987, pp. 41–49. Schneider, in his tragicism, takes the impenitent thief as a symbol of our godless age. "The cross of the lost" is the "terrible sign that is set to rule . . . this age." The other says to him: "We suffer justly." "It is an utterance on the cross. For we will not escape the cross. But it is also an utterance of quiet power, . . . for it is obvious that light streams down upon the one uttering it, and that, in the circle around the cross on which it is spoken, life takes on order and men become brothers. The 'No' is permitted to go no further." Christ suffers for the "unpardoned" as well.

[16] His *Letzten Dinge* [Last Things], 2nd ed. (1949), which, while citing Mt 25 gives no commentary on the decisive parts, has a largely personal orientation.

[17] Cf. only *Grundkurs* [Basic course], pp. 107–10.

someone, especially someone who is our friend, in desperate straits or in great suffering, then we are overcome, apparently as a natural reaction, by compassion, and if his pains are severe, then we feel them most vividly. But to see a soul condemned for all eternity to the torment of all torments: who could bear such a thing?" (Teresa of Avila).[18] May we therefore pray the Church's prayer of hope: "Lord Jesus Christ, to save all mankind you stretched out your arms on the Cross. Let our work be pleasing to you and proclaim your salvation to the world."[19]

[18] *Lebensbeschreibung* [Autobiography], chap. 32.

[19] Liturgy of the Hours, Ordinary Time, 4th week, Wednesday, Midafternoon Prayer. I might also note here that Fr. B. de Margerie—in France a traditionalist, scarcely recognized outsider, but in Germany discovered by right-wingers as a theological luminary and often cited in polemic—does not represent an authority for me.

2. CHRISTIAN FAITH

It can hardly be out of place here to clarify our question by taking an initial look at the nature of Christian faith. That nature emerges most clearly from the situation of early Christian baptism, which—as the theology of the Fathers plainly shows us—"consists" in a "turning away from idols in order to consecrate oneself, through Christ, to the unbegotten God" (Justin, 1 Apol. c 49).[1]

This could take the following form: the person to be baptized, turned to face the west, renounced the devil and his temptations, then, turned to face the sunrise, responded to the threefold question of the bishop: "Do you believe in God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit?" with a threefold "Yes", after (or during) which he was submerged in the baptismal font. This trinitarian baptismal formula subsequently gave rise to the oldest credo formulas, all of which, of course, obviously contain the threefold division.[2]

[1] On the following, see above all: Henri de Lubac, *The Christian Faith: An Essay on the Structure of the Apostles' Creed* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986).

[2] For all particulars: John N. Kelly, *Altchristliche Glaubensbekenntnisse: Geschichte und Theologie* [Early Christian

Faith implies this change of bodily direction; con-version [German: "*Be-kehrung*"], "to turn oneself toward that in which one had still not yet had faith" (Clemens Alex. Strom II, 1, 2). This turning toward is one of the whole person toward the God to whom one entrusts oneself (it is no accident that the Latin word *fides* means both faith and trust; the faithful, *fideles*, are the God-loyal) because this God appears to us as truth and faithfulness, the true, enduringly sustaining meaning of our existence. "Christian faith means understanding our existence as a response to the Word, the Logos, that sustains and maintains all things. It means affirming the fact that the meaningfulness that we do not create but can only receive has already been given to us." "The words *I believe* could virtually be translated here as 'I give myself over to . . .'" (J. Ratzinger).[3]

Thus we find, in the case of the Fathers, a distinguishing (constantly repeated all the way into the Middle Ages) of three levels within the act of faith, with only the third representing faith in its total fullness: *credere Deum* (belief that God exists), *credere Deo* (belief in what God says), *credere in Deum* (giving oneself believingly over to God).[4]

creeds] (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1972). On the formulas of abjuration, cf. pp. 37–45, 49, 79, 392f.

[3] *Einführung in das Christentum* [Introduction to Christianity] (Munich: Kösel, 1968), pp. 47, 59.

[4] H. de Lubac, *The Christian Faith*, 191f.

This third one certainly includes the two preceding forms, yet in such a way that "faith" implies, by its very essence, the response of the whole man.[5] "As a personal call to man by God, revelation calls for a similarly personal response on the part of man."[6] "What, then, does it mean to *believe in God*? Believingly to enter into God" (Augustine, *In Ioh Ev.* tract. 29, 6). That this occurs in the community of the Church is self-evident to the Fathers, and yet they expressly refrain (as the credo formulas also do) from formulating: "I believe in the Church" (*in ecclesiam*); rather, the wording is: "I believe that the Church exists" (*credo ecclesiam*): with, and inside of, the Church, I believe and entrust myself to God.[7]

This unconditional entrusting-of-oneself-to-the-truth-of-God contains in itself a similarly complete hope in God and love of God: "The faith in Christ that hopes in Christ and loves Christ" (Augustine, Sermo 144, 2). A living faith is inseparable from hope and love (cf. 1 Pet 1:3–9).

From this Christian understanding of faith, which understands the attitude of faith as an utter

[5] Ibid., p. 145; cf. p. 161: Christian faith is only externally comparable to the "faiths" of other religions: "Faith is not an abstract concept but the name for something that occurs only once, the response of man to the God that comes in Christ": Guardini, *Vom Leben des Glaubens* [On the life of faith], 1935, p. 33.

[6] Ibid., p. 228.

[7] Ibid., pp. 132–56.

and "blind" throwing-oneself-into-the-arms-of-God, it follows decisively for us: in the Church's creeds, only redemptive events have a place (the devil, from whom the believer has turned away, is in no case included, and a "belief in the devil" would fly in the face of everything just said). What is included and corresponds centrally to the Gospel is the fact that Christ will be the Judge of us all, of "the living and the dead". But this, in the context of the second and most extended part of the credo, is definitely an aspect of God's entire economy of redemption, which progresses from creation (Father) through redemption (Son) to sanctification (Spirit).

The believer likewise throws himself into the arms of this judgment by Christ: "I do not even judge myself. . . . It is the Lord who judges me" (1 Cor 4:3f.), for "none of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord." Therefore, Paul forbids any human anticipation of this judgment: "For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living. Why do you pass judgment upon your brother? . . . Each of us shall give account of himself to God" (Rom 14:7ff.). Do you have the right to refuse to your brother the hope that you have invested for yourself, through your living faith, in your Judge?

Since our whole eternal salvation is placed in

the hands of our Judge, what is at issue here is an ultimate seriousness; the Christian,

> as a trustee over something entrusted, is held to account. Nothing and nobody empowers us to make light of the enormous gravity that surrounds such knowledge. . . . There is a court of final appeal that upholds justice so that love can be given effect. A love that would destroy justice would create injustice. True love is a surplus of justice, an abundance that goes above and beyond justice, but never a destruction of justice. Of course, one must also guard against the opposite extreme. One cannot deny that the doctrine of judgment has taken on, in Christian consciousness, a form in which it practically had to lead to the destruction of full faith in the redemption and in the promise of grace:

against the "*Maranatha*" (come, Lord!) was set the "*Dies irae*". But the early Christian creeds intended nothing of that kind: "In those circles in which the creed was spiritually indigenous, the primal Christian heritage was still thoroughly alive; the word about judgment was still experienced as self-evidently one with the message of grace. Of itself, the statement that *Jesus* is the one who judges simultaneously brought the judgment under the aspect of hope" (J. Ratzinger).[8] In support of his assertion, Cardinal Ratzinger cites a passage from

[8] *Einführung* (n. 3), pp. 270–71.

the Second Letter of Clement: "Brethren, we must think in the same way about Jesus Christ as about God, as about the One who judges the living and the dead. We must not think little of our salvation, for by thinking little of it we think poorly of our hope" (2 Clem 1:1f.).

