THE ONE CHRIST AND THE UNIVERSALITY OF SALVATION

The purpose of this enquiry is to throw some light on the question of the one Christ and the universality of salvation as a theme of systematic theology.\(^1\) The precise meaning of this topic may become clearer in the course of these reflections.

Our method here will be to use both the binding statements of the Church’s magisterium and broader theological opinion to underpin the ideas presented. For it is in fact impossible to formulate a systematic account of the teaching of the Church, in a form that can be personally appropriated in a contemporary setting, without free theological opinion playing a role whose limits can often not easily be separated from dogma proper. Christian faith at any particular historical period needs theological opinion in order to be given appropriate expression; no theology can be made up of the defined propositions of the Church’s magisterium alone, for theology must be explained and explanation necessarily requires the use of concepts, assumptions and contexts of meaning which are subject to chance. At any rate theological opinion does enter in either explicitly or in a disguised form; the boundary between it and the binding dogmatic truths may be clearly marked or ill-defined and the theological weight of this opinion may be of various types. But such opinion is always present, even for instance in the ‘Credo of the people of God’ of Paul VI.\(^2\) Here, however, we can dispense with explicit definition of the various theological ‘notes’, in as much as the topic under discussion directly embodies only one statement of a dogmatically binding sort and even this has perhaps not been explicitly defined as such. I refer to the truth that the achievement by any man of his proper and definitive salvation is dependent upon Jesus Christ. How that is to be conceived is the subject of this enquiry.

Naturally other propositions possessing either dogmatic force or a high theological ‘note’ will be employed in the course of this investigation. But to clarify the truth of the universal significance of Jesus for the salvation of every man, any meaningful and reasonable proposition can rightly be used which is appropriate for the explanation of this dogma.

THE THEOLOGICAL MEANING OF THE QUESTION

We are speaking in the first place of the basic possibility of the salvation of all men and not of the extent to which, according to Christian understanding, salvation will in fact be achieved, i.e. whether the ‘apocatastasis’ of all men is a legitimate hope or not.\(^3\) Here the question is the possibility of salvation, not its actual realisation. Contrary to the view of St Augustine, this possibility is a real one in a fallen world: no man is excluded from salvation simply because of so-called original sin; a man can only lose the possibility of salvation through serious personal sin of his own. Salvation here is to be understood as the strictly supernatural and direct presence of God in himself afforded by grace. This, of course,

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\(^2\) Published in *AAS* 60 (1968), 436-445.

\(^3\) Cf. J. Loosen, *LThK* 1(1957), 709-712.
excludes, despite the statement of Pius V1\textsuperscript{4} on the subject of limbo, a purely natural state of blessedness. The direct ‘vision’ of God is the only salvation for all men. How the many stages of this long journey to the final union with God are to be conceived is not a matter of concern here. Indeed in certain cases the journey may not even be terminated by death. The traditional teaching about a ‘place of purification’ embraces a multitude of assumptions and modes of interpretation whose possibilities have by no means been exhausted and which can substantially alter the common popular notion of purgatory.

The fundamental proposition which is the proper subject of theological investigation refers therefore to the universal possibility of supernatural salvation for all men after original sin. This possibility \textsuperscript{[201]} must really be given to \textit{all}. By this is meant all those throughout human history who have come to a free realisation of their existence. The question is here excluded of the salvation of those who are clearly human beings but who have probably never achieved the full exercise of their freedom. Theological reflection upon the universal possibility of salvation involves, then, all those who have reached complete self-determination as free persons and have thus explicitly or implicitly taken a free decision for or against God. Whether this definition implies a real restriction of universality or not is a matter about which we have no certain knowledge. In any event it means all men who have existed from the beginning of human history proper, even if this beginning can scarcely be defined with any theological precision. To this group all men of course belong who have never had direct tangible contact with the Gospel and its preaching. In this context the question raised by Billot\textsuperscript{5} is of fundamental importance, whether, that is, every man who did not die as a child and could lead a more or less normal life, given the changing cultural circumstances, was capable of reaching the realisation of freedom necessary for the achievement of supernatural fulfilment. In the light of the actual historical and cultural conditions of life experienced by many individuals and groups, one may doubt whether many so-called adults do in fact reach a level of freedom which is effective for salvation. There is no simple means of resolving this question. Either one can appeal to the fact that subjective freedom in certain circumstances can be achieved despite lack of thematic reflection and scanty material, which means that the number of adults ‘under age’ with respect to their salvation is of no importance. Or one asserts that many so-called adults do exist who, with regard to their salvation, never go beyond the stage of unbaptised children who die young. We know as little about the fate of such men as about the destiny of those who die as embryos or infants.

Without proper evidence one can only say about such men that we are entirely ignorant of their fate. If one were to claim knowledge, one would merely be projecting theological data, in itself correct enough, into the absolute future in a one-sided and inadmissible manner, and the outcome of such a procedure is questionable. The significance of this is to indicate the limits of any theological proposition about the universal possibility of salvation.

\textsuperscript{[202]}

\textbf{GOD’S SALVIFIC WILL IN THE CONTEMPORARY UNDERSTANDING OF FAITH}

Given these assumptions the theological truth of the universal possibility of salvation may be taken without reserve to possess binding dogmatic force. It may be that it has not been defined but there is no doubt that it belongs to the contemporary understanding of faith and may be considered as the explicit and official teaching of the Church. As such it is to be regarded as absolutely binding. The truth in this matter was not always seen with such clarity

\textsuperscript{4} Denz. 2626.

\textsuperscript{5} L. Billot S.J. (1846-1931), Professor at the Gregorianium, Rome and important speculative theologian.
to be part of the faith of the Church as it is today, despite the numerous scriptural passages\(^6\) which are used today by theological textbooks to prove the universal salvific will of God. For even if the notion that God’s salvific will is limited to the predestined is rejected as heretical\(^7\) and even if God’s salvific will is taken to apply to non-believers and St Augustine’s particularism about salvation is considered a restriction which is now overcome, nevertheless the truth that God wills the salvation of all men can be so loaded with ‘ifs’ and ‘buts’\(^8\) that it can hardly be characterised as a formal dogma in the sense intended here.

