ANTICIPATION AND CONSUMMATION

By Robert Merrihew Adams

THESIS: *The idea that present and future salvation ore conditionally related is to be criticized as fostering legalism and otherworldliness, and as misrepresenting God's eschatological judgment and mercy. Their true relationship is one of anticipation and consummation, which is defined in terms of identity, the character of future salvation as destiny and as decisive, and non-conditionality. The doctrine of justification is to be expounded under the category of anticipation, and the issues of assurance of salvation and universalism must be considered in this context. The doctrine of judgment is freed from some restrictions, but it also raises the problem of conditionality most sharply. The finished work of Christ must also be viewed under the category of anticipation if the freedom of God is to be adequately expounded.*

MUCH of the uneasiness that many of us feel over the traditional Protestant doctrine of salvation can be traced to the fact that Western Christian thought has seen present and future salvation related conditionally, as cause and effect, means and end. I believe that this conception is incompatible with the Reformation's basic insight into the freedom of God's grace and of the Christian man. It is true that the Reformers' stress on predestination, as part of their struggle against the idea of merit, reversed the relationship, so that the future destiny of salvation was seen as determining the present Christian life rather than being determined by it. However, the relationship was still seen as strictly conditional; and in this the doctrinal formulations of the Reformation were inadequate to its basic insight, with the result that the

latter tended to be lost. Even the formal insistence on the priority of destiny did not prevent future expectation from being enslaved, in the actualities of religious thinking, to the present life.

I

This is most evident in the new legalism of faith or of Christian experience, which insists that the elect, those who will be saved, are, for all practical purposes, all and only those who believe savingly in Christ in this life. The only exception made is for those beyond reach of the ordinary means of grace, especially for the children of believers who die in infancy; that is—although it could hardly be admitted, since the idea of merit has ostensibly been ruled out—an exception is made only for those who have a good excuse for not believing. Classical Protestantism denies that faith as such *merits* future salvation, and it does not exactly say that faith *causes* future salvation; but it does allow that faith, or regeneration before death, is a *condition,* virtually a non-meritorious legal condition, of future salvation. Moreover, the doctrine of assurance of salvation implies that the future experience of salvation is so firmly set in accord with the patterns of the present that the saved should normally have a certain knowledge of their future destiny, based on present experience. All this has inevitably given rise to pharisaisms fully as virulent as any that the Middle Ages knew. In the new legalism of Christian experience it was not, to be sure, claimed that men could merit salvation; but men tended to look for assurance to the evidence of their lives rather than to the finished work of Christ or any other work of God performed for them rather than through them. The new legalism gave to those who attained assurance too much cause to thank God that they were not as other men; while those who believed the theology and aspired to salvation, but did not have assurance, were reduced to the most agonizing bondage to a new law that they knew themselves unable to fulfill. This was certainly far from the explicit intention of Protestant theology, and from the spirit of Luther; but the question remains whether it is not a reasonable and inevitable response to the doctrine.

Because of the legalism of Christian experience, it has proved possible on Protestant principles to treat the present life as a means to the eschatological future, not by living right in order to be saved,

but by living right in order to be able to believe oneself saved. The tendency to treat the present primarily as a means to a future end is something that medieval Christian thought has stamped on the whole of Western civilization; it is as characteristic of secular Western ideologies such as Marxism and Enlightenment humanism as it is of most forms of Western Christianity. Our Christianity has tended to treat the present life as a means to the future salvation of souls; and insofar as it has done so, it has lent itself, like other Western eschatologies, to the devaluation of the life that men now live—a devaluation which in the case of Christianity is branded with the title of "otherworldliness." There are many signs that the present life is currently overvalued, and pursued with the most frantic desperation; but we cannot simply shrug off the scorn which our age has heaped on the idea of "pie in the sky by and by." There is much justice in the charge that Christian concentration on the future induces insensitivity to the moral problems and aesthetic values of the present; too often Christian eschatology has indeed been used to cheapen life and make it easy. There has been a tendency in the Western tradition, not only in Christianity but also in rationalism and Marxism, toward an eschatological fanaticism which dehumanizes life; and this comes of treating the present as hardly more than a means to a future end.

