

# THE PLAN OF SALVATION

## DEFINITION

Our first task is to answer the question: What is the Plan of Salvation? Quite often this expression is confused with another important dogmatical term, viz., the Order of Salvation. Although related, the two are not identical. The former is much wider than the latter and even includes the latter as one of its constituent parts.

We can define the Plan of Salvation as the whole scheme of redemption as devised and executed by God. It embraces God's eternal decree and its execution in time from the beginning of history until the fulfilment of all things in the realized and perfected Kingdom. It is therefore a mighty conception, as it were, stretching from eternity to eternity, including creation and fall, election and reprobation, christology and soteriology, last judgment and renewal of heaven and earth. In this formulation we take the concept wider than Warfield, who circumscribed it in the following words: "The entire course of the divine dealing with man which ends in his salvation"<sup>1</sup> In our opinion this formulation is too anthropocentric. Not man is the centre of the Plan of Salvation, but God Himself, who does all things for the glory of His own most holy Name. Furthermore, in this Plan of Salvation God is not only concerned about man, but about the whole world. Man may have a special place in this world, yet he is only part of this world. The end of the scheme of redemption is a new heaven and a new earth, in which God dwells among men (Rev. 21:1-3). Warfield is indeed right, when he says that "with some propriety" creation and fall may be looked upon as "rather of the nature of a presupposition than as a substantive part of the subject matter itself." On the other hand, they have to be included because for God they are part of the one great plan. Creation and fall were not decreed by God as separate quantities, later on to be supplemented by the other parts of the Plan, but from all eternity God decided upon the creation and fall of the world to be redeemed by Christ. Cf. Rom. 5:14 where Paul says that Adam was "a type of the one who was to come" (*Typos tou mellontos*).

The other term, the Order of Salvation, refers to the special work of the Holy Spirit in the application of Christ's saving work to the sinner. The problem discussed under this heading is: How does the Holy Spirit apply the atonement wrought by Christ to the sinner? Is there a certain order in His work? And if so, what is this order? And what is the relation between God's work and man's work in all this? It is obvious that this problem is of the greatest importance for the discussion of the Plan of Salvation, in

1. G. B. Warfield, "The Plan of Salvation", 1942, p. 13.

particular because of the last question. On this point many a theology begins to deviate from the doctrine of Scripture. Here, for example, lies the root of nearly all Semi-pelagianism. Most Semi-pelagians are still correct in their Christology, as far as the doctrine of grace is concerned. They all admit that the gift and work of Christ are a matter of pure, unmerited, even forfeited grace. It is all God's initiative from start to finish. But then they come to the *Ordo Salutis*, and all of a sudden, at one point or another, the divine initiative has to make place for the human. God's grace becomes dependent upon the human will. The final decision is for man.

In this paper we will concentrate on the wider concept, that of the Plan of Salvation, but, of course, not without constant reference to the Order of Salvation.

### ***B. B. WARFIELD'S PLAN OF SALVATION***

Benjamin B. Warfield, the great Reformed theologian of old Princeton has written a beautiful booklet on our subject. Throughout the years this booklet has been most helpful for many students, both theological and non-theological, to find the correct starting point in the chaos of views and schemes presented from all sides. The booklet can still be wholeheartedly recommended. It gives a very clear survey of the various positions held by the various schools of thought.<sup>2</sup>

Yet we cannot accept Warfield's views without some criticism. In some respects his views are strongly "dated" and show that this great theologian too was a child of his own time. This comes particularly to the fore in the fact that he identifies the Plan of Salvation with the Order of Decrees.<sup>3</sup> The latter term he calls "its more technical designation."

In past centuries the Order of Decrees was one of the most burning problems of all theology. In a sense the whole problem of the Plan of Salvation was seen as included in this order. Within Calvinism, for example, there was the heated debate between Supra- and Infra-lapsarianism. The advocates of Supra accepted the teleological approach to the several parts of the decree. That which was last in the execution (*telos*), would be first in the plan. And thus they started the series of decrees off with that of Election and Reprobation, followed by those of Creation and Fall. The Infra-lapsarians followed the historical, causal order and started in the order of the decrees with Creation and Fall, followed by Election and Reprobation. Similarly the Order of Decrees was the great bone of contention between the Calvinists and the Arminians. The former actually knew one 'indefinite' decree only. God decrees to elect Christ and those that are His and also to actually save them. The Arminians distinguished two decrees, the first of which was 'indefinite' (to give Christ for them that shall believe and persevere;

2. It is reprinted by Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids.

3. *Ibid* p. 13.

no definite persons are yet mentioned; this decree only deals with the state a person has to be in in order to be saved), while the second was 'definite' (to save those of whom God foresees that they will believe and persevere).

