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CHRISTIAN DYING

I. PROLIXITAS MORTIS

1. Introductory Preliminary Remarks

Reflections on Christian dying are prior to eschatology properly speaking, although they are on its borderline. This means on the one hand that theological reflection on dying must refer to those phenomena of human life which are not really part of man's definitive mode of existence in his consummation, but belong to the life of history in the present world and to a freedom not yet fulfilled, and can consequently be experienced in principle in the way in which human experience, enlightened by revelation, is related to other factors of human life and its history of freedom. But on the other hand, despite all experience of dying, we can speak appropriately of Christian dying in the light of the event of death and the dawn of eternal life only by looking to death itself as such and to the permanence of the eschatological consummation which it involves. The experience of dying can thus always be lived and understood in a Christian way only in the light of the knowledge of faith in regard to the condition of being dead and to the final consummation. How these two elements of dying can be coordinated with each other in a Christian death and what hermeneutical principles result from this mutual relationship are questions which would have to be discussed at the beginning of eschatology properly speaking. In this reflection then death will be discussed as the advent of consummation only insofar as this is indispensable for the understanding of Christian [227] dying. If and insofar as we must say of Christian death substantially what is usually said about death in dogmatic theology, this is unavoidable from the nature of the case and creates no special difficulties, as long as it takes into account a preliminary glance at general and individual eschatology. But the fact remains that our theme here properly speaking is Christian dying. And to that extent it is possible to discuss here particular themes which are not usually discussed in a dogmatic theology of death.

For a great variety of reasons arising from the nature of the case and from traditional habits the theme of *dying and death* is never treated completely and comprehensively at any one point in a Christian dogmatic theology, even though this as such would not be impossible, if it is appropriate to conceive a Christian doctrine of faith as an 'anthropology' of salvation history in the comprehensive sense of the term and thus perhaps to concentrate all the themes related to dying and death at one point. However that may be, it is possible to find in different parts of this dogmatic theology important statements on dying and death which must be presupposed here and cannot really be repeated in all their breadth and depth. We may refer particularly to the treatise on man as sinner and to the treatise on the cross, dying, death, and descent of Christ into the underworld, in these two treatises especially, what is essential about dying and death is said, since both are understood in a Christian sense only if they are seen and realized as both the manifestation of the sin of the world and of the sinful condition even of the Christian and also a dying with the redeeming death of Christ. This means that on the one hand not everything mentioned in these two treatises can be entirely omitted here, but on the other hand these things may and must be repeated only in a kind of formal abstractness referring back to their full content in the original treatises. But conversely a number of things must be discussed in regard to the theme of dying and death which could certainly find a

place in other parts of a dogmatic theology. For, fundamentally, there is no element of a Christian anthropology which, if it is really to be understood in a Christian sense, need not be confronted with the doctrine of death in a Christian understanding, whether this happens or is overlooked in a traditional theology. The orientation of human existence as a whole to death is in reality, as a co-determining factor, part of any treatise on a dimension of human existence, of a theology of mind and knowledge, [228] of a theology of freedom of a theology of human fellowship and love, of a Christian description of the basic realizations of human existence (fear, hope, joy, despair, trust, etc.), and so on, since this 'being for death' co-determines everything in human life and imparts to the latter its uncertainty, its openness to mystery and its ultimate seriousness. This more or less transcendental occurrence of death in the totality of human life, the whole of anthropology as theology of death, can of course be put forward here only in a very rudimentary fashion and in a somewhat arbitrary selection. Otherwise the whole of dogmatic theology would have to be repeated here.

2. Fundamental Option and Clinical Death

The point of the theme of Christian dying to be discussed here would be missed from the very outset if death were seen only in the generally accepted sense, as consisting in those biological and medical occurrences which directly and immediately closely in time lead to death, to being dead. Specifically, Christian dying (insofar as it is supposed to be not sheer suffering, but a Christian deed in freedom) cannot simply and certainly be located in the last hours of a human being, since as human and Christian he may perhaps be no longer capable of such an act of dying and yet the latter may not simply happen (even though this act may be conceived under certain conditions as produced without much reflection and 'anonymously', depending on the individual's disposability even within the history of his freedom). For this reason dying must be recognized as an event that is taking place throughout the whole of life, even though at all times with varying intensity and with a fresh application of the freedom that accepts death in life or protests against it. This *prolixitas mortis* (as Gregory the Great describes it) must be borne in mind. In this connection we must at once issue a warning against a possible misunderstanding: we should not ascribe to death as an event corning at the *end* of life and only there peculiarities (apart from those to be mentioned later) which we deny in principle to other moments of time within the life of a human being.

At the moment (immediately before or in or 'after') of death everything possible can 'happen' that we regard as conceivable, that we [229] may presume, for which we can appeal to accounts given to us by those who have endured more or less the agony of dying and nevertheless escaped. But in principle to ascribe to the moment of medical decease a theological significance that cannot belong to any moment in the rest of life, to assert that in the moment of clinical death and only at that point there occurs man's real and comprehensive act of freedom in the total disposal of his existence for or against God, since this passing alone offers an adequate situation and opportunity for it: this is an assertion which is not probable in the light of empirical psychology and biology,[1] can be supported

[1] Medical and psychological scrutiny of dying people and those who have been 'rescued' after 'death' from heart failure may yield interesting factual conclusions. These facts permit us to hope that in very many cases of a slow passing there occurs a phase in which the individual's physical condition makes his personal surrender to his destiny of death easier and consequently that the basic act of the history of human freedom is possible also at the time of clinical death. But this in no way alters the fact that there is no return to the present life after a real death (from the very nature of actual death as the definitive end of the history of freedom) and that all accounts of dying are accounts of experiences before death and that there is no guarantee that what sometimes happens on these occasions must always happen.

only with the aid of ideas savouring of mythology, and which theologically is neither probable nor necessary. If and insofar as the total disposal of freedom in regard to our own existence before God (for or against him) has to be understood as localized at all as such at a definite point or at definite points in time, although in our reflection we can never or (apart from a mystical 'confirmation in grace', traditionally accepted in mystical theology as possible, even though considerable misgiving must be expressed in this connection because of man's continuing and always threatened history of freedom) rarely determine with certainty where exactly such a moment lies within the temporal course of our life's history; that moment need not in any case simply coincide with the moment of clinical death, since, as we said, empirically this is extremely unlikely in the majority of cases and theologically in no way necessary. It is the same even if we take an optimistic [230] view of salvation for as many as possible or for all human beings (and this is the hidden motivation for this false hypothesis) and assume that they are saved despite the empirical appearance of their sinful life. For on the one hand our general thesis to the contrary does not exclude the possibility in individual cases of a more or less exact coincidence in time of the final basic option for God and clinical death, and on the other hand it is possible to think of a sufficient number of other ways of an explicit or of an unthematic character in which this fundamental option could occur within the course of life. The assumption behind this understanding of a totally free decision for or against God that does not need to happen mysteriously at the very moment of physical death (as, for example, Ladislaus Boros seems to think) lies in the fact that we understand and take seriously the *prolixitas mortis* in life itself as the permanent and inescapable even though unthematic confrontation of freedom with death in the whole course of its history.