Now, however, the Second Vatican Council has recognised the possibility that even non-Christians, polytheists and atheists can live in a subjective state of freedom from serious sin. At the same time the Council reckons with the possibility of supernatural salvation in such cases. Thus it is an evident part of the contemporary understanding of faith that there is no human state which allows one to draw definite conclusions about the personal sinfulness of a man and thus deny him the possibility of salvation. This is the meaning of the proposition that all men have the possibility of being saved, as this proposition is understood today. This implies that there is no human situation which can be empirically verified and conclusively established, that certainly rules out salvation from the start. At the same time salvation is only achieved in fact when a man acquires faith, hope and love, and so overcomes the contrary tendencies in him. The Second Vatican Council, in contrast to the previous tradition of the schools, reckons with the possibility of the saving activities of faith, hope and love being found even in the case of atheists who remain attached to their belief. So the possibility cannot be denied to any other group of men, whatever their externally verifiable attitudes and beliefs. A man may be [203] disposed in whatever way he will as far as empirical criteria are concerned, but the direct possibility of salvation cannot thereby be denied to him. Only if we grant this, can we take seriously the biblical injunction that we can judge no man.\(^9\) How the real and direct possibility of salvation can co-exist with a human situation which objectively ought not to be\(^10\) is a matter to be considered later.

The Second Vatican Council offered no definition of the truth of the universal salvific will of God, but this truth has never before in history been so clearly a part of the understanding of faith as it is today. One can, therefore, either offer the sort of theological description we have provided above or define the proposition as ‘sententia fidei proxima’,\(^11\) with L. Ott for example. The topic of our deliberations is not the proposition in itself but rather its Christological reference; thus the above remarks may be considered sufficient explanation of its theological significance, its limits and its theological ‘note’. Further proof of its validity and a more detailed treatment of its history are not in any event necessary here.

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**THE DIRECT AND SAVING PRESENCE OF GOD**

In every conceivable historical and social situation of life a man can have direct saving access to God without necessarily being required to leave his objective situation ‘de necessitate medii absoluta’, in order to be able to discover the direct reality of God somewhere else. Naturally the actual discovery of this immediate presence demands ‘metanoia’, faith, hope and love, but the universal possibility of salvation, as it is understood here, means precisely that the necessary turning to God can be achieved, either reflectively or unreflectively, from

\(^{6}\) Cf. 1 Tim 2:4.


\(^{8}\) This must apply at least until the Second Vatican Council.

\(^{9}\) Mt 7:1; Lk 6:37.

\(^{10}\) E.g. an objective sin, a theoretical or practical atheism.

any conceivable existential standpoint, in so far as it is the given historical, cultural or religious situation which is in question. This possibility is a categorial one and belongs to the basic structure of human freedom and human self-realisation. It may often occur in the case of a particular human life that the refusal freely to alter his own existential situation means a denial of God and the destruction of the chance of salvation. But this assumes that the prior historical situation of a man is directly open to the saving presence of God, in so far as it is not [204] formed or maintained by the personal sin of the individual. In purely human terms we can never assert with total certainty of any situation that its existence is only possible because of the personal guilt of the individual living in it, and that it is therefore a sign of the loss of God’s direct saving presence.

In an ultimate sense God is equally near everywhere. The narrow gap can everywhere be bridged through faith, hope and love with the help of whatever aid the particular historical circumstances provide. Conversely the faith which is effective for salvation never enters so clearly into any situation that its presence or absence enables one to make a certain judgement that the situation is open or closed to salvation. In saying this I do not at all mean to question the importance or the objective value of a moral act, the validity of the confession of faith, or of actual membership of the Church, or to relativise these values with regard to the subjective salvation any man. However a more thorough treatment of these questions would divert us from the topic under discussion.

The world is drawn to its spiritual fulfilment by the Spirit of God, who directs the whole history of the world in all its length and breadth towards its proper goal. This means that every man, whatever his situation, can be saved. The Christ event, however, seems at first glance to be the effect and not the cause of the dynamic of divine spiritual communication to the world. How can one claim, then, that salvation comes entirely from Jesus Christ? This question forms the focal point of our reflections, given the necessary clarifications we have provided.

THE PROBLEMATIC

We live in a world in which each and everything is inter-dependent, in which every event is in some way important for every other, at least if it comes later in time, a world in which Sirius wobbles in its course when a child throws a doll out of its cradle, to quote the telling remark of one modern physicist. But this physical unity of space and time does not offer a suitable basis for the solution of our question. For we are not dealing with a framework or a unity in which every element is significant for every other, but rather with a single, specific, historical event which is supposedly important even for the periods of history before it. This event, taking place within history, is meant to be absolutely fundamental for every other event occurring at any time [205] from the beginning to the end of that same history. And yet this must be understood as a history of freedom operating at every particular moment, i.e. events continually occurring which cannot be dependent for their very essence, the decision for or against God, on other events, however much these latter may form the conditions and context for the exercise of freedom. In the realisation of salvation the freedom of the individual is irreplaceable.

One could offer the answer that freedom must be exercised under prior conditions and circumstances which are independent of it, since human freedom is finite. One might add that the ‘objective redemption’ through Jesus Christ forms part of the condition of freedom as far as salvation or damnation are concerned. But this raises at least the question of how redemption understood in this way can apply to those who lived before Christ. Furthermore how can this situation be of relevance for the free action of those who, though living after the
time of Christ, have either no knowledge of him at all or knowledge of a kind which does not
impel their freedom to an ultimate decision? Finally in what way is the objective redemption
to be analysed as constitutive of human freedom and its exercise?

The ‘objective redemption through Christ’ can be a specific and characteristic element in
the basic structure of human freedom, which includes numerous other elements as well. It
would then possess a unique place among these elements, which is higher than all others,
since it forms part of the predestination of freedom ordained by God. This predestination is
assumed in all schools of Catholic theology, whatever their exact interpretation, to be
something which can be reconciled with human freedom. But this is merely a statement of the
real problem. Whether we should speak of a general (or particular) predestination of human
freedom to salvation or simply of the saving will of God does not make any difference to our
investigation. Our enquiry concurs the how of the connection of such a saving will, or divine
predestination, with the Christ event.