The seriousness that we are confronted with is the seriousness of a love that goes beyond all justice. God's love for every man is absolute; it is ineffable. Who can, "by rights", claim adequacy before it? No saint would presume to say, "I can." No one has loved God with his whole heart, with his whole soul, with all his strength. Everyone, without exception, has to say: "Lord, I am not worthy." All will someday have to stand before him, and then "every eye will see him, every one who pierced him; and all tribes of the earth will wail (for themselves). Even so. Amen" (Rev 1:7). Nothing is more serious than love, precisely because it is "abundance that goes above and beyond justice": one must surrender oneself to it for better or for worse.

3. THE DIRECTIVES OF SCRIPTURE

That Jesus Christ could not give us, nor wished to give us—living as we do in constant danger of sinning, even grievously—a "report" on our life after death but rather enough light to enable us to have hope in God plus a sufficiently serious warning that we must take account of the real possibility of forfeiting our salvation: this was explained in some detail above in *Dare We Hope "That All Men Be Saved"?*

Still, in the New Testament there are two series of statements that we cannot bring together into an overall synthesis. The first throws open a seemingly unbounded prospect for our hope; but we cannot separate this series from the second one, which prohibits any quick and easy conclusions ("Everything is sure to turn out all right") and confronts us relentlessly with the most serious possibility of our damnation. And indeed, precisely in the case where we "have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come", yet "then commit apostasy". If we are among those who "crucify the Son of God on their own account and hold him up to contempt", we are "worthless and near to being cursed"

(Heb 6:5–6, 8). Why should God, who gave up the most valuable thing that he had—his Son—for us, still have grace to spare for him "who has spurned the Son of God and profaned the blood of the Covenant by which he was sanctified and outraged the Spirit of Grace"? (Heb 10:29).

In the case of John and his conception of God's judgment, the way that the two series of statements both intertwine with yet run counter to one another becomes more than obvious. Jesus says of himself both: "I did not come to judge the world but to save the world" (12:47), and "For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may become blind" (9:39). But the apparent contradiction is soon resolved: Jesus comes as the light of absolute love ("to the end" [13:1]) in order to save all men. But how will this be, if there are some who consciously draw back from this love and refuse it (3:19; 9:40–41; 12:48)? The question, to which no final answer is given or can be given, is this: Will he who refuses it now refuse it to the last?

To this there are two possible answers: the first says simply "Yes". It is the answer of the infernalists. The second says: I do not know, but I think it permissible to hope (on the basis of the first series of statements from Scripture) that the light of divine love will ultimately be able to penetrate every human darkness and refusal. I will draw

on several examples to show how the first of these readings interprets the most extreme warnings as implying the factual existence of a full hell, and what then becomes of the first series of texts. Also, the reasons may be noted that show why the move from the warning to the established fact is really a "step" that—because it vitiates the first series—remains questionable.

Everything begins with the inexorableness, inherent in the grace of Yahweh's turning to Israel, of the choice: "See, I have set before you this day life and good, death and evil . . . , blessing and curse; therefore choose life" (Dt 30:15, 19). Then follow the long list of blessings and the even longer one of curses. It is of no importance here to trace the variations on this basic motif through the whole of the Old Testament. We know that disaster was initially experienced and interpreted as earthly punishment for breaking away from the Covenant, while death and Hades appeared as the common lot of all mortals, but that early on death as punishment was associated with the notion of fire (downfall of the company of Korah [Nb 26]; cf. the image of God's anger as fire, along with other images [Dt 32:22–26]). In the prophets, the theme of choosing crops up, but scarcely anything about punishment in the next world, except in the concluding verse of Isaiah (the fire that shall not be quenched and the worm that shall not die in the corpses in the valley of Hinnom, images

that are taken up again and again in Sir 7:17 LXX and the New Testament). It is in Daniel 12:2 that mention is first made of a resurrection of some to everlasting life and of others to shame and everlasting contempt, which finds an echo in 2 Maccabees 7:9. Here, too, are found for the first time prayer and sacrifice for the fallen soldiers (in whose tunics idols that were forbidden by law were found), so that, on the day of their resurrection, they might be delivered from sin (2 Macc 12:39–45). Whereas (especially in the Book of Job) the netherworld is characterized primarily by extreme darkness, while the place of punishment (gehenna) in the Book of Enoch and other intertestamental writings contains ice, gloom and fire, during the latest pre-Christian times the focus of man's final destiny shifts more and more away from the people and toward the individual: the late Psalms distinguish, within Israel itself, the persecuted righteous men who implore God from the "horde of evildoers" and godless ones.

Neither the Baptist, who heralds judgment by God and speaks of inextinguishable fire for the evildoers, nor Jesus, who employs the Old Testament images of everlasting fire, the outer darkness and the worm that shall not die, needed to worry about not being understood. Even in the parable that sees the rich glutton consigned to a fiery Sheol (Hades: Lk 16:23), Jesus says nothing that his disciples cannot understand, not even in Matthew

25, where the evildoers are cast into the eternal fire that (as the Apocrypha and the Letter of Jude also repeat) is prepared for the devil and his angels.

The individual responsibility of each man before God's throne of judgment (clearly evident since Ezekiel) comes strongly to the fore in the New Testament, above all in the Pauline letters and the Catholic letters. Still, there is continued talk, in the Old Testament vein, of the day of wrath (Rom 2:5; 1 Th 1:10), of possible damnation (1 Cor 3:11–15), of a two-sided vengeance (2 Th 1:5–10): "Each one" will "receive good or evil, according to what he has done in the body" (2 Cor 5:10).

The truly new element in the New Testament is that the old righteousness of the Covenant becomes concretized into acknowledgment of the ultimate Word of God in Jesus Christ: "He who is not with me is against me" (Lk 11:23). "For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words . . . , of him will the Son of man also be ashamed, when he comes [to judge]" (Mk 8:38). All of the writings of John are interwoven with the crisis (decision, judgment) between Christ as the light and rejection of him as the darkness. And this "Yes" or "No" transcends the bounds of temporal life; there is a resurrection of life and a resurrection of judgment (Jn 5:29). This same twofold division runs through all of the First Letter of John. For Jesus, the death of the body counts for naught; of whoever believes in him it is said, "though he die, yet

shall he live" (Jn 11:25), for he has eternal life; whoever does not obey him shall not see life, but the wrath of God shall rest upon him (3:36). The absolute decision must be made in one's earthly life; in the hereafter, it will be too late: "You will die in your sins *unless* you believe that I am he" (8:24). Thus the sin against the Spirit (denial of what God has revealed as evident) can also not be forgiven in the next life (Mt 12:32). But it would be pointless to cite still more texts documenting the absolutely required decision about Christ and God's testimony on his behalf.