3. Experiences of Oncoming Death

We are not yet going to provide the ultimate existential-ontological and theological justification of this idea of *prolixitas mortis* throughout the whole of life in the light of the nature of human freedom. (This will be attempted in section 2 of the second part of this chapter.) At this point it is a question only of straightforward indications of various experiences which herald the coming of death and do so from very different aspects.

(*a*) There is something like an experience of death even when there is no question of suffering and sickness in the proper and ordinary sense of the terms. The transcendental constitution of man, who in all his mental achievements of knowledge, freedom, production and in all other intellectual-personal achievements aims at a particular categorial object and at the same time (even though generally only unthematically) surpasses it, produces to a continually increasing extent the experience of the finiteness of his milieu and environment and thus, too, of himself and consequently that 'disappointment' as a basic mood of our existence which the Preacher in the Old Testament described in radical terms at an early stage. This very experience itself is a presence of death in which all the 'disappointing' [231] individual realities of life perish and thus the finiteness of the subject itself becomes a matter of radical experience. Here there is an experience of dying inwardly that is not an individual occurrence here and there in the course of life, but a basic mood permeating all things,

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The question whether individuals have been 'raised from the dead' in the sense that they really died and yet returned to this earthly life (Lazarus, etc.) is one that cannot be examined here. It would be impossible to clarify the many preliminary questions. Certainly those who were resuscitated in this way had not died in a theological sense of death as the finality of a personal life's decision. But it is impossible to explain here what this 'not dying' means in the concrete, not even on the assumption that the stories of raising from the dead in Scripture and in the lives of the saints can claim historical validity.

whether the latter is accepted in freedom and resolution or not.

(*b*) This basic mood makes itself felt as warning and herald of death whenever suffering, failure, and the like are experienced, as something that even an average, everyday consciousness regards as what ought not to be. All this (which need not be presented here in detail in its thousand shapes) is every time a partial death, no matter what attitude a person takes toward it. Something perishes that the person judges to be possible, realizable, and desirable, and yet he is deprived of it. Hence the theodicy relevant to suffering in the world, possible only in the hope inspired by faith, is an element in the theodicy of death, and vice versa. At the same time we should be under no illusion that bravery, rationality, and so on could *so* remold and transform all these disappointing experiences, that the 'maturity' of a person could be so effective and assured and thus the success of 'heroically' coping with death could be established. Consequently there will be no attempt at this point to produce (once again) a theodicy of death in terms only of an unconditional surrender of man to the incomprehensibility of God in what in the last resort is a self-evident hope; it would in fact be nothing but the understanding of faith, hope, and love in regard to God's incomprehensibility in face of death, before which alone the meaning of these basic Christian achievements can be made radically clear. This is true then also of that *prolixitas mortis* which consists in suffering of every kind in individual and social life.

(*c*) This infiltration of death is felt most clearly in real (that is, dangerous) illness, for it is the danger of biological death as directly perceptible. That is why in the Old Testament also death through sickness as distinct from a smooth fading out of life at an advanced age was regarded as particularly hard and problematical and liberation from sickness as a special mark of God's favour. Even apart from all the discoveries of modern psychosomatic medicine, sickness is distinguished as a total human phenomenon and not merely as a disturbance of man's biological dimension, because in the light of our very ordinary experience (even though not clearly verifiable [232] in every individual case) it threatens and reduces even man's intellectual and free subjectivity, diminishes or withdraws from man the possibility of reacting to it, so that this helplessness of the subject itself is an element in a really human and not merely biological sense. But in this way and not as a purely biological disturbance sickness points and tends toward that endpoint of life in which man as a whole is deprived of himself and his sovereignty, and which we call death. The experience of a sickness rendering the whole person helpless up to a point itself shows that human death is not to be identified simply with clinical death understood in terms of natural science with its immediate causes. By its individual peculiarities also sickness proves to be as such preeminently *prolixitas mortis*. The impossibility of completely foreseeing and manipulating sickness; the helplessness into which it thrusts us; the special, remote relationship to society into which it forces us; the solitude and the curtailment of possibilities of communication; the weakening of the capacity for active self-direction; the permanent uncertainty of any interpretation of its 'sense' and its causes within the total structure of a human life; the burden it imposes on the people around the sick person; the withdrawal from an efficiency-oriented society; the sick person's experience of being useless to others; the impossibility of integrating sickness meaningfully into a plan of life, and many other peculiarities of sickness make it a herald of death.

4. Memento mori

In the light of this constant presence of death in the whole course of life Christian wisdom has always been aware of a *memento mori*. If and insofar as dying and death amount not only to a purely passively endured happening at the end of life, but also to an active deed of man

(as will be explained more precisely in the second part of this chapter) and if this act, as we said, cannot be located simply at the moment of the advent of death in the medical sense, then for the Christian, coming death cannot be something which does not concern him 'for the time being', something that he might now suppress as much as possible. Within life he has to live with death. This happens primarily and fundamentally through all those accomplishments of freedom in which a person accepts with resignation the [233] finiteness of his milieu and environment and of himself in hope of the incomprehensible and thus abandons the attempt to regard as absolute anything that can be experienced in itself; this sort of thing happens also when someone simply accepts as unanswerable the question of his ultimate identity and his relationship to God as sinner and (as he hopes) justified before God. This ultimate acquiescence, too, is an anticipation of that 'night in which no man can work'. But, in addition to these basic, even though unthematic realizations of a *memento mori*, in Christian life and in the life of the Church there is rightly an explicit remembrance of the prospect of death. There is no need to describe here in detail these ways of keeping death in mind, of explicit preparation for death, of organizing life with an eye on death, etc. Despite their derivative character, they are of great importance, since in the light of man's nature the reflex thematicizing and practising of basic realizations, which, whether accepted or rejected, are in any case inescapably present in human life, is of great importance for the very reason that it renders more secure retrospectively the true and radical acceptance of these basic realizations by fundamental freedom and because man is bound in principle (of course, only insofar as it is possible) to make these things secure.

5. *Styles of Dying*

In the history of the Christian life and also in the history of the life of mankind as a whole there can be found obviously varying styles of dying. The method and custom of a particular society presents to its individual members a definite style of dying, to be preferred as right and proper, at least for the 'normal' case. In Christendom, too, there are such 'rules for dying' and they have not always simply remained the same. In particular a certain style of dying was expected from those holding important positions in the Church, a style in which their rank, their responsibility for others, their Christian faith, could be presented as an example. Formerly, a Christian died within his family circle, said goodbye there, blessed them, had a few last words to say, asserted his orthodox faith and his Christian hope, etc. It is very different today, when, as a result of thrusting the sick into the impersonal atmosphere of public hospitals, dying has largely become [234] styleless. This may be deplorable and need not simply be accepted as inevitable; but it is part of that lack of style (that is, shapelessness) which we accept as belonging to death and thus also to dying, which in the last resort is beyond our control. The individual styles of dying possible to a Christian and up to a point being successively eliminated in the course of history need not be described here in detail. Their alteration and the continually changing concrete circumstances of dying, which determine this style on each occasion, are also part of that radical uncontrollability that is proper to death. Thus all that remains to be noted here in theological terms – as distinct from those of a (perhaps ecclesial) cultural history of dying – is that the Christian is bound to the Christian Church's style of dying in the 'normal case', that is, when the concrete possibilities are available and can be realized without recourse to extraordinary measures, insofar as he is 'bound' to die in an explicitly Christian way. Concretely, this means that he is expected to receive the 'last sacraments'. An attitude of this kind, in which there is also realized an indispensable readiness to accept death, is present (to put it circumspectly) according to general Christian feeling also when the dying person can regard himself as being at peace

with God, as justified, and thus the 'last sacraments' are not for him the obligatory mode of sacramental reconciliation with God and the Church. The exact form of this obligation to an ecclesial 'style of dying' can be examined in a work of moral theology.