A quick and easy answer to our question which consists in an appeal to the ‘cosmic Christ’
should be avoided. Of course the pre-existing Logos of God can be conceived without
difficulty as a creative, sanctifying, reconciling and divinising force operating in the world
and in history. Human salvation depends on the Logos and all salvation is related to it. The
eternal Logos of God gives himself to the central core of human freedom as the condition of
possibility of a supernatural response to the self-communication of God. He thus constitutes
the redemption or the redemption event. On the basis of the ‘communicatio idiomatum’
one can say of Jesus that he is the salvation of the world, just as he can say he is creator of the
world.

But all this does not provide a satisfactory answer to our question, for the self-
communication of the divine Logos to the world is conceived not as a single event within
history but as the ultimate dynamic orientation which operates universally and is the ground
of the whole of history. One may leave aside here the further problem of how the function of
the Logos in its work of salvation and its guidance of the world is related to the activity of the
Holy Spirit, and how, or rather with what justification, the disciples of Jesus moved from the
experience of him as the one crucified and risen (cf. the letter to the Colossians, the writings
of John and the letter to the Hebrews) to the pre-existent, creative and saving Logos
embodied in Jesus. But that still leaves the question unanswered how the particular historical
event of the death and resurrection of Jesus, which happened at a particular time and place,
can be of fundamental importance for the salvation of all men. It may be that the question
cannot be answered without reference to the pre-existent Logos in Jesus, but this appeal by
itself does not provide the solution we are looking for.

SELF-REDEMPTION AND REDEMPTION BY ANOTHER

In Christian apologetics a distinction is usually drawn between self- redemption and
redemption by another. We mention this point in order to avoid the danger of making greater
demands than are theologically necessary upon the redemption of all men in Christ and upon
his death and resurrection. Otherwise people today are forced into a situation of meaningless
confusion from which they cannot escape. The Christian doctrine of faith, hope and love, of
the union in grace with God and of the free reception of God’s self-communication can well
be understood in the sense of a true self-redemption. The person who redeems himself in
freedom, i.e. places God in the centre of his own free existence, is a creature who is
constituted by the creative freedom of God and is therefore given the capacity to accept
God’s self-communication. God, however, shares himself with man both through uncreated
grace which forms his very being and through the supernatural capacity which arises from
grace and belongs to man in his freedom. God is himself the condition of possibility of human salvation from which man freely realises his salvation. Naturally it is [207] taken for granted in Christian theology, in contrast to any form of Pelagianism, that the free acceptance of salvation is also a gift of God’s grace and thus forms the very core of the human person and of human freedom.\textsuperscript{12}

If, however, self-redemption means that a man can achieve his fulfilment without God, then any form of self-redemption is foreign to Christian teaching. Christian salvation can only be understood as self-redemption in the sense that a man does not merely receive his salvation in a passive manner but rather realises it with total, and not just partial, freedom. The very possibility of freedom, however, is established by God through nature and grace. To gain a proper idea of this grace one should not conceive of the grace in which a man achieves salvation as an external means but rather as the innermost core of human freedom which is freely constituted by God.

If self-redemption is presented in Christian faith in the above sense, and if the cross of Christ (rooted in the incarnation of the Logos and reaching fulfilment in the resurrection) is made the cause of our salvation as the ‘redemptio objectiva’, then the causality of the cross must be understood in relation to the general and the individual conditions of possibility of self-redemption. But how this is to be conceived still remains unclear.

CROSS: CONSEQUENCE OR CAUSE?

It follows from what we have said that the event of the crucifixion, taken as ‘redemptio objectiva’, cannot be the cause of the uncaused salvific will of God, at least not in the usual sense of the term. For according to common understanding, cause means a physical or moral operation which brings something about. By contrast we must say: because God wills salvation, therefore Jesus died and rose again, and not: because the crucifixion occurred, therefore God wills our salvation. God is not transformed from a God of anger and justice into a God of mercy and love by the cross; rather God brings the event of the cross to pass since he is possessed from the beginning of gratuitous mercy and, despite the world’s sin, shares himself with the world, so overcoming its sin.

What mode of ‘causality’ is to be attributed to the cross for the salvation of all men, is precisely the question which is at stake here. This is also a version of the real difficulty of the so-called Anselmian theory of satisfaction,\textsuperscript{13} which in a crude or a more subtle form has determined the doctrine of the redemption in western Christianity, at least where the crucifixion has not been denied any form of causality and the cross and resurrection treated only as ground for our faith and our trust in God. The satisfaction theory requires a series of tortuous distinctions in order to make plain that the one making satisfaction and the one accepting it are in our case one and the same. This seems to make the theory untenable as a model for the understanding of the causality of the redemption. We can see from the history of preaching and theology how this theory consistently obscured the simple fact that the event of the cross did not originate in an angry God who demanded reparation, but from a God of gratuitous and merciful love. This is not to deny that God’s holiness and justice are evident on the cross or to dispute the value for religious teaching of certain elements of the satisfaction theory, which are entirely to be approved. But the theory, almost of necessity, introduces the metaphysically impossible idea of a transformation of God and obscures the

\textsuperscript{12} Cf. A. Hamman, \textit{LThK} VIII (1963), 246-249. Also the more recent study of the position of Pelagius by G. Greshake, \textit{Gnade als konkrete Freiheit. Eine Untersuchung zur Gnadenlehre des Pelagius} (Mainz, 1972).

\textsuperscript{13} Cf. W. Kasper, \textit{Jesus the Christ} (London, 1976), pp. 219-221.
origin and cause of the crucifixion which is the mercy and love of God. This love can only include sin in the world because, as God’s yes to man, this love was meant to prove itself Victorious over man’s no to God.

The satisfaction theory requires the ultimately inconceivable notion that Jesus is man’s representative and is opposed to the correct understanding of self-redemption outlined above. In addition the Pauline formula ‘υ(πε_ρ η(µω∼ν’ is interpreted in an unconvincing manner which forces the sense of Paul’s words. But how could the apostle of the gentiles know and speak of this ‘υ(πε&ρ’ in the light of the experience of the death and resurrection of Jesus of the first disciples?