Just one further addition: namely, Jesus' unconditional demand for love of one's neighbor and of one's enemy as a prerequisite for receiving God's forgiveness. If you do not forgive men, neither will God forgive you (Mt 6:14). Or, if you have received forgiveness yet treat your neighbor with harsh justice, God will have to treat you with a similar lack of mercy (Mt 18:33; James 2:13); you will be put into prison *until* you have paid all of your debt (Mt 5:26; 18:34): this imprisonment is severe, but not eternal. And when Jesus informs the self-righteous that sinners would enter the kingdom of God before the self-righteous would (Mt 21:31), he does not thereby announce that they will meet with eternal ruin; nor does he damn Israel, which does not acknowledge him, when he predicts her forsakenness (Lk 13:35). And when he tells the unrepentant cities that they will

"be brought down to Hades" and stand in the last place on the Day of Judgment (Mt 11:23f.), he is speaking the same prophetic language as that of Ezekiel (16) on Jerusalem.

In view of the quite numerous threatening texts in the New Testament, which spiritually deepen the truly horrible threats against a rebellious Israel (Lev 26:14–43; Dt 28:15–68) because they extend the perspectives of punishment into the hereafter, the question arises—ultimately unanswerable for us—of whether these threats by God, who "reconciles himself in Christ with the world", will be actually realized in the way stated. Jonah's disappointment at the fact that God did not carry out his categorical prophecies of ruin for Nineveh occupied the Scholastics to no end. Is the transition from the threat to the *knowledge* that it will be carried out necessary? It seems all the more logical if we are convinced that God, with his redemptive grace, does not wish to force anyone to be saved, that man alone and not God is to blame if he refuses God's love and thus is damned (on this, see the statements by the Council of Quiercy in DS 621ff.).

But what, then, becomes of the statements of the second series, in which God's redemptive work for the sinful world as undertaken by Christ is represented as a complete triumph over all things contrary to God? Here one cannot get by without making distinctions that, while retaining

the notion of God's benevolent will, nevertheless allow it to be frustrated by man's wickedness. "God . . . desires *all* men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and there is one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for *all*" (1 Tim 2:4f.). Permit us, Lord, to make a small distinction in your will: "God wills in advance [*voluntate antecedente*] that all men achieve salvation, but subsequently [*consequenter*] he wills that certain men be damned in accordance with the requirements of his justice" (*S. Th.*, 19:6 ad 1; De Ver. 23:2). One can also speak of God's having an "absolute" and a "conditional" will (1 Sent. 46:1, 1 ad 2). Further, Christ is referred to as "the Savior of *all* men, especially of those who believe" (1 Tim 4:10): Can we not see a qualification in this formulation? But what about Jesus' triumphant words when he looks forward to the effect of his Passion: "Now shall the ruler of this world be cast out; and I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw *all* men to myself" (Jn 12:31f.)? Oh, he will perhaps attempt to draw them all but will not succeed in holding them all. "Be of good cheer, I have overcome *the world*" (Jn 16:33). Unfortunately, only half of it, despite your efforts, Lord. "The grace of God has appeared for the salvation of *all* men" (Titus 2:11)—let us say, more precisely, to offer salvation, since how many will accept it is questionable. God does

not wish "that any should perish, but that *all* should reach repentance" (2 Pet 3:9). He may well wish it, but unfortunately he will not achieve it. "Christ" was "offered once to take away the sins of *all*" (Heb 9:28). That might be true, but the real question is whether all will allow their sins to be taken away. "God has consigned *all* men [Jews, Gentiles and Christians] to disobedience, that he may have mercy upon *all*" (Rom 11:32). That he has mercy upon all may well be true, but does this mean that all will have mercy on this mercy, that is, will allow it to be bestowed upon them? And if we are assured, in this connection, that one day "*all* Israel will be saved" (Rom 11:26), then this sweeping assertion need not, of course, include every particular individual. The prison letters appear to speak in this sweeping manner, too, when they say that God was pleased, through Christ, "to reconcile to himself *all* things, whether on earth or in heaven" (Col 1:20), or that he purposes "to unite *all* things in him, things in heaven and things on earth" (Eph 1:10); hymnlike and "doxological" talk of this kind need not be taken literally. The same applies, of course, to the Philippians hymn in which, at the end, before the victoriously exalted Christ, "*every* knee will bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and *every* tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil 2:10f.). And if Jesus prays to the Father: "Thou hast given him

power over *all* flesh, to give eternal life to *all* whom thou hast given him" (Jn 17:2), would it not be better to distinguish the first "all", which can be universal, from the second "all", which refers only to a certain number of the chosen? But can the overpowering passage in 2 Corinthians 5:20f. be in any way interpreted as restrictive: "For our sake" God "*made him to be sin* who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God"? And is it not all but embarrassing when the same Paul, in Romans 5,[1] hammers home to us that in Adam (the principle of natural man) "*all* died", "but God's gift of grace, thanks to the one man Jesus Christ, abounded for *all* in much greater measure"? That is stressed seven times in a row, with the culmination being that "through the trespass of *all*" (for all share the responsibility for Christ's condemnation) "justification and life came for *all*". The repeatedly stressed words "much more" and "abounding" cannot be ignored (Rom 5:15–21). All just pious exaggeration?

Many passages could be added here. I do not at all deny that their force is weakened by the series of threatening ones; I only dispute that the series of threats invalidates the cited universalist

[1] In the following context, the German biblical versions used by von Balthasar are translated directly. The Revised Standard Version often contains the word "many" where the German has "all".—TRANS.

statements. And I claim nothing more than this: that these statements give us a right to have hope for all men, which simultaneously implies that I see no need to take the step from the threats to the positing of a hell occupied by our brothers and sisters, through which our hopes would come to naught.

I do not wish to contradict anyone who, as a Christian, cannot be happy without denying the universality of hope to us so that he can be certain of his full hell: that was, after all, the view of a large number of important theologians, especially among the followers of Augustine. But, in return, I would like to request that one be permitted to hope that God's redemptive work for his creation might succeed. Certainty cannot be attained, but hope can be justified.

That is probably the reason why the Church, which has sanctified so many men, has never said anything about the damnation of any individual.[2] Not even about that of Judas, who became in a way the representative example for something of which all sinners are also guilty. Who can know the nature of the remorse that seized Judas when he saw that Jesus had been condemned (Mt 27:3)?

[2] "The Church has never said of any concrete individual that he is damned": Johann Auer, "*Siehe, ich mache alles neu.*" *Der Glaube an der Vollendung der Welt* ["Behold, I make all things new." (Rev 21:5) Belief in the perfecting of the world] (Regensburg: Pustet, 1984), p. 71.

4. HELL FOR OTHERS

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is the revelation of God's highest, unsurpassable love for us, who care not one iota for that love, have absolutely no conception of its dimensions and are, at most, happy if someone wishes to remove the burden of our guilt before God from us and carry it himself. "While we were yet sinners Christ died for us . . . , while we were enemies" (Rom 5:8, 10), that is, godforsaken ones, who "have turned their back" to God, "and not their face" (Jer 2:27).

But then, is any man capable of looking into the countenance of eternal, absolute love, of being "equal to" that? And would not every one who, in earnest faith, would like to direct his life toward this love first have to become existentially aware of the infinite distance from it, of his own godforsaken half-heartedness and indifference—in order not to succumb to the delusion that he could, just as he is, throw himself into God's arms and suddenly be capable of living in the "consuming fire" of his love?