In our day this form of the problem has generally been abandoned.<sup>4</sup> Most theologians agree that this particular form of the problem is in itself untenable. (1) The decree, being God's decree, is eternal and therefore does not leave room for an order- or succession-idea with regard to the several 'parts' of the decree. In God and His decree there is no 'first' and 'last'. This is excluded by the divine attributes of 'simultaneity'. We agree with L. Vander Zanden, when he says regarding the controversy between *Supra* and *Infra*: "We cannot speak of before and after in God's eternal decree as we do in time, hence the difference between *Supra* and *Infra* can be called imaginary, because it implies the application of a temporal order to eternity."<sup>5</sup> (2) Linked up with this is that in actual fact the decree of God is organically one. "The idea of the universe is in fact one single conception in the divine consciousness. Just as Minerva comes full-grown from the head of Jupiter, and just as a genius suddenly and completely grasps the idea of a work of art, in like manner throughout all eternity the idea of the universe is fully and completely present in the divine consciousness"(Bavinck)<sup>6</sup> For that reason the Westminster Confession is fully right, when it uses the term decree only in the singular. On the other hand, as the idea of the universe, when it is realized, unfolds itself in all the riches of its beauty in the forms of space and time, there is no reason why we should not speak of God's decrees in the plural as well (as the Westminster Catechisms do). "This manner of speech should not be condemned as long as we maintain and recognize the close relation that obtains between the several decrees, and the fact that in God the decree is one."<sup>7</sup> (3) The various elements or aspects do not stand in such a simple, single-track order in God's decree as is suggested by all the various schemes. The decree, which can be called the 'divine blueprint' of history, shows the same great variety of relations as history. In history it will not do to state things in a simple causal or a simple teleological order only. All things are related and inter-related in a thousand ways, both causal and teleological. To quote Bavinck once more: "Accordingly, between the different elements of the decree -- as also between the facts of the history of the universe -- there is not only a causal and teleological but also an organic relation. Because of the limited character of our reasoning powers we must needs proceed from the one or from the other viewpoint; hence,

4. Of course, the MATTER is still the centre of much controversy. It is the perennial problem: Who redeems? Is it God? Is it man? Is it God and man in co-operation? But generally it is not any more discussed in this particular FORM of the Order of Decrees.

5. L. VanderZanden, "Praedestinatie in Christus", 1949, p. 32. Cf. G. C. Berkouwer, "Divine Election", 1960, p. 244ff.

6. H. Bavinck, "The Doctrine of God", Grand Rapids, 1955, pp. 371-2.

7. *Ibid* p. 372.

the advocates of a causal world and life-view and the defenders of a teleological philosophy are engaged in continual warfare. But this disharmony does not exist in the mind of God, He sees the whole, and surveys all things in their relations. All things are eternally present in His consciousness. His decree is a unity: it is a single conception. And in that decree all the different elements assume the same relation which a posteriori we even now observe between the facts of history, and which will become fully disclosed in the future. This relation is so involved and complicated that neither the adjective 'supralapsarian' nor 'infralapsarian' nor any other term is able to express it. It is both causal and teleological; that which precedes exerts its influence upon that which follows, and that which is still future already determines the past and the present. There is a rich, all-sided 'reciprocity'.<sup>8</sup>

For all these reasons it is better to give up the whole Order of Decrees problem. It is essentially sterile and leads to a complete deadlock. In our opinion it is better to concentrate the whole problem upon the question: WHOSE DECISION IS DECISIVE IN THE REDEMPTION OF MAN AND THE WORLD? Is it God's? Is it man's? Or is it the decision of both? And if so, how are these two decisions interrelated? If we formulate the problem thus, we still have essentially the same basic problem, but we have been freed from the unsolvable Order-of-Decrees aspect.

## **WARFIELD'S DIVISION**

It may be helpful first to give a short survey of Warfield's distribution of the material. He distinguishes four main conceptions: Autosoterism, Sacerdotalism, Universalism and Calvinism.

I. AUTOSOTERISM; In this conception man has to redeem himself (Autos - soteria). The classic example is the old Pelagianism. But under this heading Warfield also deals with Semi-pelagian views, such as those found in R.C. theology, Lutheranism and Arminianism. For the modern period he especially mentions Liberalism. He deals with it in the form which was predominant in his own day — a Liberalism that actually only knew the Gospel of the Parable of the Prodigal Son; a Gospel of the loving, forgiving Father, but without an atoning Son; a Gospel of forgiveness following upon repentance, but without propitiation or expiation. As examples he mentions Harnack and Bousset and their innumerable disciples and imitators<sup>9</sup> "It is a Pelagianism . . . which out-pelagianizes Pelagius. For Pelagius had some recognition of the guilt of sin, and gave some acknowledgement of the atoning work of Christ in making expiation for this guilt. And this theology does neither. . . . The view of God which is involved, someone has not inaptly called "the domestic animal conception of God." As you keep sheep to give you wool and cows to

8. Ibid p. 393.

9. Warfield, op. cit., p. 47.

give you milk, so you keep God to give you forgiveness".<sup>10</sup> As Heine said to the visitor who asked him if he had hope of the forgiveness of sins: "Why, yes, certainly; that's what God is for."