THE MERIT OF CHRIST

Official doctrinal pronouncements of the Church as well as traditional theological opinion both refer to the fact, e.g. in connection with the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of Mary, that grace and salvation were guaranteed man ‘intuitu meritorum Christi’. Yet this comment, while perfectly correct in itself, expresses no more than the truth from which these reflections originated and which requires further elucidation. This line of thought connects human salvation with the cross of Christ, without explaining how the connection is to be conceived. At least it makes it easier to understand how pre-Christian mankind and men living outside Christianity could be dependent for their salvation upon the cross of Christ, in that the idea of God’s eternal fore-knowledge of this event in time is brought into play. This makes intelligible a possible effect of Christ’s cross operating before the time when he himself became a historical event.

There is here the problem that the elements of the history of salvation, which should be inter-connected to form a single salvation history, are in this account bound together by forces operating outside history, that is, by the eternal fore-knowledge of God. This fore-knowledge does not belong to salvation history as such, since all historical and temporal moments are equally and eternally present to it. But even if we leave this difficulty aside, the fact remains that the proposed ‘intuitus meritorum Christi’ does not explain the real meaning of the statement that God wills human salvation ‘because of’ the cross of Christ.

In the light of what we have said the cross of Christ cannot be the cause of human salvation in the sense that it brought about the will to save in God which otherwise would not have existed, or that it bestowed upon men a type of salvation which takes no heed of human freedom. Despite all these objections does a connection exist between the cross of the Lord and the salvation of all men, a connection which is more than an appeal to the moral impact which the death and resurrection of Christ has on us? Any attempt to discover such a connection should not ignore the fact that all men are involved. Let us start our investigation with Jesus himself and then turn to ourselves; the double perspective will open up questions which otherwise might have been overlooked.

JESUS AND ALL MEN

The relationship of Jesus to all men raises a series of questions relevant to exegesis and fundamental theology which cannot be systematically investigated here. Only one will be mentioned: how did the pre-Easter Jesus conceive of his death? Did he approach it with full

14 Cf. 2 Cor 5:21; Gal 1:4; 3:13; 1 Cor 1:13; 11:24.
15 Cf. Denz. 2803.
knowledge and consent and accept it in ultimate unconditional faith and trust? Did [210] he realise the soteriological significance of his death? Under what assumptions and in what framework of meaning can Jesus’ knowledge of the soteriological importance of his death be conceived? What is the minimum required by dogma and fundamental theology to enable us to attribute to the pre-Easter Jesus a soteriological value for his death in a historically tangible form?

Without being able here to go further into these and similar questions, we will simply assume that the death and resurrection of Jesus, taken together, do possess soteriological significance. We take this to be the teaching of Scripture and the Church, and there is sufficient evidence to connect its content with the reality of the pre-Easter Jesus. Here the only question to be asked is how the connection between the death of Jesus and the salvation of all men can be imagined without our getting enmeshed in the conceptual tangle we mentioned earlier.

Of course we should remember first, that Jesus possesses that relationship to every man which connects all men together in the many dimensions of life within the framework of a single humanity and history. The existential, ontological, historical, philosophical and theological grounds for this assertion cannot be listed or developed here, except to say that humanity and history form a genuine unity and do not merely consist in a sum of individual human beings and isolated biographies put together by our thought processes. This unity affects not only the common physical and biological basis of man and his world, but also the human reality of man and his freedom and history, which cannot easily be explained. It is obvious that such a specifically human unity, and not one with merely material and biological foundations, is important for the soteriological connection between Jesus and the whole of humanity and should not be obscured or undervalued. It plays a role in the doctrine of redemption found among the Greek fathers, in that in their view humanity has a form of existence which enables the eternal Logos to enter into communion with the single race of mankind. But even the western theory of satisfaction presupposes a unity among men to which Jesus belongs as well, irrespective of whether this unity, in which Jesus in his representative function can act for all, is thought of as the result of divine -decreet rather than as a natural unity of mankind to which the incarnate Logos of God also belongs. Yet however necessary it is to reflect upon the unity of man and his history, nevertheless it is not sufficient by itself to make what is meant here intelligible.

If one wanted to say that the redemption was achieved through the [211] incarnation alone, then the universal significance of the Christ event could be explained on the basis of the unity of mankind alone. Humanity is one and is saved as a single whole through the incarnation of the eternal Logos in this unity. He must share the ultimate salvation with man which necessarily belongs to him as the Logos of God; otherwise the unity of human history would be destroyed, if the necessary salvation of one of its members were irrelevant to the destiny and possibility of salvation of the whole of mankind. Certainly these considerations have positive meaning and validity and they should therefore be included in a theology of the cross and its significance for salvation. But if the cross of Christ, his death and resurrection, are regarded as a saving event affecting all men, then even the notion of a universal communion of race and history shared by the Logos is not sufficient by itself. The death and resurrection of Jesus must possess universal importance in themselves for salvation and cannot merely be regarded as isolated events, of no significance in themselves, in a life which only has universal relevance for salvation in being the life of the eternal Logos. It is this Logos which entered the unity of mankind and took on a human nature, thus taking on and saving the whole of humanity.

As we have seen earlier, the ‘causality’ of the saving death of Jesus for the salvation of all men must be the consequence and not the cause of the self-giving of God to the world in
grace. It does not mean a transformation in God, for God brings the crucifixion to pass out of grace not out of anger, although the meaning of the cross does not consist alone in its power to convince us of the love and forgiveness of God. If the causality of the cross with regard to salvation were exclusively interpreted in this way, then any universality would be out of the question, since the majority of mankind have no explicit knowledge of the cross and since, according to Paul’s notion of the saving effect of the cross, the death of Jesus is set within the category of sacrifice. However we may here with caution assert that the Pauline ideas of ‘sacrifice’, ‘ransom’, ‘reconciliation through blood’ do not reflect the original understanding of the saving significance of the Cross of Jesus for all men; they are legitimate ideas but they are secondary notions which must be explained in the light of the primary and original data and are aimed to bring home the significance of Christ’s death for our salvation. In other cultures and historical periods such ideas do not so easily achieve this goal, even if we do not mean to imply by this that, for us today for example, these models of thought should be entirely rejected.

