

#### XIV. - Universalism.

And this Gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness all full; and then shall the end come. MATTH. 24:14.

The peculiar mark on our time has been left, firstly, by the surprising power which man has acquired over Nature, secondly, by the admirable extension of our knowledge, but also, as we saw, thirdly, by the almost miraculous appearance of ever new means of connection and traffic, through which gradually the whole world, with all lands and peoples, has been incorporated into the one great complex of man's dominion. The latter was also to impair the flowering of religious life, the flowering of the Christian religion, and thus the recognition of the Kingship of Christ. We now add that the faster traffic gave greater mobility to life, broke the silence of the Sabbath, caused church attendance to decline, and for those who became acquainted with the countries of Islam and with the peoples of paganism, led to a comparison of our Christian religion with these false religions, This led to a comparison of our Christian religion with these false religions, which resulted in the complete contradiction being reduced to a relative difference, in Christianity and all other religions being regarded as only partially different manifestations of the one religious idea, and finally, albeit in a much smaller circle, in praising these other religions as superior to Christianity. In the so-called religious world congresses this view has been expressed in a way that is offensive to Christians. The priests of Buddha were not guilty of grandstanding when they professed to have found more love for Buddhism in the Christian world than for Christ in the land of Buddha. Persians thirsted to assure that their Sufism spoke to modern Europe, while conversely virtually no Persian Christian is found in Persia. And how Islam is often exalted above the Gospel by baptized Christians, everyone heard who listened to our colonial magnates or to English rulers in the East Indies and Egypt. This reversal has understandably aroused annoyance among the faithful professors of Christ's kingship, and on this point, too, the question should be seriously considered whether this inclusion of the whole world in our human development is to be judged as something to be deplored from a Christian point of view, or whether it should be applauded as a characteristic of the Christian religion itself, in such a way that not the fact itself, but only the misuse made of it, is to be condemned.

This question, too, must be keenly examined. Without clearly understanding the relation in which the Christian religion places itself to this enclosure of the whole world in the sphere of our human action by virtue of the Scriptures themselves, the

professed believer in the Christian religion is powerless in the face of the religious destruction also wrought by this new order of things. We see the material interests of the people taking first place. The so-called world power begins to suppress all specific national life. A cosmopolitan condition is developing that leaves no room for the true patriotic feeling for the native soil. Even the power of the historical languages of the country is being crushed by a mechanically deployed world language. All that is special and peculiar dissolves into the general and common to all peoples. The core and spirit that lies precisely in the special life is weakened and lost. And all over the world a circle of modern life is forming, presenting itself under the honorific name of civilization and humanity, in order to fundamentally renounce all religion, but especially the Christian religion. Already this movement under the name of anticlericalism has developed quite strongly in most countries of Europe. This anticlericalism is developing in Italy and Spain, in France and Austria, in Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands, with the aim of pushing back Christianity. And finally, all this amounts to an ever more determined, ever more hostile attempt to destroy the kingship of Christ.

In its deepest sense, there is no other opposition than that between the God of Israel and the idols. Nowhere in Scripture is there the slightest trace of the idea that the Jehovah of the fathers was higher than the other gods, but that the idols were also to be honored as real gods, albeit of lower rank. There is no mention in Scripture of a comparative value between the idols of the heathen and the one true God of Israel. The conviction is always expressed that there is only one God, and that everything that attempts to exalt itself as a god apart from or in opposition to Jehovah must be counted as idols and rejected as such. It is neither disputed nor denied that there is something common to all religions, but this is explained not from the fact that idolatry has a relative right, but quite differently from the double fact, firstly, that God Himself put into our human nature the *semen religionis*, i.e., a religious seed, and secondly, that from paradise the whole of our human race took certain religious deliveries with it. It is always the work of God that is referred to, what God put in man by virtue of his creation in the image of God, and what God had revealed to man before and immediately after the fall. On the other hand, idolatry is never seen in any other light than that of a lie. It is pseudo-religion, i.e., false religion, and it robs the living God of the honor which is His alone. All idolatry is therefore destined to be destroyed and eradicated, and the end must be that all idols fall and, finally, that only the King, anointed of God, takes dominion over the spirits.

