

## "Nothing good is ever lost."

Now that the pope has added a 4th "decade" (10 beads) to the rosary & called it "the luminous mysteries" (of Jesus' life & ministry), & reaffirmed the Marian tilt of this devotional praxis as praying-hoping for peace, I've taken to thinking that some of my sayings intended to give comfort & strength bear this "mystery" of prayerful hope--sayings giving me comfort & strength--beads on my rosary--rosary beads I offer others.

This Thinksheet begins as a self-examination as to what I'm doing when I say (as I did recently to a new widower, with about 100 others reading my post), "I believe that nothing good is ever lost."

1 The saying is mine, nobody ever said it before. (That's how ignorant or forgetful I am.) It's power lies partly in it's ' - - / - / ' - - balanced rhythm: beware of seductive siren songs! It's power lies deeply in God's will--&, therefore, mine--"so that nothing may be lost" (Jn.6.12, a clause the three Synoptics do not have; Eucharistic practice [Ap.Const.8.13] follows Jn.: no fragments lost; "eucharistic coloring" [Raymond E. Brown, THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO JOHN I-XII, 248 (Doubleday/66)]; in 17.12, Jesus reports to the Father that none of his disciples was lost except Judas the traitor [Dante puts traitors, as absolute violators of relationship, in hell's lowest level]; Judas is "destroyed"--the vb. "esp. of eternal [resurrectionless] death" [Arndt-Gingrich], as also in 3.16.)

Having made his creation "very good" (Gn.1), God intends good to, has goodwill for, all his creatures, to some of whom he gives the gift of will, the power to choose, therein the freedom to choose other than God's will. Though the gift (to angels & humans) is good, not all the choosing is; & an implication of my saying--this Thinksheet's title--is that the not-good choosing (i.e., choosing without goodwill) & the choosing of the not-good (i.e., what lies outside God's "holy love to save all people," as in the UCC Statement of Faith) is lost: all not-good is lost.

2 A steady biblical theme is God's will & power to bring good out of evil (from the first book [at 50.20] onward, supremely the Resurrection out of the Cross). This generosity appears also in the theme of §1 (above), viz., (let's call it) the law of the conservation of creation: God's will that nothing/nobody be lost is limited only by his own gift of free will to some of his creatures, some of whom habitually choose against God's will, against the good: what's to become of them? Are they to be "destroyed" (like Judas, who proved "You can't win 'em all" applied even to Jesus)? Worn down by the "Love that will not let us go," the Love that has the patience of eternity? Their will called in like a loan closure, God withdrawing the gift of free will, thus reducing the creature to a zombie (or, at best, an only instinctual creature among the other animals)? In the 1st case (annihilation), is not something good, viz. the volitional being apart from the misused volition, lost? The question is only theoretical: only by repentance is that creational good separable from the accumulated not-good; & upon repentance, the sinner (Jn.3.16 again) "shall not perish but have eternal life." In the 2nd case, can such divine temporal overpowering of a mere creature be considered loving (or is it not torture, like a water-drip)? Further, this alternative assumes the creature will eventually choose purgation, purification--on what evidence? In the 3rd case, the divine override of the human produces a comparative not-good, a high creature diminished to the level of "the beasts of the field," God in the devil's role of reducing the good.

Which of the three is the least damaging to the Bible's image of God? The 1st (annihilation), if indeed it can be said to be at all damaging. Says S.Mark Heim (THE DEPTH OF THE RICHES, Eerdmans/01, 119), "Annihilationism is not beyond doctrinal consideration, but it has been explicitly affirmed by only a few Christian groups." Why the low poll? Because the Platonic notion of the immortality of "the soul" (a distinctly antibiblical notion: Gn.3.22; 1Tim.6.16) taboos the biblical belief that we human beings do not have, innately, immortal dignity (though by grace we may receive "eternal life" as a gift additional to our creation).

3 So, when I say "Nothing good is ever lost," I am not being immorally,

sentimentally, "inclusive" of humanity (as in the secular remark I've often heard in personal witnessing to the unsaved/lost/unchurched/secularists/pagans [take your choice], "I guess the Man Upstairs will be good to me; when I die, I'll go to a Better Place." (My responses? "Why do you think so?" "Can you be sure?").

4 Let's have a look at **Ac.3.21**. It's in Peter's 2nd sermon (in Ac.), exclusively to Jews (as his 1st sermon was not). In 1.6, Jesus' disciples-apostles wonder whether it's kingdom-come time: will "David" be re-enthroned over Israel? In 3.2, Peter's lens is wider, loosing toward "all" God through the prophets had promised to "re-stitute /-store/-new/-pair" (the NT's only use of ἀποκατάστασις *apokatastasis* [in street use, the balancing of accounts or the discharge of debts]). While the word modified by "all [things]" could have the philosophical-universal meaning that ἀνακεφαλαιώσασθαι τὰ πάντα *anakephalaiousasthai ta panta* ("to bring everything together," lit. "to head up...") has in Eph.1.10 (Vulg. "instaurare"), it need not.

While the Greek of Ac.3.21 could mean either the Jewish eschatological vision or the philosophical-universal vision (viz., "universalism"), the context--a speech to Jews--predisposes to the former. Correctly, many versions/translations prefer the former--e.g., all until KJV, which was not followed by RSV ("establishing all that God spoke"); TEV ("Jesus must remain in heaven until the time comes for all things to be made new"; so the revision [CEV]: "Jesus must stay in heaven until God makes all things new"). Too, the former comports with the Jewish expectation of Elijah, who (in anticipation of the Messiah) leads the people to repentance for inner & outer (sociopolitical) renewal (Mal.4.5-6; Jesus says Jn.Baptist is this eschatological forerunner). Unfortunately, NRSV diverts the reader from this Jewish-Christian understanding by using the adj. "universal" (following a few modern translations): "universal restoration." Easily, then, the reader is misled from the adj. "universal" to the n. "universalism," as is S.Mark Heim, *THE DEPTHS OF THE RICHES* (Eerdmans/01), 118 (on which p. his note quotes NRSV).

WARNING to Christian thinkers who don't think from the biblical texts themselves: don't trust any one version/translation!

5 On the same page, Heim eliminates, from his theology, what is the last word of this Thinksheet's title. He speaks of (& for) "the scriptural twofold division" of destiny, but misstates it. That division is between the saved & the lost; Heim's is "between salvation and loss"--not between the two eternals of Mt.25.46, viz. bliss (which he keeps) & punishment (which he jettisons; even in the lowest level of hell, all have what they want--a modified universalism; as the Queen of Hearts says, "All have won and all shall have prizes"). Further, his pair is lame: the antonym of loss is gain; the antonym of salvation is damnation; the antonym of the saved is the lost (or unsaved).

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