[212] The question, therefore, of the mode of causality remains open. One is tempted to demand from the start the abandonment of the idea of ‘causality’ altogether. But the fact remains that it is part of the Christian confession of faith that the death of Jesus means something for the salvation of all men, that it was for us that he died. Such formulations express the same content as the ‘causality’ of the death of Jesus with regard to the salvation of all men. The problem remains the same whether one speaks of ‘causality’, ‘meaning’ or ‘for us’. In any event all forms of causality of a physical or moral type fail, so that a causality of the death of Jesus is suggested which is precisely one that should not come into question.

To resolve this dilemma one may pursue a number of paths. Here we will choose one which discloses the causality of Jesus’ death we are seeking with a concept which is familiar in a different theological context and has been extensively investigated.

We may assert the following: the cross (together with the resurrection of Jesus) has a primary sacramental causality for the salvation of all men, in so far as it mediates salvation to man by means of salvific grace which is universally operative in the world. It is the sign of this grace and of its victorious and irreversible activity in the world. The effectiveness of the cross is based on the fact that it is the primary sacramental sign of grace.

SACRAMENTAL SIGN AND GRACE

The salvific causality of the cross should not be subsumed under the sign causality of grace which is characteristic and familiar from sacramental teaching, or rather from one possible and legitimate version of that teaching. The specific character of the effect of the cross must be obtained from theological investigation of the cross itself. Of course this can lead to a notion of causality which evidently agrees with the sign causality of the sacraments. Such a conception can then easily be adopted, although the proposed causality is not to be found elsewhere and is not to be subsumed under the other familiar notions of causality. Sufficient proof of this is provided by the fact that the new concept in sacramental theology is recognised as sign causality, a type of causality, therefore, which is proper to the sign as such and is not some- thing added to the sign. In sacramental theology it is not that the qualities sign and causality are attributed to the sacramental processes [213] with regard to grace and then other categories of instrumental causality of a physical or moral type are applied to cover this sign causality and interpret it. It is rather the case that the sign is the cause. ‘Sacramenta causant gratiam, quia et prout significant gratiam’. We are not of course assuming here that every sign of a thing can also be treated as its cause. But in so far as a sacrament can and should be conceived of as a ‘real symbol’, as a historical and social
embodiment of grace, where grace achieves its own fullness of being and forms an irreversible gift (opus operatum), to this extent the sign is a cause of grace, although the sign is caused by this grace.

The mutual inter-dependence prevents one regarding grace and the sign of grace as two quite separate realities set over against each other as cause and effect. We should rather speak of two moments in a process of historical and ontological fulfilment, even if the conditions of each are different. In this sense the sacramental sign is a cause of grace. The sign belongs to the essential actualisation of this grace which thereby finds irreversible historical expression. The sign is in fact brought forth by grace as its ‘real symbol’, so that grace itself achieves fulfilment. The ontological and pneumatological implications of sign causality and its connection with the bodiliness and the historicity of man require fuller clarification but these remarks about the notion of sign causality must suffice. Its legitimacy in any event is independent of the following reflections and thus can serve as theological evidence in their favour.

What is to be said in our case? God’s saving will embraces everything and so permits even the sin of the world. His self-communication which consists in an offer made to human freedom touches the innermost nature and goal of man and therefore of salvation history. In this process each thing is important with and for every other, since every individual in this single salvation history is willed by God’s saving purpose as an element within it. The solidarity of man in salvation history is not of the same character for every individual as this history unfolds in time, nor does it consist merely in a temporal succession of individual histories of salvation. It tends towards a goal and a fulfilment of the whole of salvation history, in which the being of God as self-giving love and the freedom of God find an irreducible and historically tangible expression. Under these conditions it is at least conceivable that the ambivalence of human and divine freedom which is a primary feature of this history will be resolved by a free and historical act before the universal culmination of the total historical [214] process. The outcome would then be fixed and irreversible from within history.

The logical possibility is assured if the irreversible outcome, appearing within history, of the historical process of human and divine freedom is positive, i.e. signifies the salvation of the world which could not then be totally lost. This would be possible if God were to communicate himself to a man in such a unique manner that this man would become the definitive and irreversible self-gift of God to the world. He would also freely accept the divine self-gift in such a manner that this too would be irreversible, i.e. through his death as the definitive culmination of his free actions in history. If salvation history is irreversibly directed in this sense to salvation, and not to damnation, through a concrete event, then this historically tangible occurrence must be a sign of the salvation of the whole world in the sense of a ‘real symbol’, and so possesses a type of causality where salvation is concerned. To this we wish to apply a well known theological concept and call it ‘sacramental’.

Christian faith sees in Jesus, his cross and resurrection just such an event. Given the unity and solidarity of mankind, we have here before us the sign of an irreversible positive outcome of the one historical process. Before this event took place the positive ending of salvation history was not assured with tangible historical certainty, but was obscured by the ambiguity of human and divine freedom. Thus we may predicate of this sign of the salvation of the whole world the type of sacramental causality which was mentioned earlier. Because Jesus died and rose again, therefore salvation is offered and given to the whole of mankind; taken together cross and resurrection are the ‘cause’ of the salvation of all men. To avoid the problems alluded to above, this ‘causality’ must be thought of in terms of ‘sacramental sign causality’, which is brought about by the prior divine will to save mankind and is not itself the cause of this divine will. If the Second Vatican Council emphasises that the Church is the
sacrament of the world’s salvation and explains this statement by describing the Church as the basic sacrament of salvation, then Jesus Christ may be called the primary sacrament (‘Ursakrament’), which is the original ‘sign and instrument of the innermost union with God and of the unity of the whole of mankind’. In this way the Constitution on the Church speaks of the Church, deriving its description from the nature of Christ.

