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Some Quotes from "What I  
Believe"

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188-I am taking up here a basic theme that I have dealt with elsewhere but which is so essential that I have no hesitation in repeating myself. It is the recognition that all people from the beginning of time are saved by God in Jesus Christ, that they have all been recipients of his grace no matter what they have done.

190-If God is, he is all in all. There is no more place for nothingness. [Commenting on Annihilationism]

190-The second and equally essential factor is that after Jesus Christ we know that God is love. This is the central revelation. How can we conceive of him who is love ceasing to love one of his creatures? How can we think that God can cease to love the creation that he has made in his own image? This would be a contradiction in terms. God cannot cease to be love. If we combine the two theses we see at once

that nothing can exist outside God's love, for God is all in all. It is unthinkable that there should exist a place of suffering, of torment, of the domination of evil, of beings that merely hate since their only function is to torture. It is astounding that Christian theology should not have seen at a glance how impossible this idea is. Being love, God cannot send to hell the creation which he so loved that he gave his only Son for it. He cannot reject it because it is his creation. This would be to cut off himself.

190-191-A whole theological trend advances the convenient solution that God is love but also justice.

He saves the elect to manifest his love and condemns the reprobate to manifest his justice. [...]

This view is part of the mistaken theology which declares that the good are unhappy on earth but will be happy in heaven, whereas the wicked are successful on earth but will be punished in the next world. Unbelievers have every reason to denounce this explanation as a subterfuge designed to make

people accept what happens on earth. The kingdom of God is not compensation for this world.

191-All the evil done on earth from Adam's break with God undoubtedly has to be judged and punished. But all our teaching about Jesus is there to remind us that the wrath of God fell entirely on him, on God in the person of the Son. God directs his justice upon himself; he has taken upon himself the condemnation of our wickedness. What would be the point, then, of a second condemnation of individuals? Was the judgment passed on Jesus insufficient? Was the price that was paid -- the punishment of the Son of God -- too low to meet the demands of God's justice? This justice is satisfied in God and by God for us. From this point on, then, we know only the face of the love of God.

191-192-God's love is demanding "jealous," total, and indivisible. Love has a stern face, not a soft one. Nevertheless, it is love. And

in any case this love excludes double predestination, some to salvation and others to perdition. It is inconceivable that the God of Jesus Christ, who gives himself in his Son to save us, should have created some people ordained to evil and damnation. There is indeed a predestination, but it can be only the one predestination to salvation. In and through Jesus Christ all people are predestined to be saved. Our free choice is ruled out in this regard. We have often said that God wants free people. He undoubtedly does, except in relation to this last and definitive decision. We are not free to decide and choose to be damned.

193-I believe that all people are included in the grace of God. I believe that all the theologies that have made a large place for damnation and hell are unfaithful to a theology of grace. For if there is predestination to perdition, there is no salvation by grace. Salvation by grace is granted precisely to those who without grace would

have been lost. Jesus did not come to seek the righteous and the saints, but sinners. He came to seek those who in strict justice ought to have been condemned. A theology of grace implies universal salvation. What could grace mean if it were granted only to some sinners and not to others according to an arbitrary decree that is totally contrary to the nature of our God? If grace is granted according to the greater or lesser number of sins, it is no longer grace--it is just the opposite because of this accountancy. Paul is the very one who reminds us that the enormity of the sin is no obstacle to grace: "Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more" (Rom. 5:20). This is the key statement. The greater the sin, the more God's love reveals itself to be far beyond any judgment or evaluation of ours. This grace covers all things. It is thus effectively universal.

194-Concerning the proclamation of rejection in Gehenna, we must not forget that the Valley of

Hinnom served as a refuse dump for Jerusalem, so that this proclamation meant: you are being put out with the garbage as an object that was finished or broken or unusable. In this case the object became unserviceable for God.

194-We read constantly that God does not reject forever. He "will not keep his anger forever" (Ps. 103:9; Jer. 3:5, 12; Mic. 7:18). On the other hand, his mercy endures forever (Ps. 106:1; 118:1; 136:1; etc.). These two great theological proclamations rule out the idea of a God who damns, for that would mean that he keeps his anger forever.