6. Advent of Death

The question of the advent of death, that is, the criteria according to which a person is already dead or is still living although unconscious, is in itself primarily a question of a natural empirical anthropology. But it has theological consequences for the Church's practice: for example, for the decision as to whether a Christian can still be given the anointing of the sick. Since and insofar as death in a theological sense is the end of an historically personal life in freedom, it can be said today that death has come at the point where the functions of the brain as the foundation of this life have irreparably ceased, no matter whether other 'organs' of the person continue to 'live' or not.

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II. DYING SEEN IN THE LIGHT OF DEATH

1. Official Statements of the Church

We come at once to the official statements of the Church on death. The reason for this is simply that the Christian tradition on death cannot really be set out in all its fullness at a later stage, so that it is possible only to put forward the essentials of this tradition in a certain formal abstractness.

(*a*) What strikes us first all in these official statements is that not all aspects of death or, consequently, of dying find adequate expression in this teaching. Of course Jesus' death as the crucial salvation event is frequently mentioned, but at the same time the real nature of this death is not clearly considered nor is there any attempt to deduce from it statements of the magisterium about human death as such. It is also shown there that death is the consequence, the 'penalty', of original sin, but its positive significance for salvation is scarcely given clear expression in the statements of the magisterium. In addition to this hamartiological aspect of death, little more is stressed than the fact that 'all' human beings must 'die' and with death the mental-personal history of man passes directly into the definitive permanence of the subject and its history before God; in other words, the idea of a migration of souls, of reincarnation, etc., is incompatible with a Christian understanding of man and his death. In view of these gaps in the teaching of the magisterium on death, it is not very important how we are to arrange these somewhat amorphous statements. Some observations on the meaning and limits of these statements of the magisterium are here directly linked with the presentation of this teaching.

(*b*) Death is seen as penalty (*poena*) of original sin (DS 146, 222, 231, 372, 1511-1512, 1521, 2617). This teaching need not be described here in detail. It is sufficient to refer to the treatise on sin. Insofar as 'original sin' as compared with grave personal sin can be called 'sin' only analogously, can certainly be understood as an historical and universal condition of man's freedom and must be regarded as an element in the 'sin of the world' (while, admittedly, the lack of grace resulting from sin must be seen as part of this situation in the sense that there would be this lack of grace from the [236] dawn of history if it had not been surpassed by the redemption of Christ), death, too, is a penalty only in an analogous sense, a penalty really surpassed by the death of Christ and thus turned as such into a redemptive

event. The *relativity* of the hamartiological interpretation of death (insofar as it comes from 'Adam') is not explicitly brought out in the texts of the magisterium on death as penalty for sin, but it may be assumed as implicit in them if the other statements of Scripture and tradition on the positive meaning of the death of Christ (and of Mary) and on death as dying with Christ (cf. DS 72, 485, 3901) are given their full force. Neither is this 'penalty' to be understood as an additional element, as God's reaction attached as it were to sin extrinsically, but as a consequence of the intrinsic nature of sin itself. Nor can the penal character of death consist in the appointed ending of man's history of freedom *as such*. For it is part of the nature of a creaturely history of freedom to reach a definitive consummation in a unity of restraint and freedom, a consummation which might as such also be called 'death' and which is prior to the distinction between guilt and innocence. It will be explained at a later stage what exactly is the element that enters into this 'death' in the concrete history of man and makes this 'death' into death in the traditional sense as penalty for sin (as understood in the doctrine of original sin). Then it must also be seen how the character of death as penalty for sin can be compatible with the teaching against Baius and others (DS 1955, 1978, 2617) that death is a 'natural' characteristic of man.

(*c*) With death comes the *finality of man's basic option*, which permeates his history and in which he disposes of himself in confrontation with God, set before him by world and history (DS 410, 839, 858, 926, 1002, 1306, 1488).[2] With this official teaching of the Church, which, with certain qualifications still to be indicated, must be understood as the teaching of faith, a number of theories are rejected as incompatible with the Christian understanding of man and the seriousness of a unique history. These include the theory of an apocatastasis (at least and certainly also merely as a firm, theoretical statement, as distinct from a hope, that respects God's sovereign and unknown disposition and the openness of every history of [237] freedom known to us)[3] or the theory of a migration of souls (metempsychosis, reincarnation). From both aspects however it can be said with some caution that this doctrine of the uniqueness and permanent validity of every personal history secured by death is certainly true when such a history of freedom has actually occurred. Every human being and Christian has to admit that in his own life he must allow concretely for such an absolute and definitive history of freedom has actually occurred. Every human being and Christian has to admit that in his own life he must allow concretely for such an absolute and definitive history of freedom and can never discard the burden of such a responsibility, that he must presume such a history of freedom in every other human being when he encounters rational life in freedom in the course of his secular experience. But, despite the declaration of the Fifth Lateran Council (DS 1440, cf. 2766, 3771, 3998) and the ordinary understanding of faith in the Church, it can be said that in the last resort we do not know how or whether this doctrine of the always unique history of freedom passing through death into finality is to be applied to those who die *before* the moment at which, on the basis of ordinary experience, we would be inclined to ascribe to them an actual decision of freedom in the radical sense; nor do we know whether in fact everyone who is 'adult' in the sense generally understood really makes *that* decision of freedom of which the official teaching of the Church says that it is raised by death into finality. From the Christian standpoint, all that we can really say must be about the 'normal case' of humans and Christian life, we must take this seriously on each occasion for ourselves, read official teachings of the Church which seem to go beyond this normal case

[2] Cf. also *Collectio Lacensis* VII, 567; Pius XII: AAS 47 (1955) 64-65.

[3] At the same time of course we are disregarding our profession of faith on the eternal redeemed state of Christ and of Mary and the teaching of theologians that the saints solemnly canonized by the Church have certainly gained eternal happiness. But it must be remembered that the good news of salvation and of God's victorious salvific will certainly does not permit us unconditionally to expect that the possibilities of life on the one hand and of death on the other form part of the content of the Christian message in precisely the same way.

more or less as broad, general statements, not intended in the last resort to express anything purely and simply about marginal, if very numerous, cases; for the rest, we must admit an ignorance which in the last resort is obvious from the nature of the case.