The quotation refers to ‘sign and instrument’, which can be easily interpreted according to a particular sacramental theology as, ‘instrument because sign’. The objection may be raised that a sign, which can only be directed and addressed to men, may possibly be a significant cause of their awareness but cannot be the cause of the reality signified, i.e. the salvation of men. In reply to this it should be pointed out that a notion of ‘sign’ is here being assumed which is quite inappropriate for a sacramental sign. Certainly this form of explanation does not do full justice to the causality of Jesus and cross where salvation is concerned, or entirely explain the dogma of the redemption through the cross. But in a sacramental sign the saving will of God and grace find historical expression. Sign and signified are essentially one, in contrast to the above assumption, so that the reality signified comes to be in and through the sign, and the sign therefore, in this specific and limited sense, causes the reality signified.

This applies in a fundamental way to the relationship between the saving will of God and grace which is the innermost purpose of the whole history of the world, on the one hand, and the cross of Jesus on the other. In consequence the cross can and should be understood in this sense as the cause of the salvation signified and not merely regarded as the cause of our awareness of salvation in faith. Of course the cross possesses this latter function for us and our faith as well, but the cross of Jesus as the universal primary sacrament of the salvation of the whole world expresses more than this, and indeed says everything, always assuming that ‘sacrament’ is correctly interpreted and is seen to possess the specific type of causality which is proper to the cross as the instrument of salvation for all men.

The explanation we have offered does not of course exhaust the subject matter. Much has been left without proper proof or development, e.g. the solidarity of all men and the history of individual freedom within the totality of human history, the connection between God’s self-communication in grace and the death of Jesus, the theology of death, the unity of the death and resurrection of Jesus, etc. On many of these topics we have spoken elsewhere; others are deliberately left open here. For the thesis we have proposed is not meant to include at any price under the notion of the primary sacramental causality of signs all that objectively belongs to the salvation brought about by Jesus and the universal significance of his cross and resurrection. Our theory does not in the least exclude other factors which have not been mentioned here and which could not be included under this concept, as long as the thesis is not itself placed in doubt by such alternative possibilities. Our purpose here is to show, by moving from Jesus to humanity as a whole, how a single historical event may be seen to possess universal meaning. This meaning is unique and does not arise simply from the importance which any particular occurrence in history possesses for the totality of human history.

MAN AND THE CROSS OF CHRIST

16 Cf. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (LG), nos. 1, 8, 48, 59; Decree on Ecumenism (UR), no. 2; Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church (AG), no. 1; Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (GS) no. 45.
18 LG, no. 1.
It was stated at the start of this enquiry that the universal significance of the cross of Jesus for human salvation must be seen from the point of view of the whole of humanity. It is plain that this significance is only present and intelligible if the relationship is mutual, if, that is, not only is Jesus related to mankind but also mankind is related to him. In part this is presupposed, in part proposed as a thesis. But this poses new problems which acquire proper focus and depth if we leave on one side those with faith who believe explicitly in Jesus and redemption on the basis of the Christian Gospel and concentrate on those who, for no fault of their own, have never really been touched by the explicit message of Christianity. To this number belong the whole of mankind living before Christ as well as non-Christians since the time of Christ and all those who consciously and explicitly believe that they are required by their conscience to refuse the Gospel of Christ as this is presented to them. In this last case it is not a question of sin offering a threat to salvation. All these groups ultimately belong to a single category, since for a variety of reasons they have not been reached by the Gospel of Jesus and yet their rejection of the Christian message does not mean an existentially serious sin. Seen from this point of view, therefore, such people form a single group as far as our topic is concerned despite all the differences amongst them, for their problem is a common one.

To answer this question two assumptions must be made: first, that all men only achieve salvation through Christ. This is not self-evident and is sometimes not given sufficient consideration in contemporary theory when the question of non-Christian religions and the universality of salvation is being discussed. Further treatment of this point is not needed here, however, since we have already shown how the universality of salvation may be conceived in relationship to Jesus.

The second assumption is still less obvious and both as fact and possibility requires clearer proof. It states that all men who reach salvation must have a relationship to Jesus Christ in their saving faith and that the fact that Jesus is the universal cause of salvation implies that all men are related to Jesus by means of the faith that is necessary for salvation.

The fact and possibility of this raise two different questions of which the ‘how’ question will receive most of our attention. On the fact itself a few prior comments will be made so that its possibility can be intelligibly discussed. As a result of the Second Vatican Council it must be accepted that salvation is open to any adult human being on the basis of a strictly supernatural faith in revelation brought about by grace. This is true of all men, even for ‘heathens’, and this means that in no case can faith in any way be replaced by anything else, as could be proposed at the beginning of this century by Straub, for example. All such suggestions contradict the teaching of the magisterium. The theological difficulties this raises are made plain by the repeated assertions of the Council that God alone knows how such a faith is in fact possible in certain circumstances and under certain conditions. Specifically this applied to pagans and those living before Christ who were untouched by the Old Testament. But despite this evident embarrassment the Council held fast to the conviction that supernatural faith in revelation in the proper sense of this term was necessary for all men and rejected the view that in place of faith a purely metaphysical knowledge of God, freely accepted, would suffice. A free self-revelation of God is thus demanded, which is to be accepted by man. Without going any further into this problem, the possibility and intelligibility of a supernatural faith in revelation for all men must simply be presupposed. Otherwise we would have to discuss the possibility of salvation and faith for atheists and the question of anonymous theism, as was done at the Council.

Let us suppose, then, that a faith which is directed to the self-revelation of God is possible even when a person has not been in contact with the explicit revelation contained in the

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19 Cf. A. Straub, De analysi fidei (Innsbruck, 1922).
Old and New Testaments. We may note in passing that this does not mean accepting the theory of an ‘original revelation in the Garden of Eden’ in the usual sense, or supposing that this primitive revelation was transmitted through several million years of human history. The only matter to be discussed is whether the faith, whose possibility we are assuming, may conceivably contain, in a manner analogous to the implicit and unthematic presence of God, an implicit but still genuine presence of Jesus Christ, especially in the case of so-called atheists. Only under this condition would such people not only be drawn into the redeeming action of Jesus, but would also possess a relationship to this act of salvation through their faith, thus creating a two way connection.