II. **SACRAMENTALISM**: In this conception salvation is declared to be wholly of God, but it is taught that "God in working salvation does not operate upon the human soul directly but indirectly; that is to say through instrumentalities which he has established as the means by which his saving grace is communicated to men."<sup>11</sup> The classic example here is the Church of Rome, which teaches that grace is only given through the mediation of the Church and its sacraments. Similar views are found among Anglo-Catholics in the Church of England and in Confessional Lutheranism (with its emphasis on the necessity of the means of grace).

III. **UNIVERSALISM**: This conception asserts "that all that God does, looking toward the salvation of sinful man, he does not to or for individual men but to or for all men alike, making no distinction." Particularly in this part of Warfield's discussion (and also the next, on Calvinism) the Order of Decrees problem comes to the fore. The whole discussion centres around this problem. Among the Universalists there are actually two main groups: (1) The pure, unconditional Universalists, who teach that God decided to redeem all and also does so. (2) The conditional Universalists, who say that Christ died for all, but whether people are indeed saved depends on their meeting of the condition of salvation, viz., faith. As examples Warfield mentions the different forms of Arminianism and also Lutheranism.

In our view we encounter here one of the drawbacks of Warfield's method. The four conceptions are not all complete contrasts, but particularly the first three overlap again and again. Arminians and Lutherans, for example, are discussed under all three headings.

IV. **CALVINISM**: In this conception salvation is wholly God's work from start to finish. Yet even here there is difference of opinion as to the question to what extent God's work is universal and where it starts to become particular. Or to put it in another way: Where does election come into the picture? (Note that again everything is set in the framework of the Order of Decrees!) Four different views can be distinguished: (1) **Supra-lapsarianism**: The Plan of Salvation is particular from its very beginning. The decree of Election is the first of God's decrees. (2) **Infra-lapsarianism**: The decree of Election (and Reprobation) comes after that of Creation and Fall. (3) **Post-redemptionism**: According to this view Christ died indeed for all. But after this universal decree the decree of Election follows: only certain persons are unconditionally elected to faith. The most common name for this view is Amyraldism. (4) Finally there is the so-called Congruism (or Pajonism, after the French

10. *Ibid* p. 49.

11. *Ibid* p. 52.

theologian Pajon), which also asserts that Christ died for all, but then continues by saying: the Holy Spirit does not 'compel' anyone to come to Christ, but He acts upon men in the way of suasive operations. Of course, in this conception you can hardly speak of "election" any more.

Rightly Warfield points out that the last two views are so inconsistent that they cannot possibly be maintained. Both views are attempts to mediate between Calvinism and Arminianism, by combining a universal aspect (Christ died for all) with a particular aspect (only believers are saved). Both indeed want to maintain God's sovereignty and the particular aspect of redemption, but this aim in itself does not yet make them Scriptural and Calvinistic. "The bare affirmation of particularism cannot be accepted as an adequate Calvinism."<sup>12</sup>

### OUR OWN DIVISION

As we said before, we prefer to adopt another principle of division. Not that of the Order of Decrees, but of the relation between God's work and man's work in the redemption. In this case too the term "redemption" is taken in its widest sense, embracing both Christology and Soteriology. We further keep in mind that the divine plan of redemption does not concern man only, but the whole universe. Yet we concentrate here upon the relation between God and man, because man is the crucial figure in the whole organism of the redeemed creation.

Following this line we find three possibilities:

- (1) Man redeems himself.
- (2) God redeems man, but in such a way that man's own decision is the indispensable condition — which means that ultimately man, in a sense, redeems himself. THE characteristic of this view is synergism, in one form or another. Quite often this is combined with a strong emphasis on certain instrumentalities used by God in the bestowal of His grace, so that here one can also discuss what Warfield termed 'sacerdotalism'. With the possible exception of original Lutheranism, 'sacerdotalism' is always connected with some form of Semi-pelagianism.

(3) Man's redemption is wholly God's work, from start to finish. Of course, it does not take place without man being involved, but this involvement is never at the expense of God's sovereign grace. Even when man himself is active (as, for example, in conversion, sanctification, perseverance and faith) it is still wholly God's work.

These three possibilities can be qualified in various ways. Taking one's starting point in the term "soteria" (salvation) one can call them: Autosoterism, Synergism, Heterosoterism. Starting from the contrast natural-supernatural, one can speak of: Naturalism, Mediating Views, Supernaturalism. Starting from the contrast grace-free will, one can speak of: Free Will only, Synergism, Grace only. Putting it

12. Ibid p. 93f.

in historical terms, one can state it by the names of certain views held in the Early Church: Pelagianism, Semi-pelagianism, Augustinianism. Or by the names of certain 16th century theologians: Socinus, Erasmus, Luther. Or by the names of 17th century movements: Humanism, Arminianism, Calvinism. But whatever classification one may prefer, in actual fact it is always the same problem: with whom is the ultimate decision regarding the redemption of this world and of man?