[238] The Church's official teaching says nothing about whether death as biological demise (understood of course within the totality of the one person) implies as such the finality of personal history or whether the coincidence of biological death and the end of personal history arises simply from an independent decree of God, who could also have decreed otherwise without destroying the unity of man's body-soul nature. This question has been disputed in theology up to the present time. But, as will be repeated later, it will be appropriate to opt, with Aquinas, for the first alternative and also read the official statements of the Church in the light of this assumption.

(*d*) The Church's official statements on death include also its *universality* (DS 1512), which extends as widely as the universality of original sin. In view of the literary genre of these ancient narratives, the old question as to whether Enoch and Elijah were exempted by a special privilege from this universal law has ceased to be relevant today. The same certainly holds for the question of whether, according to Scripture and tradition, those human beings whom we think of as existing at the end of the whole course of history will die or enter 'alive' into the consummation of history. In any case they will experience 'death' in the sense that it is the consummation decreed by God of their history of freedom. And, beyond this, there is no more to be said except that all, living or dead, come in the end to the consummating immediacy of God in judgment. Insofar as Paul, too, speaks in the light of the hypothesis of his eschatological imagination (1 Cor. 15:51), it is impossible to deduce from his work any dogmatic decision on this question.

2. Death as Close of the History of Freedom in the Presence of the Pardoning God

(*a*) The doctrine of Sheol, as found at least in the older strata of the Old Testament, speaks of a shadowy continued existence of the dead. But if in the first place we read these texts 'literally' (which is not the same as 'correctly') they suggest that these dead are remote after death from God, deprived of his power and care, of no account. But if this doctrine is not to create great difficulties for us in regard to the inerrancy of the inspired Scripture of the Old Testament, this imagery must actually be an expression of the devout person's conviction [239] in Old Testament times that with death an absolute definitiveness and a real end is reached. Despite its vivid imagery, the doctrine of Sheol does not really provide a view of a world beyond death, is not meant to indicate the substance of a 'hereafter' as such, but refers purely and simply to death as such, in order to see it in the radicalness in which death brings to an end the life of man as one and whole. If the later parts of the Old Testament (in the doctrine of the resurrection and in a differentiation of the lot of individuals hereafter according to moral standards) and the New Testament (in developing further belief in the resurrection of the just and in view of Jesus' resurrection and the indissoluble union of the believer with the Lord) offer the dying person a hope, this hope, arising from the basic experience of the Old Testament of the radicalness of death, cannot consist in the fact that the dying person is promised a 'further' life that on the one hand might be understood as 'living on' with different means but in the last resort in the same style, and that on the other hand would be bound to raise the question of why in this further life there might not be new moral decisions, conversion, etc. Only on the ground of the radicalness with which the earlier strata of the Old Testament bring the life of the whole person to an end at death can the later hope of an eternal life hereafter be rightly understood.

This life is not a continuation of earthly life; on the contrary, it is only by this afterlife that

the impossibility becomes clear of escaping the radical importance and the inalienable seriousness of the responsibility of freedom even by a flight into the void, since this eternal life is nothing but the finality (as redemption or perdition) of this earthly life and its subject possessing it in freedom. If we think in terms of biblical theology and at the same time evaluate positively the Old Testament's radical experience of death and yet (in the same light however) go on to the New Testament hope, it cannot be a question of the conception of an immaterial intellectual subject surviving and 'going on' as soul after the biological death of the body, but of seeing the one human being radically affected by death and nevertheless inescapably burdened and hoping with an absolute responsibility of freedom. That is not to say that a positive appreciation of a Platonic theory of the 'immortality' of the spiritual soul is not at all possible, particularly since even the Western Christian tradition understands the fundamental definition of man within the [240] scheme of a distinction between body and soul and death accordingly as separation of body and soul (cf. DS 991, *animae separatae*; and DS 1000, *ante resumptionem suorum corporum*, etc.).

From the original starting point of Scripture, however, it is understandable that the one fate of the one human being should be seen as a resurrection of the dead, a resurrection that does not come subsequently as the lot of the body as additional to that of the soul; that the doctrine of the judgment (in the last resort impossible to systematize) sometimes places that judgment as an event occurring at the death of the individual and sometimes as what happens for all at the same time at the end of world history. If all this is considered without tacitly assuming a positivistic understanding of revelation, then it must be said that for the theology of Scripture death sets an essential internal limit as a *consummation of freedom* from within and not merely an end of the history of moral freedom assigned arbitrarily by God 'on the occasion' of biological death. Otherwise the ancient doctrine of Sheol could have no *positive* meaning for us, but would raise the unanswerable question as to why it had not been simply erroneous even in its earlier form. The later teaching in the Old Testament and particularly in the New on an eternal life of a positive character could not be understood as a radicalization of what was really meant by the doctrine of Sheol, but would be merely additional, leaving it still obscure why a supplementary teaching had not developed only out of the experience of Jesus' resurrection, but had also been present at an earlier stage. If it were to be said here that this teaching had developed out of the conviction of Yahweh's irrevocable fidelity to the people of the covenant and from the feeling that a history leading pointlessly to breakdowns must have a meaning in the sight of this God of fidelity, this would be merely another way of saying what had hitherto been meant: there is only this one earthly history, which is ended by death as its internal limit, and this history has an irremoveable finality and permanency before God.

It is from this standpoint alone that the fundamental meaning of particular texts, especially of the New Testament, is really to be appreciated. The final sentence of the judge of the world with its irrevocable consequences is related to man's deeds accomplished in his earthly life and to nothing else (Matt. 25:34-46, etc.). The time of earthly life is the day that is followed by the night when no one can [241] work (John 9:4). We must work 'in the body', 'while we have the chance', and this alone is the standard of the final judgment (Gal. 6:10; 2 Cor. 5:10; Rev. 2:10). The free sovereignty of God frequently stressed by Scripture, with which he decides on the death of a person, need not mean that the restriction of the opportunity of merit is based on a divine decree external and additional to the nature of death, but is assured simply by the fact that man's death as such by its very nature has in itself a passive, incalculable element not completely at man's disposal.

If we disregard the always sparse remaining supporters of an apocatastasis doctrine from Origen onward or interpret this doctrine as the expression of a universal *hope* impossible to work out in theory and consequently permissible, then it can certainly be said that the

Christian sense of faith was always and unambiguously sure that death is the end of the history of human freedom, in which that history is raised up into an enduring finality. As we said, it remained and still remains a matter of dispute in this Christian tradition whether the finality of history arises from the nature of death as a biological event (affecting however the totality of man) or whether this death and the end of personal history are linked with each other by a supplementary decree of God. It has also been said that the first alternative is accepted here, because otherwise it is quite impossible in the last resort to see that this connection can be revealed or how it can be revealed. (If someone wanted to say that this link, despite the lack of an essential connection between death and the end of the history of Jesus, arose with his death as *such* and consequently this link had to be accepted also with all other human beings, then it must be recalled that the actual experience of Jesus' resurrection – however much it must be understood as something new and fundamental – is also and indissolubly associated with the belief in a future resurrection of the just: a conviction existing even before Jesus' time, which must have been formed legitimately, and, as indicated above, could have emerged only on the assumption of an essential connection between death and the end of history, even though Scripture never explicitly considers the reasons for this connection.)