196-God being who he is, hell is impossible. It is an impossibility. Nevertheless, you Christians must realize that nothing is impossible for God. Hence the possibility remains that he might decide for this punishment and penalty. You must retain, though not as a dominating factor, a fear that God will make possible that which

according to his revelation is impossible.

198-We must come back unceasingly to grace. Receiving grace is not a matter of good works or of being justified by one's words. Once again we recall that Jesus did not come to seek the righteous but sinners. We have to take this statement in all seriousness. When the president of a modern state exercises his right of reprieve, this means that a person has been found guilty and condemned but after the pronouncement of condemnation there is a declaration of pardon. Grace is not exercised upon someone who is not previously condemned. In other words, we must not confuse grace, justification, and sanctification.

199-We recall the parable of the lost sheep. Jesus does not seek the good sheep that walks where it should, but the sheep that is truly lost, the lostness being that, not of temporary straying during the present life, but of eternal



perdition. This is the one that the risen Jesus goes to recover. We must not cut down the reach of God's grace or limit the dimension of it to this life--it will last into eternity. Thus God's grace has an unparalleled dimension and is universal as the concrete expression of his love.

199-Paul is interpreting Exodus 33:19, where God says to Moses: "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." This saying expresses the pure freedom of God, which we are not contesting. Note that it does not say: "I will damn whom I damn."

200-Some people are called to bear witness to the truth of God, while others undoubtedly remain in humble circumstances and live unimportant lives. It is evident that the latter might accuse God of having made them for menial use and not given them a share in a life full of meaning and greater joy. But here again salvation is not the issue

203-All are encompassed in "God so loved the world and Jesus came to save the world." In the course of human history there are those who know happiness and have the light, and those who are lost on a way with no exit. But the latter are not lost to the heart of God, nor are they outside the love of God. As has often been said, what we suffer here on earth is punishment enough. Hell is on earth, as the Bible itself tells us.

204-All are sinners, and all as such have been assumed and reconciled to God by Jesus Christ.

204-This divine decision that changes human destiny is of supreme importance. In effect, whether individuals will be reconciled or not, whether they will make their peace with God or not, whether they will be penitent or not, does not in any way affect God's decision to reconcile the world to himself. It might change the lives of those concerned but not their ordination to salvation.

From the very outset this reconciliation is for all (Muslims, Buddhists, Nazis, Communists, etc.), and it will apply to them whether they know it or not, whether they will it or not. God is reconciled to them even if they are not reconciled to God.

204-205-The reconciliation of God with the world, with all humanity, rules out the possibility of damnation. I stress again that our human will or disposition can do nothing to change what has been accomplished.

205-We read that it is the devil, the beast (power), and the false prophet (falsehood) that are thrown into the lake of fire, not beings, let alone human beings, but the forces that from creation have turned people aside from God and introduced absolute evil. It is these rebellious spiritual forces that are in hell.

206-The biblical God is not an accountant. "No one is righteous, no, not one" (Rom. 3:10). No one

no, not one (Rom. 8:10). No one can bring before God works that are worthy of him. In other words, if we were confined to an accounting balance, the result would always be a deficit, the world would be condemned, and no one would be written in the book of life.

206-All are written in the book of life. Yet the verse that follows (Rev. 20:15) then gives us the solemn warning which is addressed to Christians to make them take seriously the possible impossibility of which we spoke earlier. God always reserves to himself the possibility of rejecting people, and this is the secret of his freedom. If he is not an accountant, he is also not tied ineluctably to a kind of global decision which makes the trial and judgment derisory and fictitious. Clearly the book of life is the book of Jesus Christ, who is incompatible with death and all that death is.

207-Although I proclaim the truth of universal salvation, I cannot

of universal salvation, I cannot proclaim it as an absolute truth. I cannot penetrate the secret of God. I cannot presume upon a simple decision of the eternal Father. Hence I cannot proclaim this truth as a dogmatic proposition which is scientifically demonstrated. In proclaiming it, I am saying what I believe, what meditation on the biblical texts leads me to believe. I do not teach universal salvation; I announce it.