## I. AUTOSOTERISM

The fundamental idea of this conception is that man must redeem himself. Admittedly, in this conception too the term grace is sometimes used, but it does not mean any more what the Church in its classic confessions understood by it. It is not free, forgiving, sanctifying grace. At most it means that God creates the most favourable circumstances for man. Or that He provides some external means to assist man in his struggle, such as the decalogue, or the whole Mosaic law, or the Sermon on the Mount, or Christ's example.

This autosoterism was basic to the system of Pelagius in the 4th century, of Socinus in the 16th, of the Humanists in the 17th, of the Rationalists and Deists of the 18th, and of many Liberals in the 19th and 20th centuries.

Yet the systems are not entirely identical. They have in common the view that the way of redemption is open for all and sundry. Also that God is willing to 'forgive' all (at least if you can speak of 'forgiveness', when there is no idea of divine holiness and justice and therefore of real divine 'love'). Further also that there is virtually no real action of redemption on God's side, apart from giving man the opportunity and helping him by external means. Yet they differ sharply as to the final 'result' of this 'redemption'. For example, according to Pelagius, the result was 'particular'. But according to most Liberals the result is 'universal'. All will indeed be saved. If it does not happen on this side of the grave, it will happen on the other side; perhaps by a second probation; perhaps God will simply forgive everyone and everything. But in whatever way and by what means, the result is universal.

## II. SYNERGISTIC VIEWS

The usual construction of these views is along the following lines: (1) God wills the salvation of all. In God there is a 'universal' saving will. (2) God also provides the possibility of the salvation of all, Christ died for all. From the divine viewpoint salvation is 'universal'. (3) At this point, however, the differences start.

(a) The real Semi-pelagians stop here. According to them it is wholly left to man to accept or reject this atoning death of Christ. This was the view held by many Semi-pelagians in the 5th century and by many Arminians from the 16th century up till our day. Connected with this, or perhaps we should say, basic to this

is their optimistic anthropology. Man is not dead, but sick and there is enough will-power left in him to make his own decision.

(b) Others do not go so far but admit that also after (1) and (2) God has to give the first 'push'. It is not in the power of natural man to make the decision of accepting or rejecting the atonement wrought by Christ. God has first to change his heart or to enlighten his mind. This was the view held by the so-called Semi-augustinians of the 5th century. It is also the view of what Warfield calls: Semi-semi-pelagianism. After the condemnation of the real Semi-pelagians by the Council of Orange (529), a more subtle form of Semi-pelagianism crept into the R.C. system. It was decided that God had to change man's heart first. Orange was quite clear about this divine grace. And so the way was open for man, after having received the initial\* grace through the sacrament of baptism, to resist it afterwards and completely lose it. To be really saved man has to co-operate with the initial grace. A similar construction is found in the view of many so-called Wesleyan Arminians. Indeed, God has to enable man, but God does this to every human being in His common grace. It is postulated that for all men the ability to make a decision is graciously restored, earned as it is by the sacrifice of Christ and applied to all automatically.<sup>13</sup> All this means, however, that the final decision is laid in man's hands. It is in man's power to say a definite and final Yes or-No. W. B. Pope, who emphasizes that in the co-operation between God and man the divine grace is supreme in all stages, nevertheless says that the co-operation of the will is so real that "in this last stage it rests with the free agent himself whether the influence of the Spirit be repelled or yielded to."<sup>14</sup>

It is, of course, not surprising at all that in all these views there is no place for the doctrine of the Perseverance of the Saints.

(c) Finally there is the view held by some confessional Lutherans. They take yet another step. Following the teaching of their confessions (and of Holy Scripture) they believe that man is indeed dead in sin and trespasses. Sinful man has in himself no power whatsoever to grasp the grace offered in Jesus Christ. Yet they too believe that Christ died for all. But how, then, to account for the failure of God's grace? Not being able to introduce the postulation of the Wesleyan common grace, they seek the solution in the supposition that, though dead in sin, man can resist, and successfully resist the grace of the Holy Spirit. But, of course, this is no solution either. Rightly Warfield says: "Resistance is, however, itself an

13. Cf. *Ibid* pp. 83-4. Cf. also Ch. Hodges, "Syst. Theology II", p. 329 ff; E. D. Soper, "Grace in Methodist Tradition", in "The Doctrine of Grace" (ed. W. T. Whitley), 1932, p. 278f., esp. p. 287ff; W. B. Pope, "A Compendium of Christian Theology II", 1877, esp. p. 358 ff. "The Spirit of Grace is the Author of every movement of man's soul towards salvation; but His Influence requires and indeed implies a certain co-operation of man as its object. Here then we have three topics to be considered: grace prevenient, human co-operating agency, and the relation between grace and free will" (p. 359).