(*b*) The understanding of death as the elevation of the history of freedom into its finality must take into account three factors simultaneously: the intrinsic nature of freedom; the unity of the self-realization of the corporeal-historical and spiritual-personal human being; [242] the precise nature of the consummation which is made possible for freedom and required of it. As a result at least of the third factor, the doctrine with which we are concerned here belongs properly to the field of the mysteries of faith and is not merely part of a philosophical anthropology. If the doctrine in question here is derived from these three factors, that is not to deny that a clear and certain understanding of the factors can equally well be conceived up to a point in the light of the conviction of this doctrine, of a conviction attained unthematically but firmly rooted in life. In its fundamental nature freedom is not the ability to do or to omit one thing or another of a categorial nature, but the basic condition of the subject in its transcendentality, in which it disposes of *itself* for finality.

Freedom thus opens up history, but this history is by no means the opportunity of being able permanently to go on into the void, to be occupied with what is irrelevant (since it is always open to revision), but is precisely the opportunity of establishing something really definitive. The inalienable responsibility imposed on the subject in its freedom, which alone makes the subject what it is as such, would not exist if the self-disposal of the subject could at any time be revised, so that each particular decision would become irrelevant since it could always be revised and replaced by another; the subject could always relieve itself of itself and its freedom, continuing into a future of empty opportunity. Freedom would possess an infinite potential which would make it, not more significant, but irrelevant in everything it really brought about. The fundamental nature of freedom is therefore the opportunity of a 'once and for all' disposal by the subject of itself, a definitive self-disposal. This uniqueness of a self-disposal, which aims at being definitive and irrevocable, in man of course has a temporal extension and dispersal throughout the multiplicity of single moments that make up the corporeally historical life of man. The uniqueness of this free self-disposal is not something lying behind man's spatio-temporal life, the latter being merely the ultimately superfluous projection of a fundamental option, timeless in itself, on the part of the subject of freedom on to the conveyor belt of time; this uniqueness occurs within time itself, but is not annulled by the multiplicity of the individual moments of time. For this very reason however the uniqueness of the one total self-disposal by the subject of freedom of itself as one and whole cannot be regarded as bypassing spatio-temporal historical life, it is pointless [243] to think of this corporeal history of freedom as continued beyond death as the end of man's historical

corporality; otherwise this self-disposal of man would be placed from the very outset and always somewhere outside his spatio-temporal history, but in such a way that this history itself would be understood as no more than an appearance spread around true freedom and concealing it. If the history of freedom continues in death after the end of corporeal history, then history properly so-called was never actually present as such in this spatio-temporal life. But a person who is down-to-earth and Christian is aware of only one history, which is true history of freedom before God and thus possesses unfathomable depth and absolute radicalness, but occurs in the course of the ordinary routine of life.

If we introduce into this context the third factor mentioned above, this both renders more acute and clarifies the problems involved in the conviction that man achieves the uniqueness of a final self-disposal in an earthly history spread over space and time and only there. If this self-determination decides on an ultimate and definitive relationship to God, who makes himself in his most intimate reality and in immediacy the ultimate content of this history of freedom and thus in particular of the finality of this history, this certainly imposes an enormous and ultimately incomprehensible burden on the problem of this unique history of freedom of a spatio-temporal subject of freedom. How can a subject of this kind, with the creaturely finiteness of his freedom and in the poverty of his spatio-temporal history, really and definitively and once and for all decide for or against this infinity of his real life, which is purely and simply God himself? But if we regard this as possible and as Christians *must* so regard it, this possibility also provides some relief to the problem with which we are concerned. A preexistence or migration of souls, the disclosure of opportunities of freedom that lie before or after or behind this corporeal history of ours, even apart from the fact that they are not comprehensible in the light of sober experience, provide no help toward a solution of the actual problems involved here. If it is a question of a decision of freedom, involving radically the infinity and permanent incomprehensibility of God in himself, then this opportunity is not made any easier to understand if we say that man can cope with it if he has a few more opportunities of freedom available to him behind, before, or after his earthly life.

[243] The theory of a migration of souls can be attractive only if we have in mind the particular categorial contents purely of moral life: then the impression may be given that man needs more and better material on which to achieve his moral decisions than he is granted in the course of a short and miserable life. But if we consider the nature of freedom as the one self-disposal into immediacy before the incomprehensible infinity of God, an increase (that always remains finite) of the historical material provided is no answer to the basic question presented by the nature of freedom as self-disposal toward God. Even additional material always remains incommensurable with this basic nature of freedom. If we wanted to avoid this incomprehensibility of a decision for or against God as such, produced by a finite material, then no idea of a migration of souls or anything of that kind would help; all that would remain would be the possibility of a never completed realization of freedom and the denial of the Christian teaching that freedom can really have something to do with God pure and simple. But *such* a freedom would contradict the basic Christian sense that, at least by grace, we have to do with God himself and in the last resort would become irrelevant and irresponsible, since it could only continually choose options open to improvement. What has been said does not of course decide the question touched on above, whether there are not phenomena of human life that do not in fact involve any history of freedom in a Christian sense (ending of life at an embryonic stage, biological life that never comes to ‘the use of reason’, etc.) and whether in such a case the attainment of an eternal consummation must or can be conceived.

(*c*) The history of freedom of the subject’s decision in regard to itself in its relationship to God as self-communicating grace, ending with biological death, is *in a dialectical*

relationship to man's disposability which finds its radical manifestation in death. Only in the dialectic between freedom and disposability, completely radicalized in death and in such a way that the concreteness of this dialectic is still absolutely hidden from man, is the real nature of 'infralapsarian' death present, that makes it possible for death in this hidden dialectic (beyond our understanding) to be the manifestation of sin and redemption and liberation. As present in knowledge, human freedom has an infinite horizon, particularly since on the one hand in the concrete order of salvation this freedom has to do with God himself [245] in immediacy and on the other hand this freedom is not related solely to those finite realities which it can produce or achieve in a popular sense, but at least in the form of free renunciation or unselfish recognition can be related to everything. But this infinite freedom is nevertheless finite in its concrete realization; it is faced from the outset by certain finite preconditions and restrictions of its possibility; it always has its own place. But if freedom properly so-called is not placed behind or before or after its encounter with the concrete realities which draw this freedom to themselves, then it must be said that, although it is related to the infinite God as such, this freedom retains in itself as realized the finite categorial constituents which draw it to themselves and thus always remains finite and controlled freedom. Only in this way can the consummation of freedom be the permanent finality of man's history. Over and above this, freedom is aware of being finite and under control, since it is aware of itself as set up, as initiated by an infinity which is not itself, just as the boundless transcendentality of man's knowledge does not make the latter an absolute subject, but makes him aware of his beginning as appointed by absolute being and thus of his createdness.