But the most serious objection to the classical Protestant understanding of the relation between soteriology and eschatology is that it misrepresents both the judgment and the forgiveness of God, and leaves little room for God to act personally and graciously in the future. It sets both forgiveness and judgment in the context of a last judgment in which those who are united with Christ by faith will be acquitted (for his merits), and those who are not will be condemned (for their own sins). The scene, thus baldly painted, is a travesty both of justice and of mercy, and hardly flattering to God. The idea of judgment thus dominates classical Protestant thought, as it did late medieval thought; even the idea of forgiveness is clothed in the strained forensic imagery of satisfaction and imputation. Forgiveness is supposed to take the form of a sort of judgment; one is not said to earn it, but one must qualify for it. The idea of forgiveness is distorted by a too narrow selection from the stock of New Testament conceptions of salvation; for the same event that is justification in that God ascribes to the sinner's life the value of Christ's

is also forgiveness and reconciliation in that God, as it were, throws away the judicial apparatus altogether, "not counting their trespasses against them."

Conversely, the significance of judgment for the Christian life is distorted because full value is not given to the judgment of the works even of Christians of which the New Testament speaks (for instance in II Cor. 5: 10). The final judgment of which we hear so often in the New Testament is most definitely a judgment of works of obedience, even when faith is seen as the decisive obedience (as in John 3: 18). It is not a judgment based on faith as a non-meritorious condition. The classical Protestant theology has removed judgment from its original and proper relationship with obedience in the Christian life.

And since the judgment which has provided the framework for eschatology has been seen by Protestants as strictly conditioned by principles inflexibly fixed by the death and resurrection of Christ, little room has been left for expectation that God will yet act freely, graciously, unexpectedly. It is ironic that in pruning away such excesses of medieval doctrine and practice as indulgences, masses for the dead, and prayers to the saints for their intercession, the Reformers stripped Western Christianity of some of the safeguards it had developed against legalism. Protestantism freed God's justice from the taint of corruption at the cost of making it inflexible. At least in the medieval view of eschatological judgment and forgiveness one still had to do with persons; whereas in the Protestant view one had to do, practically speaking, with laws, covenants, and a plan of salvation; the only point at which God was now seen as acting in a truly personal fashion was election, which happened before we were born. It is because of this that Immanuel Kant and the Victorian cult of duty must be regarded as characteristic products of Protestant cultures.

II

It is my contention that these difficulties can be relieved by regarding the relation between the present and future experience of salvation as one of anticipation and consummation—by which I mean four things.

I mean, in the first place, that present and future salvation are not externally related, as two different things, but are one and the

same reality. To be sure, the one reality is fully and unambiguously present only in the future consummation, and is now present in anticipation only after a fashion and under a veil; but we are speaking of one thing, which develops, or at least has a history. Perhaps the best example, and one that is certainly biblical, is found in engagement and marriage. They are not two relationships but one, if by "relationship" we mean, not a formal property, but the reality that is involved, the mutual love and belonging; and the relationship is fully actualized only in marriage. The unity of anticipation and consummation is suggested by the way in which the New Testament speaks of the ingression of eschatological realities into the present life of Christians. Christians possess "the firstfruits of the Spirit" (Rom. 8: 23); it is an eschatological gift and may be spoken of as "a down-payment on our inheritance" (Eph. 1: 14). With the same meaning it can be said that Christians "have tasted . . . the powers of the age to come" (Heb. 6: 5). Other eschatological gifts, such as glory (II Cor. 3: 18) and new creation (II Cor. 5: 17), may also be spoken of as the present possession of Christians; for the New Testament writers, Christians are in a qualified way already living the life of the age to come.