This brings us to the often discussed question of ‘anonymous Christians’, a topic which in the space available here can only be briefly touched on. Recently the phrase has occasioned massive objections, which sometimes contain considerable misunderstandings. It is absurd and ridiculous, for instance, to assert that supporters of this notion merely want to use it to console Church members for the diminishing number, both in relative and absolute terms, of those confessing explicit Christian faith. It was never just a matter of a ‘tranquilliser’ to counter the disappearance of Christian belief. In fact the theory arose from two facts: first, the possibility of supernatural salvation and of a corresponding faith which must be granted to non-Christians, even if they never become Christian; and secondly, that salvation cannot be gained without reference to God and Christ, since it must in its origin, history and fulfilment be a theistic and Christian salvation.

One can only escape this conclusion if one adopts the pessimistic outlook common in the past and disputes the possibility of supernatural salvation for such people, thereby consigning them to hell or limbo, or if one grants salvation merely on the basis of human respectability without reference to God and Christ, or if, finally, one refuses to think about the Christian character of salvation in these cases, thus endangering the universality of Christ’s redeeming action, which should on the contrary be firmly maintained.

As we said years ago, it is not a question of the name, ‘anonymous Christian’ or ‘anonymous Christianity’. The issue clearly arises from the teaching of the Second Vatican Council. In addition we should have learnt enough from psychology, depth psychology and a genuine metaphysical understanding of human knowledge and freedom to realise that a man does not know and deliberately put into practice only those things which he can state in words as objects of his conscious awareness or can freely affirm. It is obvious that a contradiction can exist between the way a person takes free possession of himself in an unthematic and unreflective manner and the way he interprets himself as an object in words and concepts, and this contradiction does not have to be noticed by the person concerned, who may indeed expressly deny it. Is it surprising that in certain circumstances the real situation and the basic self-understanding of a person may be grasped more clearly by someone else than by the person himself, who may in fact strongly resist the other’s interpretation? This fact must be accepted; it cannot be avoided or explained away, since it frequently happens that one man interprets another differently from the latter’s own reading of himself.

I must assert as a Christian and a metaphysician who holds that the spiritual element in man cannot be reduced to matter that even a materialist philosopher does those free, spiritual activities which I objectify in a philosophy of spirit, even if the empiricist affirms that such activities do not in fact exist. A Marxist philosopher of history certainly interprets my role as a priest differently from the way I do. From a formal point of view, then, there is no problem

21 Cf. the introduction to the article referred to in footnote 19, op. cit., pp. 531 sq.
in my treating someone as an anonymous Christian, even if he energetically denies my interpretation and rejects it as false or incoherent; Nishitani the well known Japanese philosopher, the head of the Kyoto school, who is familiar with the notion of the anonymous Christian, once asked me: What would you say to my treating you as an anonymous Zen Buddhist? I replied: certainly you may and should do so from your point of view; I feel myself honoured by such an interpretation, even if I am obliged to regard you as being in error or if I assume that, correctly understood, to be a genuine Zen Buddhist is identical with being a genuine Christian, in the sense directly and properly intended by such statements. Of course in terms of objective social awareness it is indeed clear that the Buddhist is not a Christian and the Christian is not a Buddhist. Nishitani replied: Then on this point we are entirely at one.

Of course an anonymous Christian is different from an explicit Christian. Otherwise he would be an explicit Christian and not an anonymous one. He lacks nearly all or most of those characteristics which on the level of objective understanding and social life go into making a Christian. The idea of the anonymous Christian does not mean that the realities which the anonymous Christian lacks, such as the explicit profession of Christian faith or baptism, are unimportant for salvation and for being a Christian, even if it is not possible here to explain more clearly their significance for salvation.

It is more important that the heathen in his polytheism, the atheist in good faith, the theist outside the revelation of the Old and New Testaments, all possess not only a relationship of faith to God’s self-revelation, but also a genuine relationship to Jesus Christ and his saving action. It is in fact not easy in the case of the relationship to God to solve the question why such men do not merely have an unthematic, transcendent relationship to the God of philosophers but also possess a relationship to the God who communicates himself to man in grace and bestows a supernatural self-revelation on man.

A CHRISTOLOGY OF QUEST

The actual history of Jesus Christ, the particularity of his cross in space and time, makes the relationship to him difficult, more difficult at any rate than the transcendent relation of man to God. In contrast to the possibilities open to believers, Jesus cannot be meant to be an explicit theme in the cases we are considering, nor be presented as a concrete historical point of reference which would make possible an encounter with his unique spatio-temporal location. Otherwise the reference to Jesus embodied in faith of this type would not differ from that possessed by an explicit Christian. One way out of the cul-de-sac created by the demand for a relationship to Jesus for which a concrete historical possibility cannot seemingly be discovered, may be offered by the suggestion that such a relationship can actually be established by a person’s alignment, correct in terms of faith, to realities which are objectively and historically connected to Jesus and his history. This would mean that a man would be related to Jesus without this involving any subjective implications. This notion need not be false, but it leaves the proposed relationship so ‘thin’ that it does not suffice by itself. For the relationship would have, in part at least, a purely objective character and would not enter at all into the existential realm of the life of faith, or at least not in an intelligible fashion. The objective part of the relationship remains so general and abstract that it provides less explanation than is here required. Finally the whole theory is based on the single truth that, given the unity of history, each part is connected to the whole.

22 The importance for salvation of the realities which constitute explicit Christianity may be explained as the response to a command or as a necessary means of salvation or in a variety of other ways.
We can only find a real way out of this difficulty if in such cases we attribute a ‘Christology of quest’ to all men of good will and regard it as sufficient to answer our question. A person who is searching for something which is specific and yet unknown has a genuine existential connection, as one alert and on the watch, with whatever he is seeking, even if he has not yet found it, and so cannot develop the relation to the object of his quest to its full extent. The reality of the relationship to this object and its inner connection to the goal becomes clear, since the relation to the goal is always characterised by a new and more radical search. If this were not true we could not speak of the growth of faith and the quest of hope in the case of the justified. If searching belongs to the essence of the pilgrim state of having found what is being sought, then the real connection of the search to its object cannot be denied, even if the object of the quest has not yet been found. At this point it will be clear that the search is brought about by grace, which has found its historically tangible expression and its irreversible force in Jesus. This means that if the search is caused by this grace, a person engaged on such a quest is directed in some measure to this goal. We are assuming here that such a Christology of quest involves hope and expectation of an Advent kind and that a person who is caught up in the actual process of history demands some factual guarantee of the successful fulfilment of his eschatological hope. Its realisation means the end of his history, the fulfilment of his own transcendent nature which consists in the reference to God and his own self-realisation in freedom. This realisation, however, does not occur in an isolated transcendence apart from history, but takes place in the specific and common history of all men.