This disposability of finite freedom, both by its nature and also in virtue of the material of its environment and milieu drawing this freedom to itself, is experienced radically and irrepressibly in dying and death, no matter where precisely this radical experience (which must not necessarily occur at the very moment of clinical death) has possibly to be located in life. Wherever the experience is made as an act of freedom accepting its radical finiteness within the one and unique act of freedom of life, it reaches in dying and death its complete realization and manifestation. For at that point man is drawn away from himself and rendered powerless. Because he is deprived of everything of which he can dispose and the subject of freedom is withdrawn from itself, freedom is seen in the last resort as something granted and assigned. Insofar as freedom is aware of itself as finite as it is actually situated, man's radical disposability in death cannot be understood as something external to the one and unique act of freedom by which a person disposes of himself for finality; this disposability of man in death is in fact an *intrinsic* element of the one act of freedom consummated in death by which a person disposes of [246] himself before God. Death is both man's final self-determination *and* final, irrevocable disposability,[4] even if we try to appreciate better the active-passive finalization of man and his freedom by identifying the moment at which he is rendered utterly powerless with the point in time at which clinical death occurs, while assuming the man's free self-disposal of himself takes place at some other moment within the course of life. Even then the unity of the history of freedom, to which the factor of disposability is intrinsic, would keep together these two factors in the unity of a specifically human death. This unity is also involved particularly as a result of the fact that the absolutely proper 'object' of freedom is the very acceptance or rejection of this disposability, that is, of finite creatureliness, which enters into our experience precisely through the infinite horizon of freedom.

[4] It is no different with suicide, which has only the semblance of a self-disposal greater than that which is present in normal death. In this respect, too, freedom acts in the light of existing factualities, not determined by ourselves, and tends toward powerlessness. The theme of suicide, incidentally, must be left to moral theology, however much it needs to be considered as a whole by an anthropology and however often it is there made to seem too easy and too simple.

At the same time of course this passive disposability of man conceals the nature of freedom as self-disposal. In death it seems as it man no longer has anything on which self-disposal can be achieved as the means of its self-realization or as if all former results of his individual free acts as elements of the one and entire self-disposal had been annihilated. And conversely the act of freedom in the boundless range of its possibilities can always spread the impression of an absolute autonomy and conceal the disposability of freedom, so that eventually biological death would present itself as something that really does not touch the person properly speaking and his freedom. But since the appearance exists on both sides and all appearances are deceptive, since moreover in his fatal impotence man cannot break down this impression, nor can he judge or effect the dialectical relationship between absolute powerlessness and absolute deed from a higher standpoint, particularly also since (because of the impossibility of adequate reflection) the act of freedom as such cannot be judged in its concrete reality with certainty in the light of explicit knowledge: for all these reasons death has the character of hiddenness and of an insoluble question. No one knows [247] concretely what sort of death he will face. He must see it as the event of active finalization of the one act of freedom of his life; he experiences the same death as the height of his powerlessness; he knows that his freedom must accept this powerlessness while hoping to the very end; he cannot tell explicitly and with certainty where and how, in living or dying, the opportunity of such an acceptance by an act of freedom has been given to him in his powerlessness and whether he has actually accepted it. Insofar as this death involves the approach of God's incomprehensible mystery, embracing both the incomprehensibility of his nature and also that of his freedom in regard to man, the incomprehensibility of death becomes definitive in its hiddenness.

3. Death as Manifestation of Sin

(*a*) Attention has already been drawn to the texts of the Church's official teaching which speak of death as the penalty for original sin. But it was also pointed out that statements of the Church's magisterium nevertheless describe death as 'natural', as a consequence of man's natural essential constitution. As the teaching of the Church and of tradition is that in the first justification (at least as achieved in baptism) not only are original sin and personal sins remitted, but also all punishment due to sin, so the traditional theological formulation was that death for the justified person had the character only of a *poenalitas* and not of a *poena*, although and even because death comes also to those who are justified. In the first place the term *poenalitas* is one that conceals rather than illuminates the problem facing us. For it is not clear how the empirically existing factuality, at least apparently permanent for all (justified and sinners) can be at one time a punishment and at another merely a *poenalitas*. Nor does the explanation that the punishment due to original sin is turned by justification into a mere *poenalitas* bring out the positive importance for salvation of the death of the justified person, an importance that cannot be denied to this death as dying with Christ and in view of Jesus' salvific death.

As far as the first problem is concerned, it can of course be said that death can be a pure *poenalitas* also because it is itself natural and a consequence of man's natural being as a biological organism. [248] But then the question again arises as to how death can be conceived and experienced as punishment, if it is a natural essential consequence in human existence. Certainly in human life there are particular occurrences and injuries which are contrary to man's natural being and thus can be seen and experienced under certain conditions as 'punishment'. But if such a penal character is to be assigned to death as a *universal* natural phenomenon, this penal character and the experience of it cannot be seen as

related to man's natural being. But if something that ought not to be (without which punishment cannot be conceived) is present in death, this can be understood only as relative to the claims which man as a being committed to a supernatural goal and endowed with the offer of God's self-communication by grace rightly raises and simply cannot fail to raise. In order to understand the penal character of death, it must also be made clearer what there is in man that ought not to be (purely relative to his supernatural destiny, since the character of death as the consummation bringing to an end the history of freedom in deed and endurance evidently cannot be seen as something that ought not to be) but under any circumstances belongs to man's nature.

(*b*) The penal character attributed to death can therefore consist only in what was described as the *hiddenness of death*, insofar as this is or can be experienced as something that ought not to be, relative to man's supernatural elevation, at least as a retarding factor that must be overcome in the development of man's life under the influence of grace. In the first place it is at least not unthinkable that a history of freedom can clearly grasp, in the increasing radicalness of the fundamental option gradually integrating all plural elements of human existence, the success of this process of integration and thus the outcome of the history of freedom. This cannot be unthinkable, since man actually has at least partial experiences of this kind of maturing, of the growth of his 'identity', of at least a partial 'integrity' which overcomes (up to a point, at any rate) 'concupiscence' as the nonintegratedness of many of man's realities into his free fundamental option. From this standpoint in the first place it is at least not positively contrary to man's nature as subject of freedom, even though not completely attainable by his natural being, that in his history of freedom, which finds its consummation in the finality of his self-disposal (described in a metaphysical sense as 'death'), he [249] should experience the complete success of this process of integration, which means that the hiddenness of death ceases when it becomes an act of freedom by the endurance of a helpless passivity in which the subject and the outcome of his act of freedom are withdrawn and concealed from him in life. For there are styles of dying and death in which (at any rate, as it appears to us) a death in 'integrity' is attained at least asymptotically, where someone can die 'old and weary of life', where death is freely accepted in complete peace and final composure, in possession of the intrinsic results of a life brought to its fullness.

It should not be claimed that (apart from Jesus) such a death in pure integrity, where what is really meant by 'concupiscence' has been overcome, is ever fully realized. But it can be seen from such approximations that a 'death' in integrity without this hiddenness of death, depriving the subject of freedom of the clear and palpable outcome of a life, is not under all circumstances contrary to man's nature. If then the official teaching of the Church and the teaching of the New Testament explain death as 'payment' for sin and the experience of man (which can or must be seen as affected by grace) in which a protest is made against the darkness of death and its concealing powerlessness is regarded in this teaching as justified and 'encouraging', then it can easily be understood that the real punishment of sin consists in this hiddenness of death; it can be understood that this situation corresponds to man's natural being, but need not be present in human existence under the influence of grace, that this hiddenness of freedom in concupiscence and death would not have appeared if there had been grace at the beginning of the history of mankind and increasingly at the end, and consequently this hiddenness of death is seen in the light of this grace and the experience of it as something that ought not to be, as a punishment of sin.