The second thing that I mean is that future salvation is a destiny. That which is anticipated is not seen as a possibility but as a reality, albeit a reality in the future. Here again the example of engagement and marriage is helpful: people who are engaged may say that they "are going to be married." The marriage is not merely a possibility, but something that has been decided upon, something they are committed to—a reality which is believed in despite the uncertainties of human plans, and a fact to be reckoned with in all their thinking. How much more certain, and therefore how much more a reality, are God's plans! Other biblical models of the relation of future to present salvation, such as promise and inheritance, or citizenship in heaven, also show the character of the eschatological consummation as a reality, something already decided on, even "stored in heaven" (I Peter 1: 4; Col. 1: 5).

As destiny, as something already decided on, consummation determines anticipation more than anticipation determines consummation. This is the third point in the definition of the relation: consummation is decisive for anticipation. Things done in anticipation of future salvation are done not so much in order that it may come

as because it is coming. People are not engaged in order to be married so much as because they intend to be married. Likewise, because the reality which is in both has its fullness only in consummation, anticipation is defined in terms of consummation. Engagement is engagement to be married; an heir is one who is going to inherit something. Anticipation is what it is only in relation to consummation. Thus far the future consummation determines the facts of the present subjectively, of course, through the medium of divine and human planning and expectation; but behind this subjective determination is an objective determination of the value and significance of the present by the future consummation. For instance, the Christian's way of life as a pilgrim is determined by his faith in the resurrection of the dead, but that is because the fact of the resurrection of the dead (directly, whether or not one believes it) qualifies the (real) importance of worldly success or failure. And conversely, as Paul says, "If we have hope in Christ in this life only, we are the most miserable of all men" (I Cor. 15: 19). The present Christian life is authentic, and has the value ascribed to it, only on the assumption that it really is the beginning of a life that actually will be consummated.

What has been said so far might suggest the Aristotelian model of the development of a single substance from potentiality to actuality, controlled by the ultimate form of the substance as a final cause. The analogy breaks down, however, not only because of the obsolescence of Aristotelian physics, but also because in speaking of salvation we are not speaking of the natural development of a physical substance but of the historical development of a reality that is, like engagement and marriage, essentially personal and social. The distinction between natural and historical development suggests the fourth point that must be made about the relation of anticipation and consummation: anticipation is not to be understood as a causal, necessary, or sufficient condition of consummation, but consummation follows anticipation by the free action of persons. In particular, the conception of anticipation and consummation keeps the freedom of God clearly in view. This fourth point is the one which must be stressed most strongly against the classical Protestant understanding.

It is not to be denied that what happens in the present influences what God will do in the future—or to put it in better, more personal terms, that God will take the present into account in deciding for

the future. But God's decision for the future is not to be represented as determined mechanically or mathematically or legally on any principles by the present; God remains free to dispose of the past as he will. The traditional approach pinned God down and brought the eschatological future to a large extent under human control, by making a constant of God's eschatological response to man's state in the present life, leaving that state the only important variable. Viewing the relation between soteriology and eschatology under the categories of anticipation and consummation, we must recognize that in eschatology we still have to do with a God who is a free person, and not with a plan of salvation already delivered into our hands.

The synoptic Gospels are particularly rich in material emphasizing God's freedom of decision for the future. "Some are last who shall be first, and some are first who shall be last" (Luke 13: 30). There is surprise at the Last Day (Matt. 7: 22–23; 25: 31–46). No one but the Father knows when the Day is coming (Mark 13: 32). The parable of the laborers in the vineyard, with its conclusion, "Haven't I the right to do what I want with what's mine?" (Matt. 20: 15) was addressed to a situation in the ministry of Jesus, but it says something about God that applies for the future as well.

It may seem that this stress on God's freedom with regard to the future contradicts what was said above about consummation as destiny. But destiny is not fate. When destiny was spoken of, it was in terms of things that have been decided upon by persons, and particularly by God. Such decisions are not absolutely irreversible. Engagements can be broken; heirs can be disinherited. God being who he is, there is for Christians no question of his being forced to change the broad shape of his plans; there is no doubt of his ultimate triumph and the perfection of his reign. But his plans cannot be regarded as inflexible in detail or in their application to us and our present form of life. Within his commitments he still is free.