With a view to acquainting us with this distance, which is unbridgeable for us, Ignatius of Loyola, at the end of the meditations on sin that serve to

introduce his *Spiritual Exercises*, has us make a final meditation on hell. With the greatest seriousness, every one must go through it for himself, for himself alone: placing himself, with all his senses, into the "flames", into the "smoke" and "stench", "bitterness", into the "wailing", "howling", "screaming", "blasphemies" against Christ and those who are his—not just through an effort of imagination but in the consciousness that all those who, "despite their faith, did not uphold his commands" (love, of course), condemned themselves to remain forever remote from the eternal love that they rejected. This should be done, however, with a view to Christ's crucified love and in wonder that such a fate has so far been spared me through his mercy because he died, incomprehensibly, for my sins. Becoming aware of the "opposition" (no. 59) between "his wisdom and my ignorance, his righteousness and my unrighteousness" is, for Ignatius, the condition of my being accepted into humble service (no. 114) for Christ.

"Hell" here is something that falls to me personally—not hypothetically but by full rights—which, without any side glances at others, I have to withstand in utmost seriousness. And I do not need—like Schwab's rider over Lake Constance—to sink down dead after learning of my escape but may live in gratefulness to him who carried me through the ice of his godforsakenness.

But woe is me if, looking back, I see how others, who were not so lucky as I, are sinking beneath the waves; if, that is, I objectify hell and turn it into a theological-scientific "object" and begin to ponder on how many perish in this hell and how many escape it. For at that moment everything is transformed: hell is no longer something that is ever mine but rather something that befalls "the others", while I, praise God, have escaped it. And I can cite support diligently and piously from Holy Scripture: "But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the polluted, as for murderers, fornicators, sorcerers, idolaters and all liars, their lot shall be in the lake that burns with fire and sulphur" (Rev 21:8). "Do not be deceived; neither the immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor sexual perverts, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor robbers will inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Cor 6:9f.). But, the theological Monsignore tells himself, I do not seem to fall into any of these categories. And at once the prayer is on his lips: "God, I thank thee that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers or even like this tax collector" (Lk 18:11). Then one goes on to populate hell, according to one's own taste, with all sorts of monsters: Ivan the Terrible, Stalin the Horrible, Hitler the Madman and all his cronies, which certainly results, as well, in an imposing company that one would prefer not to encounter in heaven.

It can be taken as a motif running through the history of theology that, whenever one fills hell with a "*massa damnata*" of sinners, one also, through some kind of conscious or unconscious trick (perhaps cautiously, and yet reassuredly), places oneself on the other side.

We might ask the great Augustine, the teacher of grace and love who has the greater portion of mankind destined to eternal hell, whether—with his hand on his heart—he ever worried, after his conversion, about his eternal salvation.

> Much that is great is promised us by the Lord for the future, but something far greater, as we know, has been done for us. Where were the godless, what were they, when Christ died for them? Who can doubt that he will give his life to his saints, he who gave them even his death? He made a wonderful barter with us: In taking our death upon himself, he pledged to us most faithfully that he would give us life in him. How could he, whose promises are truthful, not give the saints their reward?[1]

"The entire mass [of mankind] deserves punishment, and if all should be allotted the torment of damnation owing to them, that would certainly not be unjust. Therefore, any that are set free from this through grace are not called vessels of their own merits, but 'vessels of mercy' (Rom 9:23).

[1] PL Suppl. II, p. 545f.

Whose mercy? That of him who sent Christ Jesus into the world to save sinners (1 Tim 1:15) and who foreknew and predestined (*praedestinavit*) and called and justified and glorified them (Rom 8:29f.)? Who, then, could be so touched with madness that he would not give unending thanks to the mercy of him who set free those he wished to free, he could by no means censure the justice of him who had damned all without exception?"[2] It would be superfluous to quote any more here, and superfluous as well to blame the great Doctor for the heresy of "certainty of faith".

But what a story of misery he set in train, all the way to the Reformation and beyond, with his idea that, in practice, only some are "predestined" to heaven. At bottom, it makes no difference whether they are many or few. Here one could think back to the Jewish "Fourth Book of Ezra", written after the destruction of Jerusalem, in which the "prophet", during a journey through the hells, glimpses the immense number of the damned and asks God, in horror, what sort of a world that is. God's answer: "I rejoice in the few who find salvation; I do not want to harbor sorrow on account of the multitude of those who are damned." Ezra, of course, is to regard himself as saved.[3]

[2] *De natura et gratia*, 5; PL 44, p. 250.

[3] Riessler, *Altjüdisches Schrifttum ausserhalb der Bibel* [Non-biblical ancient Jewish writings] (1928), pp. 274, 276.

It would be pointless to unfold here the unendingly complicated and endless speculations, running from Augustine all the way through the Middle Ages, that attempt, in a thousand ways, under the assumption of the certainty of a (more-or-less densely) populated hell, to relieve God of the blame for this. The only thing of interest for us is that this hell is usually there "for the others", for the sort, naturally, whom one can "give hell to" because of their sins without seriously having to fear it for oneself. When so poor a fellow as Gottschalk, who in matters of predestination hardly got beyond a logically consistent Augustinianism, was condemned, whipped and thrown into jail for life, he was still certain, in his prayers, of belonging to the elect.[4]

If, to be sure, it was the Reformers who first made a guiding principle of the religious certainty of being chosen, that doctrine did not just spring up out of the ground with no preparation; the supernatural hope of winning salvation was regarded—to give but one example—as infallible by Bonaventure. We know what struggles of conscience the young Luther had to go through in order to flee from the thought of damnation, in naked faith, to God. He finds that he is not at all equal to God's command, and thus that, by rights,

[4] Lambot, *Oeuvres . . . de Dodescalc d'Orbais* (Louvain, 1945), pp. 73, 183, and so on.

God will punish him. Or did God want him to have this experience so that the sinner would give himself over to him for better or for worse, acknowledging that he is nothing in himself and must be prepared to go into hell if that should be required for the glorification of divine justice? Thus it becomes the "basic question" for Luther "whether it is possible to be aware of unity with God when starting from the absoluteness of self-condemnation".[5] Could one learn "to think constantly of absolute rejection and, likewise, of unconditional reprieve as simultaneously conjoined with respect to oneself"?[6] "For Luther, the matter is bitterly serious, even though it concerns the mere *possibility* of rejection."[7] In the lecture on the Letter to the Romans (1515–16), he regards unquestioning certainty of faith as a consolation that can be permitted the weak; the strong Christian would have to endure the tension and "prepare himself seriously for the *possibility* of himself being among the rejected. Love of God first shows itself in its full purity only when one affirms God's will even though it destroys one's own happiness."[8]

[5] Karl Holl, *Gesammelte Aufsätze I. Luther* (Collected essays, I. Luther], 7th ed. (Tübingen, 1948), p. 68.

[6] Ibid., p. 144. [7] Ibid., p. 151.

[8] WA II, 215, pp. 8ff.: "For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ" (Rom 9:3).

> These words seem strange, even foolish, to those who think themselves holy. . . . For those, however, who love God truly, with the love of a child and friend that does not stem from nature but comes solely from the Holy Spirit, these words are wondrously beautiful and the testimony of an exemplary model of the most consummate sort. Men like this freely commit themselves to whatever God wills, even to hell and to eternal death if God wishes this so that his will might be fully accomplished, so little do they care for the pursuit of things that are their own. And yet, since they thus conform themselves so unreservedly to God's will, it is impossible that they would remain in hell.
>
> *Römerbrief-Vorlesung 1515–1516*
> [Lecture on the Letter to the Romans, 1515–1516], 3rd ed. (Munich, 1957), p. 302.