(*c*) Contrary to a widely held opinion, it must now also be said expressly that death in its hiddenness is not merely an expression and manifestation of that remoteness of God which humanity brought on itself by sin at the beginning, in 'Adam'. Closer consideration of the New Testament statements on death (Rom. 1:32, 6:16, 21, 23; 7:5, 9, 10; 8:2; James 1:15;

similarly in John) shows that it is regarded there as also the *consequence of serious* (*unremitted*) *personal sins* and (as with original sin) as intrinsic, essential expression [250] and manifestation of these personal sins also in the total corporeal reality of man. Death then is the manifestation of the one 'sin of the world', beginning with 'original sin', built up from the sin of mankind as a whole, and manifested not only in the internal and external situation creating suffering for the individual or in the bad social conditions that can never be completely removed but also in concupiscent death, death as hiddenness.

With the principle that death is the expression and consequence also of personal sins the teaching of Paul can be connected without more ado, that there is a link between *death* and a *law of God* that is not under grace. If the law of God apart from the grace of Christ in fact (even though contrary to its own original and intrinsic intention) becomes the dynamism of sin (1 Cor. 15:56), it is understandable that mere law, by rousing man's sinful protest against itself, produces death as the consequence of this sin, not only death of the soul, but also death purely and simply, including also man's bodily ending in the peculiar form in which-we actually experience it, that is, in its hiddenness (2 Cor. 3:6; Rom. 7:5, 10, 13).

(*d*) In this connection attention must be drawn also to the link attested in Scripture and the Church's official teaching between *death resulting from sin and the devil* (Heb. 2:14; John 8:44; Wisd. 2:24; Gen. 3:13, 19; DS 1511). As death is the consequence of sin, so, too, it appears in Scripture as expression of the devil's sphere of power as ruler of the world. If and insofar as the 'sin of the world' is connected with the 'authorities and powers' that we sum up and interpret in the term 'devil' and that are part of the situation in which and in the light of which the sin of the world takes place, the relationship between sin that means death and the devil already exists in principle. To describe this relationship more closely would lead us into an angelology and a demonology that cannot be discussed here.

(*e*) Death is the most universal of all realities and everyone admits that it is natural and a matter of course for us to die. And yet in everyone there is a concealed protest at this end and an irresolvable horror of it. A metaphysical anthropology alone cannot explain this fact. If it recognizes that man as a spiritual being is 'immortal', that his death is 'natural' to a biological nature, and that by the very nature of freedom he cannot want merely to live on endlessly, it is really impossible to see why he is so afraid of death, unless that fear [251] is no more than the expression of frustration of a purely vital drive for self-assertion, the very thing that fades out at death: thus the problem of the fear of death is distorted.

At this point the testimony of Christianity comes in. Man rightly has *a fear of death*. For he was and is expected in the act of his life (carrying with it an element of passivity that admittedly can be integrated as such into his freedom) to raise up his history of freedom into finality and in this sense to 'die'; but he ought not to have to suffer this darkness of death, since even now he has within himself that vitality of divine life which, if it had been able to find pure expression from the beginning in this world of ours, would have outdone death from the outset. The fact that man dies and is not simply brought to fulfillment is the consequence of sin at the dawn of the history of humanity as a whole and of all those sins in which man makes the sin at the beginning and the situation it created his own. This consequence is not a punishment inflicted by God, breaking in upon man from outside, without having any intrinsic material connection with the punishable offence, even though of course death as suffering and as a rupture inflicted from outside, as the 'thief in the night' which it always is, is concretely under God's free decree and thus always carries with it the character of the intervention of a judgment of God. But what especially comes to the fore in death is sin.

Emptiness, hopelessness, surcease, insubstantiality, the indissoluble conjunction of supreme deed and sheer instinctive submission, of utter clarity and fundamental dubiousness: all these peculiarities of the death that we actually die are nothing but manifestations of sin,

to which the same peculiarities belong analogously in a higher and more hidden dimension of the subject of freedom. But since the creature belonging to God, by its very nature as elevated by grace, shrinks from the ultimate mystery of emptiness and helplessness and nothingness, from the mystery of wickedness, and since – holy or sinful – as long as it lives it is always driven also by the power of the divine life that calls it and is active within it, this creature feels a secret dread (not self-explanatory) of death as the rising to the surface of visible life of that which alone is death properly speaking. If it wanted really existentially to conceal this horror of death by simply interpreting it as a fact of life, whether by taking refuge in superficiality, [252] by taking refuge in despair or in a tragic heroism, then it really would turn this death into that aspect of it which rouses an unadmitted terror: the advent of eternal death.

4. Death as Dying with Jesus and as Event of Grace

(*a*) It was pointed out earlier that death as dying with Christ, so far as a person dies in grace and from it, does not find any clear expression in the Church's official teaching or in textbook theology. Textbook theology only says, with reference to the Council of Trent (DS 1515), that the death of the justified person is not really a punishment for sin, but only, like concupiscence, a mere consequence of sin, *poenalitas* and not *poena*, which God permits for the testing, purifying, and probation for the justified person, something to be wrestled with. We spoke about this at an earlier stage. But the New Testament has more to say about the death of the justified person. There is a 'dying in the Lord' (Rev. 14:13; 1 Thess. 4:16; 1 Cor. 15:18), a dying that is not really death, since anyone who lives and believes in Christ will never die (John 11:26), a dying with Christ that gives life (2 Tim. 2:11; Rom. 6:8). According to the New Testament, the acceptance in principle of the death of the death of Christ takes place of course by faith and baptism, so that dying with Christ and the gaining of new life even now secretly permeates our present life (Rom. 6:6, 11; 7:4-6; 8:2, 6-12, etc.).

Apart however from the fact that these statements of the New Testament assume that real death must be understood as an axiological factor permeating the whole of life and also as an act of freedom, if dying 'during' an earthly Christ-like life shaped by faith and the justification that comes from faith is not to be dissolved into an ethical-idealistic conception and to lose any connection with the reality of death, we must conclude from these very statements of the New Testament that for the justified person actual dying, too, determined of course by life, considered as the end-event, is a dying in Christ. But this means that death itself in the person endowed with grace is to be regarded as a salvific event, while of course this death must also be seen as an act of freedom recapitulating that person's life; it can then remain an open question at what point in time this act as such occurs in life, to what extent it coincides in time with the [253] biological cessation of life or is distinct from the latter. Those who die in faith are 'dead in Christ', not only because they lived their earthly life in Christ, but also because their dying itself was in Christ. If and insofar as death as an act of man is the event that gathers together the whole personal act of man's life into the one consummation, and if in 'death' there occurs 'pragmatically', as Eutyches said, what had occurred 'mystically' at the sacramental high points of Christian life in baptism and the eucharist (that is, assimilation to the Lord), then death must be regarded as the culmination of the work of salvation and its final acceptance.