This may be illustrated, in what seems to me a legitimate theological use of typology, from the relation of Old Testament expectation to the fact of Christ. Here we can examine a paradigm of the relation of anticipation and consummation in which the consummation has already been laid before our eyes in history. From the Christian point of view, the fact of Christ was Israel's destiny in the Old Testament period—a destiny which determined by its reality what was truly significant and what was vain in the history of Israel,

and determined the acts and expressions of the people of God by being apprehended as a datum of faith. But as we believe in Jesus as the Christ and see the transformation of the concept of the Messiah in the New Testament, we must above all be amazed by the freedom which God took to himself in fulfilling his promises; we must recognize that God did not allow the fact of Jesus Christ to be in any strict sense determined by the history of Israel, or fixed according to the expectations of Israel.

III

Let us consider some important aspects of the Christian life and the Christian hope in the light of the relation of anticipation and consummation thus defined. We may take up first the idea of *justification.* Here we find ourselves enmeshed in a thicket of thorny issues: the Reformation controversy with Roman Catholicism, assurance of salvation, universalism versus the necessity of faith for salvation.

Justification belongs primarily under the heading of anticipation. "Being justified (aorist) . . . by faith, we have peace (now) with God . . ." (Rom. 5: 1). The Christian has in a sense already been before God's judgment seat and been acquitted. He possesses in the present the gifts of acceptance, forgiveness, reconciliation, and fellowship with God, which belong to eschatological salvation. He may wait in hope for clearer and more dazzling tokens of his vindication and God's love, but he is already loved and accepted by God. The relation of sonship, the essence of the consummation that is hoped for, is already established; the believer is not merely a candidate for this relation but already a son. Reconciliation has already occurred. This is one of the great truths which is grasped in the Reformers' doctrine of justification, which may be seen in large part as an affirmation of the present reality and glory of anticipation in the Christian life, and as a protest against a piety which made the Christian's life in this world a period of doubtful candidacy for God's acceptance, which was reserved for a future life.

We need to be much more hesitant, however, about the Reformed doctrine of assurance of salvation. If we think of justification in terms of anticipation, we must certainly allow that a confident expectation of future salvation belongs to it, for the relation that is already established is defined in terms of what it shall be; we must

say, along with Calvin, that living faith "must have along with it the hope of eternal salvation as its inseparable companion."[1] The point is made clearly in the first eleven verses of Romans 5, whose theme is stated in verse 9: "Much more, therefore, being justified (aorist) now by his blood, shall we be saved through him from the wrath (i.e. to come)."

But we will not be able to follow when this point is pressed to the conclusion that justification by faith in the present is strictly a sufficient condition of eternal salvation in the future, that it is infallibly certain that one who has really been justified cannot fall but will be saved, and that the believer is normally aware of this certainty. In the context of such a doctrine of assurance it is hard to do justice to the New Testament emphasis on the liability of Christians to judgment. What has happened is that confidence has been transmuted into certainty. The concept of anticipation has been developed above in terms of a relationship, such as engagement, in which there is a commitment of persons looking toward the consummation; *confidence,* which properly belongs to such a relationship, is the belief that the consummation *will in fact* take place, and is quite compatible with the awareness that this outcome is not inevitable, that other outcomes are possible. Thus, for instance, the author of Hebrews sketches a truly horrifying possibility of apostasy, but then goes on to say, "But we are confident of better things for you, beloved, things that belong to salvation" (Heb. 6: 9). When a confidence of this sort is changed to a certainty, the character of expectation tends to the impersonal and the timeless; it is no longer a matter of persons but of facts.

If justification by faith in the present life is not to be taken as strictly a sufficient condition of future salvation, neither is it to be made a necessary condition of future salvation. It is one thing to say that divine acceptance and faith in it are necessary to establish a redeemed and reconciled relationship with God here and now, or at any time; it is quite another thing to set limits to God's mercy by saying that if such a relationship is not experienced before death the individual is eternally excluded from it. Here we must face the issue of universalism. The conception of anticipation and consummation which is proposed here rules out any strict conditional relationship between the present and what God will do in the future.