Later, admittedly, for Luther too, the notion of the certainty of salvation comes so strongly to the fore that he adopts for all men the standpoint that he had initially allowed only for the weak.

The position of Calvin and of classical Calvinism is too familiar to require detailed description: the twofold division of mankind into the chosen (*élus*) and the damned (*réprouvés*) is so unequivocal that we can tell empirically, from the character of their unbelief or weak belief, that they belong to the latter class. In *Institutio* III, 2, Calvin describes the "pure and clear knowledge" that our belief in the redemptive work of Christ through the Holy Spirit has engendered in our hearts and lists the identifying signs that distinguish this authentic belief from the "infirm and transitory" one of the

damned. They "never attain this secret inner revelation of their salvation, which Scripture ascribes only to the chosen" (no. 12). Thus, for Calvin's successors, "the certainty of salvation and of the state of grace" is "the essential characteristic of belief and the most immediate effect that faith produces in the consciousness of the chosen . . . , an immediate *certitudo absoluta*, occurring together with belief itself".[9] One really has to ask oneself how, given an eternally valid bifurcation of mankind like this, simple human love of one's neighbor, or even love of one's enemy in Christ's sense, could still be possible. It should not remain unmentioned, however, that certain late Catholic Scholastics, for their part, had racked their brains about whether, assuming that God were to reveal to me privately that one of my fellowmen was destined to hell, I should still love that person with Christian love or would, instead, have to treat him with politeness only.

The Council of Trent finally bolted the door on this whole doctrine of a "certainty of faith" about being chosen.[10] Karl Barth, for his part, dealt this Calvinist doctrine a final blow when he declared that Jesus Christ died for us sinners, as the only one rejected by God, in order that we

[9] Heinrich Heppe, *Reformierte Dogmatik* [Reformed dogmatics], newly revised by E. Bizer (Neukirchen, 1935), pp. 410–11. References from classical dogmatics on this: 411–31.

[10] DS 1534, 1564, 1565.

might all become chosen ones in him: a doctrine that, as I have shown elsewhere, comes too close to the doctrine of *apokatastasis*. What remains for me an object of hope becomes for him practically a certainty. Luther had often voiced the same idea: "Christ, too, more than all the saints, was condemned and abandoned. He did not, as some pretend, suffer only lightly but really and truly gave himself over, for our benefit, to God the Father and into eternal damnation."[11]

[11] *Römerbrief-Vorlesung*, pp. 302–3.

5. JOY OVER DAMNATION

That the Parable of the Rich Glutton and the Poor Lazarus is not meant as anything more than an earnest warning to the living to have mercy on the beggar at their door is clear. Even if it is described in such drastic terms how the one tormented in the flames of Hades pleads for a drop of water from the fingertips of Lazarus, who is in the "bosom of Abraham", the allegory should not evoke questions about the mental state experienced by Abraham and Lazarus at the sight of the tormented man: do they feel compassion, indifference, or . . . ? In the context of the allegory, such a question is absurd. For its "intention is directed toward man's salvation, not toward giving purely concrete information as such"; it "aims at saying something kerygmatic for his present life, something relevant here and now". All New Testament and theological talk about hell has but one point: "To bring man to come to grips with his life in view of the *real possibility* of eternal ruin and to understand revelation as a demand of the utmost seriousness. The fundamental reference to this *redemptive meaning of the dogma* must therefore serve as both a boundary marker and an

internal guideline for all speculation in this area" (J. Ratzinger).

Assuming, however, that there might really be such a vantage point from which to survey the abyss between heaven and hell, would not a conscientious theologian still have to ask himself the question of how the blessed feel when they see certain of their brothers and sisters roasting in hell? The question arises, of course, only if, first, there are such people in hell and, second, one can see them from within heaven, or at least miss them there.

At the end of the Book of Isaiah, there is a description of how those who were saved in the apocalyptic, magnificent (earthly) Jerusalem walk out through the city gates; they "look on the bodies of the men that have rebelled against me; for their worm shall not die, their fire shall not be quenched and they shall be an abhorrence to all flesh" (Is 66:24). In place of "abhorrence", the Septuagint has "sight [to see]", and the Latin translation by Jerome reads: "*et erunt usque ad satietatem visionis omni carni*" (PL 28, 848), which translates literally as: "and they shall be a sight for all flesh to look upon till satiated"—a rather dark passage. Be that as it may, there are comparable passages in the Old Testament, for instance, Psalms 58:6, 10: "O God, break the teeth in their mouths; . . . The righteous will rejoice when he sees the vengeance; he will bathe his feet in the blood of the wicked."

Now, the author of the theological textbook for the Middle Ages, Peter Lombard, concluded his work with the question of whether the inhabitants of the heavenly Jerusalem, too, will someday stand before the gates of the city and "look upon" those languishing in fire, and what impression this "satiating sight" (the author refers specifically to Jerome) will have on them. "In the end, we ask", Peter Lombard concludes, "whether the sight of the punishment of the damned tarnishes [*decoloret*] the glory of the blessed or enhances their blessedness." Like Gregory the Great, he observes that, in heaven, "there will no longer be any compassion for misery", and thus the joy of the heavenly cannot be dampened. "And although their joys are sufficient to them, it contributes to their heightened glory to see all the punishments of the evildoers that they have escaped through grace." "They give thanks for their salvation when they perceive the unutterable misery of the godless. For 'The righteous will rejoice when he sees the vengeance' (Ps 58:10)" (4 Sent. 50).

The seraphic teacher Bonaventure, who otherwise can speak quite bluntly about hell, avoids commentary on this last observation by the Lombard. He declares only (again with a quotation from Ps 58) that the blessed see hell while the damned do not see heaven, at least not after the Last Judgment, since that would distract them from their torment. He, too, agrees with Gregory

that compassion is something earthly and does not belong to "the goodness of nature in general" (4 d 50 p 2 a 1 q 3).

Thomas, by contrast, does not draw back from even the thorniest of questions. He poses for himself the objection that compassion is, after all, a mode of love, and love is consummate in the blessed. God, too, takes pity on our misery, as do the angels. To be sure: "Whoever has compassion for another participates in a way in his suffering, but the blessed cannot participate any more in anyone's misery." But do they really rejoice at the punishments of the damned? That would be hate or spite. Again, there is the evidence of the aforementioned biblical passages against this. What, then, can be said? God, angels and men can have compassion for sinners as long as they are on earth by wishing to help them find salvation. "In the next world, however, their misery can no longer be changed, and thus there can also no longer be any proper compassion." But what about joy over this? Not per se, but still "*per accidens*", insofar as the righteous, with a view to divine justice, rejoice at their own liberation and merely "along with this at the torments of the damned" (4 d 50 q 2 a 3 and 4).

It may be left to the more diligent to plow through the hundreds upon hundreds of commentaries on the *Sentences* (published and unpublished) and to investigate the positions of countless

theologians on this embarrassing—I would rather say instead shameful—problem. But can it be completely avoided under the assumption of a hell that we know with certainty to be full—for instance, if I were to see, from my position in heaven, my mother or my best friend undergoing eternal torture?