14. Pope, *op. cit.* p. 365.



activity; and the successful resistance of an almighty recreative power, is a pretty considerable activity — for a dead man.”<sup>15</sup>

Summing up we can say that the common features in all these views are that on the one hand God's ‘intention’ is ‘universal’ (He gave Christ for all and Christ indeed died for all), and yet, on the other hand, the ‘final result’ is ‘particular’ (due to man's refusal to accept the salvation offered). Somewhere on the line from divine intention to final result the universality changes into particularity. The various views indicate a different point of the line, but they all agree that the final decision somehow lies with man.

### III. HETEROSOTERISM

In this conception the whole redemption is due to God's free grace. It is He who gives Jesus Christ for the redemption of those given to Him by the Father. It is the same gracious God who gives His Holy Spirit to apply the redemption wrought by Christ to these sinners. And the Spirit does this in such a way that He not only revives the dead sinner, but also keeps him alive until the end. In this view there is full place for the doctrine of the Perseverance (or better — for it is God's work — the Preservation) of the Saints.

It is quite evident that in this conception all salvation is God's work from start to finish. It is all a matter of free and sovereign, undeserved and forfeited grace. In this view a believer can only say in amazement and gratitude: “By His grace I am what I am.”

But here, too, we have to distinguish two groups:

(1) There are those who follow the line of Augustine, of the Reformers (Luther, Calvin, Cranmer, Ridley, etc.) and the Reformation confessions. According to them the whole work of Redemption, both in the eternal decree and in the execution in time, is ‘particular’. From all eternity God's ‘intention’ was ‘particular’: God gave Christ for the elect only and Christ indeed died for the elect only. Accordingly the ‘result’ is equally ‘particular’: Only those that belong to Christ, given to Him by the Father, are really saved. This is the view held by such men as: Ch. Hodge, A. A. Hodge, B. B. Warfield, G. Vos, J. Gresham Machen, L. Berkhof, C. Van Til, John Murray, by A. Kuyper, H. Bavinck, G. C. Berkouwer, and many other scholars of past and present time.

(2) However, many others follow quite a different line. They too hold that the whole work of redemption is a matter of free grace, from the beginning to the end. But they see it all in ‘universal’ terms. God's eternal ‘intention’ was ‘universal’: Christ indeed died for all. And, accordingly, the ‘result’ too is ‘universal’: All people shall indeed be saved by God. This universal view was already defended by some Calvinists of the previous century. Warfield mentions William Hastie (Glasgow) and William P. Paterson (Edinburgh). The latter wrote in his well-known book, ‘The Rule of

15. Warfield, op. cit. p. 84.

Faith', that there are two mutually repulsive elements in Calvinism, namely the doctrine of everlasting punishment and that of election and irresistible grace. Because an Arminian or semi-Arminian type of thought would not give any solution, the only way out is to reject the doctrine of everlasting punishment and to "resolve reprobation into a temporary lack of privilege and of spiritual attainment."<sup>16</sup>

In our day this argument is quite common among so-called NEO-ORTHODOX theologians. One finds it, for example, in the works of P. Tillich, J. T. Robinson, J. S. Whale, and others. In his latest book, 'Victor and Victim', Whale asserts that "fulfilment is necessarily universal". A partial fulfilment of God's redeeming purpose would be a limited fulfilment and therefore no fulfilment at all. First, it would mean that God's eternal purpose is defeated. Secondly, it would not be fulfilment even for those individuals who are saved. For they are so much "members one of another" that "every question concerning individual fulfilment must at the same time be a question concerning universal fulfilment."<sup>17</sup>

A very peculiar position is held by Karl Barth. According to Barth there is but one Scriptural conception of election, viz., the Christological. To him that means; Jesus Christ is the elected One and at the same time the rejected One. He bore the reprobation of all others, and therefore they ALL are now elect in Him. Some may not know this subjectively (because they do not-yet-believe), but nevertheless 'objectively' it is true of them ALL. Does this mean an outright Universalism? It seems hard to escape this conclusion. Yet Barth himself does not want to commit himself on this point. He leaves it an open question. We have no right to bind God in either way. We have no right to say; not all will ultimately be saved, nor; all will ultimately be saved. We have to respect the divine freedom and sovereignty. If ultimately God wants to save them all, He is free to do so. Indeed, this is no straightforward universalism. And yet we must say that all the elements for such a universalism are present and that Barth's indecisiveness seems to be due to a lack of consistency rather than to the structure of his system.<sup>18</sup>

## ***EVALUATION***

So far we have only used the descriptive method. We have approached the matter from the theological-historical point of view. But, of course, we cannot escape the question; which of these views is correct?