[1] *Institutes,* III. ii. 42 (Battles translation, p. 590).

It therefore forbids us to proclaim, with the same assurance that the old Protestant theology claimed for believers' expectation of their own salvation, that all men will be saved. That would be to make humanity a sufficient condition of future salvation; and such universalism is always in danger of "humanism," in the theologically objectionable sense of that word. But neither may we lay down necessary conditions of salvation and proclaim that those who fail to meet them in the present life can never be saved. We must *hope* for the salvation of all men, with a hope doubtless somewhat muted when salvation has not been anticipated in an individual life by the reconciliation which is justification by faith, but with a full Christian hope nonetheless, inasmuch as our trust is not in ourselves, but in Christ and in God's love revealed in him, which is for all men.

The sum of what is said here about justification is that its significance lies in the reconciliation which it establishes here and now, even though that is a relationship with promise. So understood, the doctrine of justification ought to be an antidote for otherworldliness, discouraging us from treating the present only as a means to a future end, and leading us to see the present as a time in which a life can be lived that is worth living on its own account.

IV

The theme of *judgment* has already been introduced in rejecting the traditional Reformed doctrine of assurance of salvation. It must now be treated in more detail.

It should already be apparent that the position here advanced allows more room than the classical Protestant position for the repeated biblical emphasis on the liability of God's people to his judgment. Amos 3: 2 is often cited in this connection, but the emphasis is just as prominent in the New Testament, for instance in Rom. 11: 20 ff., II Cor. 5: 10, and the synoptic tradition's application of the parables of judgment to the church.

But at the same time it must be recognized that the idea of judgment raises certain difficulties for the understanding of anticipation and consummation which is advocated here. For of all the great eschatological ideas, judgment most essentially represents the future as determined by the past, and on the basis of law. The idea of judgment is a necessary and important part of eschatological

expectation; we may not deny that the present is taken into account by way of evaluation in the consummation. The life of this world may be devalued by indifferentism as well as by otherworldliness. Nonetheless, if legalism, either of works or of Christian experience, is to be avoided, the tendencies of the idea of judgment must be qualified, first, by insisting that God's judgment is a free act, not strictly determined in advance by a penal code; and second, by refusing to allow the idea of judgment to take over the whole framework of eschatological expectation, as has generally happened in Western theology. Mercy and forgiveness belong to the consummation too. There is a reckoning of our deeds in judgment; what we must not say is that God is bound as to what he will do by what we have done. We must remember that the book of life, in which is written what God will do, is "another book" than the books in which our doings are written (Rev. 20: 12).

It must be frankly admitted that the New Testament writers frequently indicate faith and obedience in the present as conditions of participation in the future consummation; the conditionality may be stated very strictly, as in II Thess. 1: 6 ff. and Heb. 6: 4 ff. Over against these may be set what is certainly a smaller number of passages such as John 12: 32, Rom. 11: 32, and Col. 1: 20, which suggest explicit universalism. More important, both classes of passages must be set alongside the biblical witness to God's freedom of decision for the future, and the repeated biblical pattern of absolute prophecy of destruction followed by partial fulfillment and the offer of forgiveness. New Testament statements of conditions of future salvation are certainly not to be taken as simply without meaning or validity for us; but it seems best to say that it is as reminders of the freedom of God that they are valid—as warnings to fear God and not to suppose presumptuously that he has so given the consummation to us that no matter what we do there is nothing important that he can do about it. This appears to be the primary motive, for instance, in the Epistle to the Hebrews, which falls into the strictest conditionality. The readers must be roused from presumptuous apathy. "Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest remains, let us fear lest any of you be judged to have failed to reach it" (Heb. 4: 1).

Fear, then, belongs in the Christian life as well as hope— not because of a threat which is laid down by way of a strict condition

of salvation, but because the hope is part of the total anticipation which is the Christian life. And if we think that we can cling to the hope, and to the promise, and turn our backs on the rest, we presume to divide the gift of God, and forget that it still belongs to him. Anticipation and consummation have the same substance, so that we do not know what we are doing if we cling to the promise of consummation and reject the rest of the anticipatory life of faith.