207-And what good is it for Christians to lead lives that are godly, worthy, honest, moral, etc.? Concerning the second point, we must be very firm. Living such a life achieves nothing and in no way assures us of salvation. To lead a virtuous life in order to be saved is completely mistaken from a biblical standpoint. The evangelical view is that I lead a virtuous life because I know that I am saved. It is because grace has been granted to me that I can live an honest life before God. Salvation is not the result of virtue but its origin and source.

207-208-What is the difference between Christians and non-Christians? For a long time the emphasis has been on individual salvation. We have to convert people, to lead them to faith, if they are to be saved. This is the goal of many evangelistic campaigns and of much missionary work. But if we accept the certainty of universal salvation, salvation cannot be the point of communicating the gospel. What, then, is its value or significance? It rests on three solid foundations. First, it is a matter of communicating knowledge. All are saved, but only those who believe the gospel know it. This is no small matter, for people are full of anguish and anxiety and fear, fear of the future and of war and of death. They are delivered up to the pain of a cruel disruption. They are desperate because they have lost their loved ones, or think they have lived in vain, or see the world degraded and nature violated and slowly plundered. They are doubly crushed because they do not know that they are loved and

know that they are loved and accompanied and saved and reunited and promised a future of truth, righteousness, and light. Not to know this is the great tragedy of people today. Communicating the gospel is passing on the astonishing news that no matter what happens nothing is lost and we are loved. "Good news is preached to the poor" (Luke 4:18). It is a matter of the poor (all of us!) and of this good news.

But passing on the gospel has a second meaning too, for those who hear and receive this gospel henceforth become the servants of God. They are given a mission, a vocation. This gospel is to be proclaimed on earth. Believers become the servants of this proclamation. I will repeat what I have often said before, namely, that being a Christian is neither a privilege nor an advantage but a charge and a mission. Those who learn the good news of salvation are under obligation to live a different life, to become "saints" because they are now sanctified, and to make it their task to pass



and to make it their task to pass on what they have been given. But they have also to become again the image that God has made of himself, his counterpart.

We have said that there are three vital points. The third is our response to the tragic and anguished question that Jesus poses: "When the Son of man comes, will he find faith on earth?" (Luke 18:8). There is no guarantee of the permanence or perpetuity of the gospel among us. Jesus gives us the promise that he will be with us to the end of the age (Matt. 28:20), but there may not be anyone with him. There may not be a single Christian, a single bearer of the good news. This is a possibility that the question of Jesus opens up for us, and we cannot treat it lightly. Again, if we are charged to communicate this gospel, it is also for Jesus, so that he may not have the further sorrow of having done everything but finding no one who believes it or knows it. Thus service out of love for Jesus (the only service that we can render



only service that we can render him) ought to constrain us to evangelize all peoples and all classes.

207-208-A final objection to universal salvation is that of the frivolous or worldly person who says: "It is all very easy then. I do not need to bother about it. I can live as I like. I am not under any religious restraints. There is no need for works, as the Protestants have shown. There is not even any need for faith, since even atheists and pagans are saved." This kind of talk is the only kind that might bring people into danger of damnation. For it is the talk of those to whom the good news has been fully proclaimed, and they despise it. There is the rub. If people refuse to believe in God and in Jesus Christ during a hard and serious struggle, if they wrestle with God as Job did, then the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and Jesus knows and understands ("for he knows whereof we are made"--cf. Ps. 103:14), and he finally grants his

revelation. But what is not tolerable, what cannot be pardoned, is that when the love of God is known, when the full extent of his grace is understood, this grace should be mocked. The unacceptable thing is not to be moved by this love when it is known and recognized, not to respond to it, or rather to respond with raillery: "It is all very convenient, we can simply profit from it." This is the kind of hypocritical talk that makes a game of the truth. It involves a corruption of the very being against which there rings out the terrible warning: "God is not mocked" (Gal. 6:6).

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