As to I (Autosoterism) we can be short. This view is so utterly unscriptural that we need not refute it here. In fact, the great majority of former Liberals have abandoned this view and sought their refuge in some form of II.

16. Ibid. p. 71f. Cf. W. P. Paterson, "The Rule of Faith", 1933, pp. 312, 352.

17. J. S. Whale, *op. cit.*, p. 63f.

18. Cf. G. C. Berkouwer, "The Triumph of Grace in the Theology of Karl Barth", ch. VI "The Universality of the Triumph".

But is II (Synergism) tenable in the light of Scripture? In our opinion this can only be defended on the ground of a superficial understanding of Scripture. If anything is clear to the serious student of Scripture, it is that redemption is wholly the work of God. In addition, this position leads to very great inconsistencies, as a result of the attempt to combine what actually cannot be combined: divine sovereignty and free will (in the sense of arbitrary and indifferent freedom). We mention some of the insurmountable difficulties inherent in this conception. (a) How can Christ indeed die 'for all' and yet 'not all' be saved? Is His death for those that perish (hyper, on behalf of) indeed a real atonement? If so, why are they not saved? If not, what does He then do for them? What is the meaning of His death in that case? Is it only the provision of a bare 'possibility'? But according to the Bible it is a real atonement of sins and a real reconciliation with God. (b) How can a finite and mortal man by his final will ever really frustrate God's saving work accomplished for him? Is this man then stronger than God? Or did God not really mean to save him?

Naturally the advocates of this view will say: but the Bible itself teaches that God's will and man's will in some way or other work together in the act of redemption. Indeed! But in the Bible this co-operation is never a matter of 'competition'. It is never a matter of 50-50, or 90-10, or even 99-1. If we want to express it in figures we can only say: it is 100-100. And yet it is also 100 in its totality. In the Bible the relation between God's will and man's will is such that man's will is totally and completely 'included', 'enveloped' in God's will. And yet it is fully man's will. It is overruled, but not eliminated. Man's action is 'caught up' in God's action and yet it is fully man's own responsible action. Ultimately we are here faced with the mystery of God's sovereignty and man's responsibility. Both are clearly mentioned on every page of the Bible, but it is beyond our possibilities to put them into a neat scheme. The apostle Paul too could not get further than pointing to the mystery of the relation: "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling FOR God is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure" (Phil. 2:12). The conjunction "for" does not mean a simple causal solution of the problem. It is only a pointer towards the mystery. At the same time it excludes every idea of competition. It is not man working 'with' God, but man working 'in' God and God working 'in' man. "He who is able to receive this, let him receive it" (Matt. 19:12). Perhaps this is the place to recall a word of H. Bavinck. Somewhere in his Reformed Dogmatics he speaks of the differences between Arminianism and Calvinism, and then he says: "There is one place, where they are all Reformed, that is, where they all acknowledge and praise free grace: in their inner chamber, on their knees before God." Indeed, when we stand before Him, all our theories of co-operation and competition vanish. All that is left is an insignificant, humble sinner imploring his God for His free grace.

We can therefore find a solution for all these problems only on the line of III (Heterosoterism). In this conception all emphasis is on FREE GRACE. It is GOD WHO REDEEMS MAN AND THE WORLD. No, God does not do it apart from man and his responsibility. God does not treat man as a machine or automaton, but as man, as a responsible being. Again and again He involves man in the great work of redemption. And yet, from beginning to end, the initiative is and remains on God's side.

But which of the two lines suggested shall we follow? That of the universalists or that of the particularists? The 'universalist' line is no doubt the most attractive of the two. In addition it is the most popular in our day. We also must admit that in this conception all our difficulties disappear — bar one, viz., that it is unscriptural. We believe that the Scriptural data are too clear to accept the universalist solution. In fact, all the universalists whether Liberal, Neo-orthodox or Reformed, have to eliminate certain passages of Scripture or at least to subject them to a drastic re-interpretation. J. S. Whale, for example, simply sets the Matthean parable of the sheep and the goats aside "as unworthy of Christ's gospel of the Kingdom". But, of course, there are more passages. Whale himself has to admit that the New Testament warns us unambiguously that the consequences of sin are fearful and that, though the City of God remains the only real end of the sinner-rebel, "it is not impossible that he should fail to arrive". But ultimately this No of God's law is fully swallowed up by the Yes of the gospel. "The evangelical logic (sic!) of God's revelation in Christ is No and Yes rather than Yes or No. . . . For the final truth, which transcends logic and against which the evil of the world cannot ultimately prevail, is that God is love." We wonder whether at this point the Neo-orthodox theologian, though from quite a different direction, has not finally ended up in the old Liberal position.