The complement of the fear of presumption is the *aspiration and striving for the consummation* which belong to the Christian life in spite of the fact that the consummation is not something that we can achieve. Anticipation and consummation in the Christian life and hope are the anticipation and consummation of a human life, not of the existence of a stone; and they must be willingly—indeed strenuously—accepted. As we live the Christian life it must be our purpose to attain to the consummation of that life, in that we willingly embrace and adopt the consummation for ourselves. Embracing the consummation involves the effort of living now the life that it consummates, and it would be presumptuous to try to separate them. But that does not mean that there is anything that we can do now to take the consummation out of God's power, to insure either that we will or that we will not attain it.

The subject can be studied to advantage in the third chapter of Philippians. Eloquently Paul tells how he has discarded all confidence in the flesh and his own righteousness, that he might hope in Christ and God's righteousness. The life in Christ is only possible because Christ has made him his own; yet he still looks to the future to be found in Christ, and presses on to make his own that for which he has been made Christ's own. He does not yet reckon himself to have made it his own; it is still under God's control, not his. What he does do is stretch every nerve in living the life that looks forward to that consummation. He mentions no condition that he expects to fulfill which will enable him to count the consummation as his own; whatever he accomplishes, he is constantly leaving it behind and forgetting about it, and concentrating all his energy and attention on the goal itself.[2] This is the attitude of the Christian pilgrim.

The theme of the *urgency of repentance* which is so prominent in

[2] Phil. 3: 13 f. Note that the participles, *epilanthanómenos* and *epekteinómenos*, are imperfect.

the preaching of Jesus must be understood similarly. In his message repentance was certainly presented as a condition of life in the Kingdom of God. But it is a simultaneous condition; it is itself the gateway to life and immediately establishes a citizenship in the Kingdom. There is no strict conditional relationship between the present and the future, no guarantee that some will not fall away, that others will not be added. Jesus' refusal to say when the Last Day will be, his insistence that it might come at any moment, embodies a characteristic tension of uncertainty, a jealousy for the freedom of God.

However, although he could not say when it will be, Jesus did speak of a time when it will be too late to repent, when "the master of the house has got up and locked the door" (Luke 13: 25). The proclamation of Jesus has the urgency of a last chance; and as both death and the Last Day appear to be boundaries of this chance, the question inevitably arises whether this does not establish the classical Protestant view that eternal salvation is normally strictly conditional on faith and repentance in this life. But against this conclusion, which seems to carry with it inevitably the legalism of faith, must be set some other questions. How much of the last-chance atmosphere in the ministry of Jesus referred originally, not to individual salvation, but to a last chance in the historic mission of Israel? How far are we bound to shape expectations for the future out of Jesus' eschatological *ideas?* Does not his eschatological thought have the unsystematic character of biblical prophecy, and defy efforts to construct a "consistent eschatology"? Must we not recognize the probability that Jesus saw the future in foreshortened perspective, and believed that he was living literally in the last generation? In the light of these questions, is it not prudent to refrain from trying to base a dogma about the future on Jesus' ideas at this point? Is it not wiser to cling to the "existential" meaning of his eschatological ideas, the impact they were designed to make on the lives of men? The impact that the ideas we are considering were intended to have on Jesus' hearers is clear: they were to press them to repentance, denying them the possibiilty of presuming on the patience of God, of presuming that another opportunity would be given them. As the end of history might be expected at any moment, men were left utterly in the hands of a free God. The dialogue of Mark 10: 26 f. is a token, however, that the hard sayings of judgment are not to be

taken as denying God's freedom to show mercy: "Then who can be saved?" . . . "With men it is impossible, but not with God; for all things are possible with God."