The point is not to paint a pathetic picture of such situations but rather to pose the absolutely sober, unavoidable question: Under the aforementioned hypothesis, is every human, every Christian, bond—designated as *communio sanctorum*—simply annulled? And more profoundly, as seen from the viewpoint of God himself: Does God no longer love the damned, for whom, after all, his Son has died? Or—if I may revert to the hypothesis that I developed earlier—do the absolute naysayers burn in the fire of the absolute divine love that also embraces them, and what sort of effect does such a situation have on God?[1]

[1] A. Auer says on this, not particularly convincingly: "All men will be saved in eternity, because God is love. In addition, it is frequently noted that we ourselves could not be happy being with God if, 'among ourselves', we were to see our brothers and sisters eternally damned. This seems to be based on an all too naïve human understanding of eternal bliss that cannot do justice to our Catholic image of God as Holy Trinity. Could there perhaps also be an erroneous (Marxist?) conception of society at work here?"

Among the many who sent me angry letters, an especially cunning person came up with the following: "Can one long for one's condemned relatives or friends when one is in heaven? Jesus says that, in the next world, men will become like angels; blood relationships will no longer play any role. The only binding thing then is sharing the same disposition. 'Whoever fulfills the Father's will is mother, brother or sister to me.' If, on earth, I had known my mother to be an impenitent whore, then I would not long for her when in heaven." Is that certain for one who loves in God? And what if she was not an impenitent whore?

6. "ACCURSED AND CUT OFF FROM CHRIST FOR THE SAKE OF MY BRETHREN"

Paul, who had just (Rom 8:39) assured us that nothing could separate him from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord, declares in the verse immediately following, "in the Holy Spirit", his unceasing sorrow on account of his "brethren", his "kinsmen by race", and says that he would wish himself accursed and cut off from Christ if he could thereby bring them to Christ. We will see shortly how the commentators twist and turn in order to cope with such a delirious assertion.

First, however, we must consider the astonishing fact that in this he had a predecessor in Moses. God is outraged at the making of the golden calf. Moses had come down from the mountain with the Tablets of the Testimony and, in a state of similar anger at the sight of the dancing people, had broken the Tablets to pieces. The calf is destroyed, but on the following day Moses announces that he will try to appease Yahweh; he goes up onto the mountain and offers himself as a sacrifice in atonement for the sins of the people: "But now, if thou wilt forgive their sin—and if

not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book [of life] which thou hast written" (Ex 32:32).

This action by Moses is greatly celebrated in the Old Testament: God "said he would destroy them—had not Moses, his chosen one, stood in the breach before him, to turn away his wrath from destroying them" (Ps 106:23). Jeremiah speaks as Moses: "Remember how I stood before thee to speak good for them, to turn away thy wrath from them" (Jer 18:20). And again, there are similar words in Ezekiel (13:5; 22:30). In Deuteronomy, Moses' offering of himself to God is described as an intercessory prostration before God that lasted for forty days and forty nights (Dt 9:25).

But several of the Fathers have also defended this heroic act of love by Moses, particularly Chrysostom, extending up to Bernard and Rupert of Deutz,[1] who says: "We do not want to reduce what was said by Moses in utmost seriousness to a trivial meaning just because we, as weaklings and frigid souls, are unable to comprehend the

[1] Passages given by Cornelius a Lapide, *Exoduskommentar* [Commentary on Exodus] (Vives, 1895), pp. 729–32. In conclusion, Cornelius makes reference to the self-sacrifice of pagan heroes for their fatherland, but emphasizes that these had sacrificed only their bodies, while Moses offered his soul. Cf. also the passage from Chrysostom that Thomas Aquinas cites on this passage in his interpretation of the Letter to the Romans.

riches of Moses' spirit, which was aglow with love." No objection is of any use: that it is sinful to want to separate oneself from God (but it was done out of love); that the whole thing was impossible anyway (but that was not in Moses' field of vision); that it was disordered and imprudent (but it took place out of love for the great mass of the people: one individual may perish if many thousands are thereby rescued).

Nor is Paul's offering of himself to God for the sake of his tribal brethren meant to eclipse Moses' deed. Origen compares Romans 9:3 with Exodus 32:32; indeed, he goes beyond that to compare Paul's offer to be accursed with what is said in Galatians 3:13, where Christ becomes a curse for our sake.[2] Gregory Nazianzen (Or 2, 55) says the same: Paul is here emulating Christ. All the Fathers sing the praises of his love of his enemies.[3] It is also pointless to proffer minimalistic interpretations here.[4] "In any case, Paul's offer is intended

[2] *Römerkommentar* [Commentary on Romans], PG 14, 1138f.

[3] More details are in K. H. Schelkle, *Paulus, Lehrer der Väter* [Paul, teacher of the Fathers] (Düseldorf, 1956), pp. 327–30.

[4] For example, Alvarez de Paz, *De vita spirituali* (Lugd., 1608). "He wishes to do without the consoling feeling of the presence of Christ for a time" (632a); other watered-down interpretations are given in R. Cornely, *Römer* [Romans] (1896), pp. 473f.

seriously."[5] "For the Christian, being prepared to do this is the utmost proof of his love for Israel."[6] And again, Luther takes Paul's wish very seriously, seeing it as evidence of consummate love (Letter to the Romans, on the relevant passage).

Do these two examples of extreme love stand isolated, without emulation? No; in the history of the saints there are many instances of emulation, the wish—even the vow—to sacrifice one's own salvation for the salvation of others. The history of taking this surely dangerous risk has probably not yet been written, and I do not wish to try writing it here. But what sorts of things do we not find in the hidden, shadowy corners of Christian history; what limits are reached in the imploring prayers of Christian mothers for their sons and daughters who have gone astray? What limits to the offering up of self by martyrs or even by

[5] Otto Michel, *Der Brief an die Römer* [The letter to the Romans], 4th ed. (1966), p. 225.

[6] Ernst Käsemann, *An die Römer* [To the Romans] (1973), p. 246. Ulrich Wilckens, *Der Brief an die Römer* [The letter to the Romans] (EKK, 1980), also draws the parallel between Rom 9:3 and Ex 32:32 and sees that "Paul follows, in a certain respect, the behavior of Christ": "As Christ brought the curse of the law upon himself in order to save lost sinners, so now Paul wants to save his brethren, who have become lost through their unbelief, by making himself accursed and destined to ruin." Of course he knows: "The Cross alone is the locus of eschatological sin created through God's righteousness" (II, p. 187).

simple priests for their enemies or irretrievable charges? Only God could reveal it to us, in inseparable connection with the dying cry of his Son: "My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" For in this cry—when the Son of God became a "curse" and was made "to be sin" for us—all the offerings up of self that seem so insane to us, of Moses and Paul, are caught up, taken in and gone beyond.