As far as we can see, Scripture clearly teaches that the 'result' is 'particular' in full harmony with the 'particular intention'.<sup>20</sup>

But what then about the universal statements, which also abound in the New Testament? Such as John 3:16, Rom. 5:18, I Cor. 15:22, II Cor. 5:14, I Tim. 2:4, 6, Tit. 2:11, Heb. 2:9, II Peter 3:9, I John 2:2, etc.<sup>21</sup> Naturally it is impossible to discuss them all.<sup>22</sup> Three general remarks must suffice.

(1) The Reformation theology has always recognized that in itself Christ's atoning work is sufficient for the sins of all men. His sacrifice on the cross had an infinite value. It should never be seen in bare quantitative categories, as if all the individual sins of the elect

19. Whale, *op. cit.* p. 166.

20. For texts see I. Berkhof, "Syst. Theology", p. 394f.; R. B. Kuiper, "For Whom Did Christ Die?" Grand Rapids, 1959, p. 62f.; G. Smeaton, "The Doctrine of the Atonement as Taught by Christ Himself", 1871, p. 365f.

21. Cf. again Berkhof, *op. cit.* p. 395f.

22. We may refer here to the works of Smeaton, the one mentioned in note 20, and also the companion volume on the Doctrine of the Apostles.

had been added up and the total sum of this debt was put on His shoulders. The death of Christ has to be stated in qualitative terms. He bore the penalty of the law. The penalty of every transgression, however serious, was borne by Him.<sup>23</sup> His sacrifice therefore has a 'universal value'. The older theologians expressed this by the dictum: sufficient for all, efficient for some.

(2) God's plan with this world is indeed of a 'universal width.' In the Plan of Salvation and in its execution God is indeed concerned about this whole world. But again we should not conceive this in merely quantitative terms. When the Bible says that God will redeem the creation and humanity, it does not mean that everything and everybody in the universe is finally redeemed. As far as mankind is concerned it speaks collectively and not distributively. Clearly teaching that not all will be saved, it yet says that in those that are being saved mankind as a whole, yes, the whole creation is saved. Older theology often indicated this by the figure of the tree of mankind. This tree will be transplanted to the new world. Perhaps not all the branches or twigs are present, perhaps many leaves have been stormtorn away in the tempest of divine judgment, yet it is the tree that is found in the new world. This is also the vision of the last book of the Bible. It speaks of a new heaven and a new earth and of a new mankind and God Himself dwelling in their midst (Rev. 21:1-4) and yet, at the same time, it speaks of the lake that burns with fire and brimstone (v. 8). For the Bible, that is, for God, there is no contrast here, and therefore it should not be there for us.

(3) There is indeed a 'universal offer of grace'. Throughout all of Scripture (both Old and New Testament) we find this offer. The Gospel of God's love in Christ has to be presented to all and on God's side this presentation is fully genuine and sincere. And yet at the same time the redemption itself remains 'particular', not only in 'result', but also in 'intention'. Here too God is not frustrated by human unbelief and rejection. Admittedly, there are here great tensions for our thinking. We cannot solve them by saying: we who have to preach the Gospel do not know who are the elect and therefore God tells us to offer it to all. Of course, this is true, but it is not the real solution. For it is GOD who offers it through us and He knows! Again it must suffice to mention a few aspects only:

(a) In many respects this tension is similar to that between divine sovereignty and human responsibility. In a sense, it is only another aspect of this same problem. And again we must say: we will never be able to make this relation transparent for our thinking. These two truths are as "parallel Scriptural lines which so far as human eye can

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23. Cf. Hodge, *op. cit.* II, p. 545, "What was suitable for one was suitable for all. The righteousness of Christ, the merit of His obedience and death, is needed for justification by each individual of our race, and therefore is needed by all. It is no more appropriate to one man than to another. Christ fulfilled the condition of the covenant under which all men were placed. He rendered the obedience required of all, and suffered the penalty which all had incurred; and therefore His work is equally suited to all."

see and human reason can understand, never meet, but which actually meet in the infinite God."<sup>24</sup>

(b) All this is connected with the fact that God deals with man on the plane of history. That means, among others, that God not simply gives redemption to man, but offers it and calls man to a decision. And God being the One who He is, really means it. History is a serious matter. God does not play with man as a cat plays with a mouse. God's offer of grace is sincere, bona fide, and thus fills man's responsibility to the utmost with His divine pressure. Precisely in this way we are confronted with the unfathomable mystery of human unwillingness and unrighteousness. For many sinners say No to this offer and reject God who stands behind it. Here we gaze into depths which make us shiver. In a sense you can say: the deepest mystery is not in God and His offer of grace, but in the heart of the sinner who rejects this grace. Ultimately we can only be silent here: not in rebellion, but in shame and amazement. Not in rebellion — that would be the silence of unbelief, which makes God the culprit by regarding Him as an arbitrary Tyrant, an omnipotent Dictator. But in shame and amazement — that is the silence of faith, which knows that God is the Father of Jesus Christ, in whose heart no arbitrariness is found, but only sovereign, wise, holy and righteous love. In the clear light of the cross all our accusing words fall silent and we bow in adoration and wonder. How is it possible that such an awful sinner is saved by such a great God! Is this the solution of the problem? As far as the mind is concerned, No. But as far as the heart is concerned, Yes.