For further clarification of the relationship of eschatological hope to Christ, as it is found in the actual fulfilment of human existence transformed by divine grace, three different claims upon human existence should be distinguished. Human existence is always directed to the freedom of man. In accepting freedom a man gives assent in his quest to the absolute source of salvation which is tangible in history, although these three claims do not in themselves exhaust the basic [222] structure of human existence. They are united by the fact that a man who approaches them without reserve is always engaged upon a ‘Christology of quest’ in his human existence. The difference between such a person and an explicit Christian is that in the Christology of quest a man does not know that it is in Jesus of Nazareth that what he is seeking is to be found. Because a man engaged upon the Christological quest is prepared without conditions or qualifications to accept the goal wherever and however it can be found, this Christological search is in fact directed to Jesus, for it is Jesus who in reality is its proper goal. This means that the Christological quest possesses a relationship to Jesus, even if a man does not know how to call him by his proper name. This relationship plainly differs from that of a professing Christian to his Lord.

THE CLAIMS UPON HUMAN EXISTENCE

First of all there is the demand for an absolute love of neighbour, in the form presented in Mt 25. This must be taken with radical seriousness and approached, as it were, from ‘below’, from the love of the particular neighbour. If one adds an ‘as if’ to the statement of Christ that he himself is genuinely loved in a neighbour, or if one adopts a theology of purely legal attribution, then one distorts the sense of Jesus’ words which is taken from the real experience of love. The true meaning is that through radical and unconditional love of

23 Similar ideas, though from another point of view, form the basis of the author’s study, ‘Das konkrete Verhältnis zu Jesus’, Ich glaube an Jesus Christus (Zurich, 1968), pp. 49-65. They have also been used for various proposals for a short formulation of faith; cf. R. Bleistein, Kurzformel des Glaubens II (Wurzburg, 1971), pp. 86-94.
another, a man makes an implicit act of faith and love in Christ. This is indeed true, for any man, being both finite and unreliable, cannot rationally justify from his own resources the offer of absolute love in which a person dares to commit himself without reserve or qualification to another. In himself he could only be the object of a limited love, a love in which the lover either holds himself back or ventures into a realm which may be without meaning. If this dilemma could be overcome purely by an appeal to God as the guarantee and limit of the absolute character of love, then this might be feasible in an abstract and speculative sense with reference to the general concept of absolute love. But if a man experiences the absolute quality of love, it is plain that love demands [223] more than the permanent and transcendent guarantee of God. Love does not find its full realisation out of its own resources but from the radical unity it has with the love of God in Jesus Christ. It implies a unity of the love of God and the love of neighbour, in which the love of neighbour is the love of God and so has an absolute quality, even if this lacks thematic expression. Love searches for the God-man, i.e. for the one who can and may be loved as man with absolute commitment proper to the love of God, not as an idea but as a concrete reality. Ideas cannot be loved: it is the reality which is desired, whether this be already present or lies in the future. This notion depends of course upon the assumption that men form a single totality and that genuine love is not an isolated, individualistic affair. It always tends rather to embrace all men with all the practical implications demanded by love, and conversely it must find concrete expression in the love of the particular individual. Furthermore we are saying that the existence of the God-man within the single totality of mankind makes possible absolute love of another person.

Secondly there is the demand to be prepared for death. Normal preaching tends to concentrate in the case of the death of Jesus, despite its crucial significance for salvation, too much upon the particular, categorial event which takes place alongside many others on the world stage and has its own specific character. But the particular character of this death does not make plain much of the innermost being of the world and of human existence, or bring it to fulfilment. One moves too quickly to a consideration of the external causes and the violent nature of this death and treats it in the context of a theory of satisfaction as the purely external and meritorious cause of the redemption. But in a theology of death the event of Jesus’s death can be more closely related to the basic structure of human existence. Death is the one act governing the whole of life in which a man as a free being has total self-determination. This means, or should mean, the acceptance of absolute control in the radical powerlessness which is acutely experienced in death. If a man, whose freedom signifies being responsible for his own destiny and the desire to control it, freely and willingly accepts this radical powerlessness, and if this is not an acceptance of the absurd which could be rejected with justifiable protest, then in this acceptance a man is looking forward to death as reconciliation with expectant hope, or giving assent to it in these terms. For a man does not give assent in the ultimate analysis to abstract norms and concepts but rather to that present or future reality found in his own [224] history as the basis of his existence, in which the enduring dialectic between action and powerless suffering is finally reconciled in death. But this is only possible if the dialectic at the root of human existence is resolved through being attributed to the one who is himself the ultimate ground of this duality.

Finally we should mention the demand for hope in the future. A man has hopes and plans and at the same time projects himself into the unforeseeable which lies ahead. In so doing he moves towards his own future. In this process he is continually striving to overcome the inner and outer self-alienation and to lessen the gap between what he is and what he wishes and ought to become. Does this absolute reconciliation, both individual and collective, remain a distant goal, ever approached but never reached, or can it be achieved as the absolute future, without its achievement destroying the finite and being swallowed up in the absolute being of
God? If the absolute future of God is really our own future, does the reconciliation still lie ahead of us as a final goal, or does it already belong to history, so that history even now embodies the definitive pledge of the goal and, though still incomplete, is moving within its final purpose? The man with authentic hope must hope that the reality of history gives an affirmative answer to the second alternative in each question. This hope offers a Christian an insight into that which faith in the incarnation and resurrection of Jesus, understood as the definitive beginning of the coming of God, professes to be the absolute future of the world and of history.