Here we come to deep waters, in which every human mind begins to flounder. Can human defiance really resist to the end the representative assumption of its sins by the incarnate God? If one replies to this confidently and flatly: "Yes, man can do that" and thereby fills hell with nay-sayers, then the theologians will again have to set up strange distinctions within God's will for grace: there is, then, a "sufficient grace" (*gratia sufficiens*), characterized as something that, from God's viewpoint, would have to be sufficient for converting the sinner yet is rejected by the sinner in such a way that it is actually not sufficient for achieving its purpose; and an "efficacious grace" (*gratia efficax*), which is capable of attaining its goal. On the other hand, we will not be allowed to say that this latter simply takes the sinner's will by surprise, since his assent has to be freely given. Into what sort of darkness are we straying here? Christ's representative assumption of the guilt for sin must certainly not be understood as a magical-mechanical exchange: apart from the Cross I am

a sinner and candidate for hell, but on the basis of the Cross my guilt is taken away and I am a candidate for heaven. This is surely not how it works. Without my consent, given that I am a free person, nothing can just have its way with me. But how, then, are we to understand the grace that is effected through the representative work of Christ (and, included in that, of Moses, Paul and all who offer themselves as sacrifices for others)?

Tentatively, we can say this: that the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of absolute freedom, allows us to see, within our free spirit, what our *own* true freedom would be, that is, by confronting us with ourself, with our own highest possibility. We *would* not *be able* just to say "Yes" to ourselves (that is effected for us vicariously); also, the meaningfulness of such a "Yes" and the *desire for it* are set before us, indeed, inspired in us. Do you really want to exist forevermore in contradiction with yourself?

Grace can advance as far as that. And if one wishes to keep to the distinctions noted above, then one would have to say: grace is "efficacious" when it presents my freedom with an image of itself so evident that it cannot do other than *freely* seize itself, while grace would be merely "*sufficient*" if this image did not really induce my freedom to affirm itself but left it preferring to persist in its self-contradiction.

To push on any farther into these deep waters is not permitted us. We have to stop at this observation: it would be in God's power to allow the grace that flows into the world from the self-sacrifice of his Son (2 Cor 5:19) to grow powerful enough to become his "efficacious" grace for all sinners. But precisely this is something that we can only *hope for*.

However, if, in closing, we look back to Moses and Paul, something is evident that lends encouragement to this hope. The "decline" [*Untergang*] that both of them wished for when appealing to God was sufficient to bring about the "arising" [*Aufgang*] of that to which they were committed. In the former case, God's displeasure is mollified; Yahweh will send his angel out before the people who have been wandering in the desert so that they may be led into the promised land. And in the latter, the apostle will be able to add, as a concluding sentence, "All Israel will be saved." It is the loving declines that transform themselves into the grace of the free arisings. That ought to be said to those thousands of mothers who offer themselves for the sake of their degenerate children.

7. THE OBLIGATION TO HOPE FOR ALL

If the threats of judgment and the cruel, horrifying images of the gravity of the punishments imposed upon sinners that we find in Scripture and Tradition have any point, then it is surely, in the first instance, to make *me* see the seriousness of the responsibility that I bear along with my freedom. But do Scripture and Tradition also force me to assume from these threats of judgment, beyond what concerns me, that even only *one other* besides me has met ruin in hell or is destined to do so? Quite to the contrary, it seems to me that, initially, the following thesis can be advocated (only, however, from the perspective of practical-prescriptive and not theoretical-cognitive reason): "Whoever reckons with the possibility of even only *one* person's being lost besides himself is hardly able to love unreservedly. . . . Just the slightest nagging thought of a final hell for others tempts us, in moments in which human togetherness becomes especially difficult, to leave the other to himself." One should, however,

> make a really unreserved decision to accept every man in his total worth and to seek one's own final joy in this affirmation of others. If one sees

> things in this way, then "heaven for all" does not mean something like an inducement to laziness in our ethical commitment but rather the heaviest demand upon all of us that one can imagine: the decision for a patience that absolutely never gives up but is prepared to wait infinitely long for the other. . . . If, on the basis of God's universal goodness, I cannot write anyone off for all eternity, then my eternal misfortune could consist precisely in the fact that I myself simply do not find the patience to wait infinitely long for the "conversion of the other".[1]

And not say at some time to the Good Lord: "Am I my brother's keeper?" Can a Christian allow himself to utter these murderous words? And which man is not my brother?

Karl Rahner is therefore right when he says: "We have to preserve alongside one another, without balancing them up, the principle of the power of God's general will for salvation, the redemption of all men through Christ, the *duty to hope for the salvation of all men* and the principle of the real possibility of becoming eternally lost." And as far as preaching the Gospel is concerned, it is necessary that, "along with clear emphasis on hell as the *possibility* of permanent hardening, there should also be fully equal stress on encouragement

[1] Hans-Jürgen Verweyen, *Christologische Brennpunkte* [Christological focal points] (Essen: Ludgerus, 1977), pp. 119–22.

to hopeful and trusting surrender to God's infinite mercy."[2] The certainty that a number of men, especially unbelievers, must end in hell we can leave to Islam, but we must likewise contrast Christian "universality of redemption to Jewish salvation-particularism".[3] Hermann-Josef Lauter poses the uneasy question: "Will it really be *all men* who allow themselves to be reconciled? No theology or prophecy can answer this question. But love *hopes all things* (1 Cor 13:7). It cannot do otherwise than to hope for the reconciliation of all men in Christ. Such unlimited hope is, from the Christian standpoint, not only permitted but *commanded*."[4] "I cannot help having the impression", says the commentator Joachim Gnilka, "that Paul at least occasionally harbored the fervent hope that all men will find salvation, a view that was later propagated as doctrine under the name *apokatastasis* and was, as doctrine, condemned. Even today, however, it is permitted to maintain this hope, under the presupposition that the solidarity with mankind expressed in the hope is practiced, struggled with and suffered through by Christians in a way similar to that manifested in the lives of the apos-

[2] *Sacramentum Mundi* (Freiburg, II 1968), "Hölle" [Hell], pp. 737–38.

[3] Ibid. (Freiburg, I 1967), "Erlösung" [Redemption], p. 101.

[4] *Pastoralblatt* (Cologne, 1982), p. 101.

tles."[5] G. Greshake writes, "Nevertheless: universal hope".[6] Thomas Aquinas taught that "one can hope for eternal life for the other as long as one is united with him through love",[7] and from which of our brothers would it be permissible to withhold this love? Or could we really believe Dante when he inscribes above his door to hell: "I was created by divine power, supreme wisdom and primal love" (*Inf.* III), only to have to stand by and watch afterward what goes on in his hell?

Should we not, rather, follow the Church Doctor Catherine of Siena when she admitted to her father confessor, the blessed Raymond of Capua: "If I were wholly inflamed with the fire of divine love, would I not then, with a burning heart, beseech my Creator, the truly merciful One, to show mercy to all my brethren?" She spoke, Raymond tells us, in a soft voice to her Bridegroom and said to him:

> How could I ever reconcile myself, Lord, to the prospect that a single one of those whom, like me, you have created in your image and likeness

[5] "Die biblische Botschaft von Himmel und Hölle—Befreiung oder Versklavung?" [The biblical message of heaven and hell—liberation or enslavement?], in *Ungewisses Jenseits?* [Uncertain Afterworld?], ed. by G. Greshake (Patmos Paperback, 1986), p. 30.

[6] Ibid., pp. 83–88.

[7] *STh* II II q 17 a 3. Besler's exegesis of this passage is simply inadequate (*Th*, 1986, p. 7332).

> should become lost and slip from your hands? No, in absolutely no case do I want to see a single one of my brethren meet with ruin, not a single one of those who, through their like birth, are one with me by nature and by grace. I want them all to be wrested from the grasp of the ancient enemy, so that they all become yours to the honor and greater glorification of your name.