V

But it may be asked whether the uniqueness of Jesus Christ does not entail that God's offer of forgiveness in him is absolutely a last chance. We have therefore to consider *the finished work of Christ* in relation to the categories of anticipation and consummation. Essentially what we have to say is that the finished work of Christ has an anticipatory relation to the consummation that is still expected. The New Testament writers regard what Christ has done as falling under the category of anticipation, and not solely as the consummation of the Old Testament. "Now Christ has been raised from the dead *as the firstfruits* of those who are asleep" (I Cor. 15: 20). He has ascended to heaven as our "forerunner" (Heb. 6: 20). He reigns *until* all his enemies shall be subdued (I Cor. 15: 25).

Unfortunately, it has been characteristic of Western thought on the finished work of Christ to leap over the relation of anticipation and consummation; what Christ is regarded as having finished is virtually the consummation itself. Eschatological judgment and forgiveness are regarded as already fixed in every important respect by what he has done; his death is seen as a necessary condition of the final forgiveness. The freedom of God is flagrantly disregarded in the traditional Western understanding of the atonement, and a legalism is imposed on God. The result, moreover, is that Christ's finished work is removed from the sphere of history, in that its important consequences are understood to be all quite otherworldly. This tends to make it seem quite unreal—a mere matter of theologoumena—to an age which requires anticipation in this world to give body to the expectation of the consummation.

We must learn to regard the finished work of Christ, not as the condition of God's forgiveness in the consummation, but as an act of God's forgiveness in history, which anticipates his graciousness in the consummation. The work of Christ in history, as is evident in the Gospels, is not to be seen as changing God and thereby affecting the consummation, but as declaratory, coming from God and therefore stamped with the shape of the consummation. The work

of Christ as a historical act of forgiveness whereby God enters into the event of reconciliation is the presupposition of justification as the historical occasion when the reconciliation is accomplished for the individual; both are anticipation.

The incarnation means, not that God uses a historical event to accomplish a transhistorical purpose, but that he has acted in history. We may not reject the implication that his act of forgiveness in history is finite. It is identified with a quite specific chain of historical events, including the anticipatory experience of Israel and the church's remembrance and proclamation; and there are parts of history with which it has no direct contact. It is bounded by the limits of the history of Israel, the life and ministry of Christ, and the church's proclamation in history.

On the other hand, the incarnation, with its preceding and succeeding historical ramifications, is indeed *the* definitive anticipation in history of a consummation in which all things shall finally be summed up in Christ (Eph. 1: 10). It is not possible to maintain that Christ's universal sway is fully realized now, although it is in principle established. He has sat down at God's right hand (Heb. 1: 3); he has inherited his title (Heb. 1: 4); but he has only been designated "heir of all things" (Heb. 1: 2)—he has not yet actually inherited them all. Precisely because he is heir of all things, we must not exclude from his inheritance everything which does not participate in a certain way in the particular chain of historical events of which his incarnation is the center.

This should have implications for the consideration of non-Christian religions in Christian theology; but here it interests us as the key to understanding the last-chance character of Jesus' message. Forgiveness is an event, not an attribute or policy of God. To speak of a literally infinite patience in regard to any particular forgiveness would dehistorize it. The historical opportunity of repentance and forgiveness that Jesus proclaimed must be seen as terminated by death, the individual's exit from history, and by the end of all history. Had Jesus proclaimed an indefinite series of chances instead of one urgent offer of forgiveness, he would have been proclaiming an attribute or policy of God instead of an event.

Because forgiveness is an event, it must be accepted while it is being offered. We have no right to presume that it is not the last chance. But to assert definitely that the forgiveness that Jesus

offers in history is absolutely the last chance or the only chance for men, is to overlook its finite, anticipatory character and attribute to it the absolute universality of the consummation. Christ's incarnation is a unique event, but not in quite the same way as that in which his second coming is unique.

What is at issue here is whether the finished work of Christ is to be regarded as the event in which God has fully committed himself in his relationship with men, or as the keystone or operative part in a "plan of salvation." Because the Christian life and the Christian hope are both founded on what God has already done in Christ, the Christian hope must be freed from a legalistic relation to the finished work of Christ if it is to be freed from a legalistic relation to the Christian life. Our hope is in God and not in a plan of salvation.