(*b*) What has just been said refers only to a fact attested in Scripture, but it has not yet really been made clear how this *dying with Christ* in our death is to be conceived. This further question as such would best be answered by referring to the theology of Jesus' dying and death, since this death as a once and for all event was not only effective of 'objective'

redemption, but, in view of Jesus' consubstantiality with us as man in grace, it is also of the same nature as our death, and since Scripture says more and speaks more clearly about this dying of Jesus than about our own death as such. But at this point we cannot refer again expressly to Jesus' dying and death. All that can be done is to draw attention once more quite briefly to the fact that Jesus did not redeem us 'on the occasion' of his death in a moral achievement of obedience, love, etc., which would have had nothing to do with death as such, but that this redemption came about by the very fact that death as manifestation of sin, as the visibility of the emptiness and hopelessness of this sin, as domain of eternal darkness and God-forsakenness, was accepted in faith, hope, and love, and transformed in the midst of desolation and loneliness into the manifestation of the obedient surrender of the whole person to the incomprehensibility of the holy God. All this must always be kept in mind, if the dying of the justified person with Christ in grace is to be rightly understood.

(*c*) We are attempting therefore to gain an understanding of death as dying with Christ in the light of the *nature of grace*, while assuming always that this grace is the grace of Christ, which is given by him and for him and incorporates our life into his life and conforms us to him. We must then briefly recall what is the real nature of grace and then show that dying and death constitute a situation corresponding to its nature and excellent for the free realization of grace. [254] Grace consists fundamentally in God's self-communication to enable man in freedom by faith, hope, and love to accept the immediacy to God that is offered to him. Since and insofar as grace makes God purely and simply the immediate goal, content, and condition of the possibility of an immediate relationship to God, grace and its free acceptance always imply a self-abandonment, a self-transcendence above all finite realities (among which the human subject of freedom itself must primarily be counted) toward the incomprehensibility of God as blessed fulfillment, attainable only 'ecstatically'. In that sense, in every act sustained by grace toward God's immediacy there is an element of self-surrendering, 'renouncing', becoming free, which is also explained in Scripture by the assertion that faith, hope, and love 'remain' (1 Cor. 13:13), that is, they are also elements of the eschatological consummation, among which particularly in hope (but also in the vision of God's incomprehensibility and in love) the peculiar character of a self-abandoning getting away from self is plainly evident.

This character of a 'renunciation' does not of course remove the possibility of a blessed consummation, since man as creature (which he remains even in a supernatural consummation) finds himself only when he radically submits to God's disposal, seized and overpowered by God and not an autonomous subject; when, in other words, he summons up courage (again by God's act of grace), embracing and surrendering his whole existence to believe, hope, and love, that he finds himself only when he loses himself to God. But as long as freedom continues in the present world and this realization of its nature has not yet become blessed and obvious factuality, but still remains an overtaxing task which may not be accomplished, as long as freedom still coming to be is situational, there are undoubtedly situations in which the element of renunciation in every realization of grace becomes clearly present as task, manifestation, and import of this realization of grace. Certainly we may not adopt a more or less tragic attitude, assuming that grace and its realization are present only when and insofar as 'renunciation' (to the point of extinction) is imposed on man. This is contradicted by the fact that the bliss of eternal life is the supreme act of the grace of Christ, that the positivity of the finite and not only its negativity has a positive relationship to God, that a positive relationship to reality distinct as such from God can certainly be an internal element of man's relationship [255] by grace to God. But man's experience and the event of the cross of Christ as redemption in death as such show that at least in practice the situation in which the element of renunciation (present as such in every act directed toward God as grace-given goal) appears in a particularly harsh form and to immediate experience as exclusive, is

the situation preferred for the event of grace in the present order of salvation. Insofar as Christian teaching sees the peculiarity of this situation of renunciation as 'infralapsarian', as consequence of sin and thus of the freedom of sinful man and of God as 'permitting' sin, the situation is not made absolute, as if we knew and could say that it could not be otherwise and that, to use gnostic terminology, it arises solely from the mysteriousness of God himself; but on the other hand this situation of renunciation is explained and maintained as the universal and inescapable situation of our self-realization toward the immediacy of God.

This renunciation as present in the very nature of grace and inescapably required of us in our infralapsarian situation reaches in death its unsurpassable culmination. Since in death as an event affecting all humanity man is deprived of everything and thus even of himself, since in death the actual success of the act of freedom in which as a justified person he accepts and approves this self-withdrawal in death remains hidden, in our infralapsarian situation (in which the subject cannot realize itself in integrity and cannot grasp the effect of this realization in final bliss) death is the culmination of the grace of Christ crucified and thus a dying with Christ. At the same time it cannot be overlooked that part of this renunciation in death is to accept in self-denying freedom the fact that this concealed and concealing death in particular need not have been, that 'essentially' things could have been different, so that death now contains within itself the acceptance of its own not derivable and not 'ideologizable' facticity.

(*d*) None of this of course means that dying and death are the mode of realization only of an 'abstract' renunciation. This self-abandonment radicalized in death is in fact an aspect of the realization of grace as faith, hope, and love. Dying can be an act of *faith*, since it thwarts any recourse by man to a categorial justification of faith or (if that is perhaps an exaggeration) since this justification of faith in terms of fundamental theology in the light of man's intramundane rationality proves to be something that simply cannot produce [256] faith as such. Dying is *love* of God insofar as this renunciation in freedom required in death is brought about as the effect of a love in which God himself is loved for his own sake and consequently the person never recovers himself. The acceptance of death can certainly be seen also as an act of love of *neighbour*, insofar as the historical subject then leaves the mundane sphere of freedom and the stage of history free for others. This of course does not mean that man's dying can be seen only in *this* respect as an act of love of neighbour. If we are obliged in love to bear witness to our neighbour by our whole life of grace, of God's freedom and the hope of eternal life, this is true also of the witness of love that we must bear by our dying. 'Both during his whole life and also and even more at the time of his death,' says Ignatius of Loyola, 'each one . . . ought to strive earnestly that through him God our Lord may be glorified and served and his fellowmen may be edified, at least by the example of his patience and fortitude along with his living faith, hope, and love of the eternal goods which Christ our Lord merited and acquired for us by those altogether incomparable sufferings of his temporal life and death'.[*]

(*e*) Christian tradition, beginning with Scripture, has always seen *martyrdom*, a death freely endured and accepted to bear witness to the faith as the most perfect way in which a Christian can die with Christ. And rightly so. For in a martyr's death the universal essential constituents of Christian death are most clearly manifested: the indisposability of death, death as free act, death as testimony of faith for others. The secret yearning for martyrdom, which

[*] This translation is taken from *The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus*, translated and with a commentary by George E. Ganss, (St. Louis, Mo.: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1970): 595. – Translator.

is constantly attested in the course of the history of Christianity, is rooted in the hope that dying with Christ, which is part of every death in grace, is assured most securely by this kind of death.