The Lord replied to her, as she secretly confided to Raymond: "Love cannot be contained in hell; it would totally annihilate hell; one could more easily do away with hell than allow love to reside in it." "If only your truth and your justice were to reveal themselves", the saint replied to this, "then I would desire that there no longer be a hell, or at least that no soul would go there. If I could remain united with you in love while, at the same time, placing myself before the entrance to hell and blocking it off in such a way that no one could enter again, then that would be the greatest of joys for me, for all those whom I love would then be saved."[8]

But precisely at this point, someone will come up with the numerous texts providing evidence that Catherine herself and many other mystics who, in their imitation of Christ, had experiences

[8] *Vie de Sainte Catherine de Sienne par le bienheureux Raymond de Capoue*, ed. Hugueny, O.P. (Paris, n.d.), pp. 479, 481. I owe the reference to this passage to Fr. Christoph von Schönborn, O.P.

of eternal-seeming damnation and godforsakenness—Besler has filled pages in stringing together their statements—were all convinced, despite everything, that the damnation of many was a fact. And it is precisely here that we are faced with the absolute paradox of Christian love. The hell that is brought before their eyes does not at all produce resignation in them but fires their resolve to resist it more strongly than ever. To be sure, a real discernment of spirits is necessary here. There are the cases in which the saint sees a group of men *heading for hell* (like "snowflakes", or like "falling leaves") and throws himself into the breach at the sight of their "course toward hell". There are other cases in which a personal experience of hell is granted apart from the sight of any damned persons; here (as with John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila), it is divine grace that arouses the zeal for representative sacrifice. "From there come, too, the powerful urges to help souls, with the result that it seems to me in truth that I would suffer death a thousand times with the greatest joy in order that even only one single soul might escape so horrible a torment" (Teresa). Of Little Thérèse, Besler rightly says: "It is beyond doubt that the Church's teaching about the *possibility* of eternal damnation was of great concern to her." Even if there were cases not only in which *images* of hell were presented (which, in my view, probably applies regarding the vision of hell by the

children of Fatima) but also in which certain chosen ones had subjective certainty that a number of men were already lost, then still (and this is the intention behind the revelation) the wish to take a stand against what was shown, to render it, as it were, untrue, by far outweighs in them the thought that with respect to those shown as lost nothing more can be done. This is evidently the case in the "Meditation on Hell" in the book of the Exercises, which is to be carried out with respect to the damned and, in fact—as always for Ignatius—in conversation with Christ our Lord.

In essence, all these cases concern the grace of being permitted to suffer along with the Lord, as we see with great clarity in the case of Marie des Vallées: "Her sufferings were, as the Lord assured her, a participation in his own, a renewal of what he had to suffer when he bore the sins of the world and was himself made to be sin. It was a quite new hell, . . . created for me by divine love and exceeding, in its severity, its intensity and its torments, . . . the hell of the damned" (Besler, *Th*, 1986, 7458), all of which lands us right in the midst of the experiences and statements of Adrienne von Speyr. Precisely the passages (allegedly suppressed by me) by Mechtilde of Hackeborn, Angela of Foligno and Julian of Norwich (ibid., 7359) show that, even in view of a hell believed to exist, the saint just strives all the more for a love that will cross out what lies written before

her. The frequent recourse to the idea of at least easing the sufferings of the damned, an idea that links up with Scholastic speculations, should be seen as a groping attempt to overcome things apparently contradictory.

But, as promised, I want to bring all of this to a close with a longer passage from the work of the recently beatified Edith Stein, which expresses most exactly the position that I have tried to develop in these short chapters:

> We attempted to understand what part freedom plays in the work of redemption. For this it is not adequate if one focuses on freedom alone. One must investigate as well what grace can do and whether even for it there is an absolute limit. This we have already seen: grace must come to man. By its own power, it can, at best, come up to his door but never force its way inside. And further: it can come to him without his seeking it, without his desiring it. The question is whether it can complete its work without his cooperation. It seemed to us that this question had to be answered negatively. That is a weighty thing to say. For it obviously implies that God's freedom, which we call omnipotence, meets with a limit in human freedom. Grace is the Spirit of God, who descends to the soul of man. It can find no abode there if it is not freely taken in. That is a hard truth. It implies—besides the aforementioned limit to divine omnipotence—the possibility, in principle, of excluding oneself from

> redemption and the kingdom of grace. It does *not* imply a limit to divine mercy. For even if we cannot close our minds to the fact that temporal death comes for countless men without their ever having looked eternity in the eye and without salvation's ever having become a problem for them; that, furthermore, many men occupy themselves with salvation for a lifetime without responding to grace—we still do not know whether the decisive hour might not come for all of these somewhere in the next world, and faith can tell us that this is the case.
>
> All-merciful love can thus descend to everyone. We believe that it does so. And now, can we assume that there are souls that remain perpetually closed to such love? As a possibility in principle, this cannot be rejected. *In reality*, it can become infinitely improbable—precisely through what preparatory grace is capable of effecting in the soul. It can do no more than knock at the door, and there are souls that already open themselves to it upon hearing this unobtrusive call. Others allow it to go unheeded. Then it can steal its way into souls and begin to spread itself out there more and more. The greater the area becomes that grace thus occupies in an *illegitimate* way, the more improbable it becomes that the soul will remain closed to it. For now the soul already sees the world in the light of grace. It perceives the holy whenever it encounters this and feels itself attracted by it. Likewise, it notices the unholy and is repulsed by it; and everything

else pales before these qualities. To this corresponds a tendency within itself to behave according to its own *reason* and no longer to that of nature or the evil one. If it follows this inner prompting, then it subjects itself implicitly to the rule of grace. It is possible that it will not do this. Then it has need of an activity of its own that is directed against the influence of grace. And this engaging of freedom implies a tension that increases proportionately the more that preparatory grace has spread itself through the soul. This defensive activity is based—like all free acts—on a foundation that differs in nature from itself, such as natural impulses that are still effective in the soul alongside of grace.

The more that grace wins ground from the things that had filled the soul before it, the more it repels the effects of the acts directed against it. And to this process of displacement there are, in principle, no limits. If all the impulses opposed to the spirit of light have been expelled from the soul, then any free decision against this has become infinitely improbable. Then faith in the unboundedness of divine love and grace also justifies *hope for the universality of redemption*, although, through the possibility of resistance to grace that remains open in principle, the *possibility* of eternal damnation also persists. Seen in this way, what were described earlier as limits to divine omnipotence are also canceled out again. They exist only as long as we oppose divine and human freedom to each other and fail to consider the sphere that

forms the basis of human freedom. Human freedom can be neither broken nor neutralized by divine freedom, but it may well be, so to speak, outwitted. The descent of grace to the human soul is a free act of divine love. And there are *no limits* to how far it may extend. Which particular means it chooses for effecting itself, why it strives to win one soul and lets another strive to win it, whether and how and when it is also active in places where our eyes perceive no effects—those are all questions that escape rational penetration. For us, there is only knowledge of the possibilities in principle and, on the basis of those possibilities in principle, an understanding of the facts that are accessible to us.[9]

[9] Edith Stein, *Welt und Person. Beitrag zum christlichen Wahrheitsstreben* [World and person. A contribution to Christian truth seeking], ed. by L. Gelber and Romaeus Leuven, O.C.D. (Freiburg, 1962), pp. 158ff. I owe the reference to this passage to Georg Bätzing.