### *PRACTICAL CONSEQUENCES FOR OUR PREACHING*

All this is not pure theory, fully irrelevant to our Christian life. On the contrary, it is of the greatest importance for our practical life in all possible regards. For example, for our personal life of faith. Where is the emphasis? On our own will? On God's free and sovereign grace? The answer to these questions is determinative for our whole sanctification, and also for our view of the perseverance of the saints.

But in this paper we will concentrate on the consequences for our preaching of the Gospel. A certain view of the Plan of Salvation implies a certain method of preaching.

I. The first view means that our preaching is fundamentally nothing else than a call to a good life. This was indeed the tenor of the preaching of Pelagians, Humanists, Rationalists, Deists and also of most Liberals. Actually it was pure legalism. Perhaps it was said in a nice way, perhaps the term 'grace' was used, perhaps Divine Love, the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man were the central concepts, and yet fundamentally it was and had to be legalistic to the core.

I. In the second conception the Gospel is offered in an 'unconditional' form. It is the "Whosoever-will-gospel", as Warfield

24. R. B. Kulper, *op. cit.* p. 87.

termed it. "God loves you personally. God has given His Son for you personally. Jesus Christ did indeed die for you personally." But this unconditional offer is all of a sudden crossed by the condition: "But you must believe". Starting from free grace the decision is suddenly placed in man's hands. Of course, there is nothing wrong with a call to decision. The Bible is full of it. But the great question is: what is the context? In the Bible it never carries its own weight, but is always placed in a living correlation with sovereign grace.

III. As to the Universalists of the third conception, they indeed preach a gospel full of free grace. There is also the call to faith, and this call is indeed set in the framework of sovereign grace. And yet, in some way or other, there does not seem to be much place for a real call to decision. While in the second conception (II) the decision always tends to devour the offer of free grace, in the conception of the Universalists (IIIa) grace always tends to devour the decision. There is much preaching of grace, but this grace becomes "cheap" (Bonhoeffer). Actually there is no genuine place left for the divine judgement. While one may say that it is still Yes and No, but the No is permanently in danger of disappearing completely behind the Yes, and the Biblical warnings lose their force and effect. Striking in this respect is a sermon of Karl Barth on the two thieves on the cross. Says Barth: "This was the first Christian congregation, yes, the first reliable, unbreakable, indestructible congregation of Christ." They probably had never heard of Jesus before, and certainly had never been believers. But now they could not possibly forsake Him and had to watch with Him on the cross. They could not escape from His dangerous companionship. And in these circumstances they could not renounce Him any more. And so they constituted absolutely and actually a reliable Christian congregation. "He and they, they and He, were connected — could not and cannot be separated from each other throughout eternity." This is indeed a wonderful Gospel of pure and free grace. But — it completely ignores that the text speaks of the conversion and salvation of one thief only! The divine judgement, so clearly mentioned in this passage, completely vanishes and all that is left is universal grace!

As to the Particularists in the third conception, they indeed preach a Gospel of mere grace, 'sovereign' grace. And simultaneously they emphasize human responsibility. Contradictory? No, only this preaching is in full harmony with the two lines clearly shown in Scripture; the line of God who is the Sovereign and Loving One, and the line of man, who is a responsible creature. Yet there is also the knowledge that the grace which is offered is particular, as to both eternal intention and historical result. For this reason the offer is never given in an unconditional, but always in a 'conditional' form. The tenor of this preaching is not: Jesus Christ has died for all of you personally, please accept it; but: God offers you His grace in Jesus Christ and He really means it. His saving will and His saving offer are sincere. But you can only

accept and receive it in the way of faith. You have to surrender to Christ as your personal Saviour and Master. If you accept it, it is for you (as Luther used to say: If you believe, you have). If you reject it, it means eternal perdition. Thus in this kind of preaching offer and warning are always combined. But both are from beginning to end seen in the context of free and sovereign grace.

And for this reason this is the richest message possible. What actually can we wish more? It contains all that the sinner, every sinner, even the greatest sinner needs: free and sovereign, forgiving and renewing grace. It is a message which does not speak of man, of man's good works, of man's own possibilities. If it speaks of man, it speaks of his sin and misery. But that too is always within the framework of Jesus Christ. It is indeed an infinitely good message which we may bring. We may offer salvation, we may invite sinners to accept it, we may urge them to do so, but we may also leave the outcome to God, who is the sovereign Redeemer. His is the glory unto all eternity. His Plan of Salvation shall be completed. The last book of the Bible concludes with that glorious vision of the completed Plan: God dwelling among his redeemed people in a redeemed world (Rev. 21, 22).

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