Thus, the fundamental opposition between God and the idols is necessarily transferred to the opposition between the Christian religion and the false religions, and, taken more deeply, between Christ, as the God-anointed King, and the unholy spirits that were able to conquer the dominion of the nations. Thus, idolatry appears in its demonic character. It is the unholy spirit that has taken up residence in these religions, and it is only the Jewish and Mohammedan religions that hold fast, albeit with much dilution, to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The question whether these heathen religions do not also contain certain germs of truth, does not add or detract from this. Likewise, in the most wretched criminal you sometimes discover traits of character that take you in. All this emerges from what God has implanted in human nature and in no way excuses the crime of the criminal or the unholy spirit that spoke in these idolatries. Moreover, a distinction must be made between the philosophical ideas that developed in the heathen country, and which in many cases blended with the idolatrous religion, and the idolatrous worship itself, which is governed by a spirit of its own. The essence of idolatry is a surrender of man in the wrong sense, as the Apostle tells us; hence it always ended up in doing things that are not right, and in giving to these things a holy appearance. Basically, therefore, in all idolatry there is a satanic motive. Just as Satan himself emancipated himself from the living God and set himself up as the false ruler of the world, so he wants false gods to arise everywhere in order to dispute his power, majesty and honor; and precisely because not one idol, but numerous idols were set up everywhere, Satan retained the power of unity and he applies the "divide and rule".

From this, however, follows for the Christian religion what has been called its universalism. Only this has been misunderstood in so far that theologians have interpreted it almost exclusively in opposition to the particularism of the Jews in the days of the Apostles. One is familiar with the dispute conducted by Paul, especially against those Christians among the Jews who judged that in order to become Christians, one had to be circumcised and keep the Law of Moses. Those who held this view locked the Christian religion into Judaism, considered that Christianity should enter the world as a Jewish religion, that Judaism should penetrate the world in order to incorporate many Gentiles into its people, and thus that, as Israelite in origin, it was destined to remain Israelite and national Jewish throughout its further course. This is the particularism, the conception of Christianity as a special Jewish religion. Paul stated on the other hand that Christianity had to break the ties of the special national Jewish life; that it was not

those born of Abraham who constituted the true Israel, but those who believed in Christ; and that this spiritual Israel should not be attached to the one Jewish nation, but should include all the nations of the earth. The Christian religion was never Jewish, even though it arose from Israel; it was the religion of mankind, it had a general human character, it aimed to win the whole of our human race, the whole of mankind to the Christ, and thus to be the religion of the world in its own sense, without any national limitation. This is what has been called universalism, which in principle was diametrically opposed to Jewish particularism.

This view was not a particular one of Paul's, but was taken from the heart of the Old Testament, which is why he constantly refers to the Old Testament. It was always preached in the Old Covenant, that Jehovah is not the national particular God of Israel, but from Zion controls all peoples and all nations. Not the small inheritance of Israel, but the whole world is the bearer of His rule. He rules not only over the Jewish people in a special sense, but also in a general sense over all the nations of the earth. He is the King of kings, the Lord of lords, and all peoples are his property and subject to his divine power and rule. The keynote of the Old Covenant is and always will be: "Give God, all the earth. All the earth hath worshipped thee, and hath praised thee, and hath praised thy name. He ruleth with his might forever; his eyes are upon the heathen. Praise be to all the nations our God, and let the voice of His glory be heard. (Psalm 66: 1-8). Or another time: "That thy way may be known upon the earth, thy salvation among all the heathen. The nations shall praise thee, O God, the nations all too time shall praise thee. The nations shall rejoice and be glad, because thou shalt judge all nations, and the nations of the earth thou shalt lead" (Psalm 67:3-5). And elsewhere: "The Lord reigns, that the nations tremble. The Lord is great in Zion and He is high above all nations. Thou whole earth rejoice unto the Lord". (Psalm 99:1, 2, and 100:1). And when "the kings of the earth and the nations of the heathen rise up against God and His anointed King, saying: Let us tear their bands and cast their ropes from us, then He that dwelleth in heaven shall laugh, He shall mock them, and shall speak in His wrath, Surely I have anointed my King over Zion, the mountain of my holiness," and it is shouted to the kings of nations and peoples: "Now then, ye kings, act wisely, be disciplined, ye judges of the earth. Kiss the Son, lest He anger you, and you perish in the way" (Psalm 2). And to make it clear that what is meant here is not the earthly dominion of Israel over the nations, but the dominion of Christ as our King over all nations and peoples, the Holy Spirit declares in the same Old Covenant that Lo-ammi will become Ammi, i.e. that God will call nations that

were not His people to become His spiritual people, spiritual Israel, and this with the temporary rejection of fleshly Israel.

When the Christ appeared, immediately after his birth Simeon confessed him in the temple as being, in the first place, "a light for the enlightenment of the Gentiles", and Jesus himself in his preaching concurred fully with this. He was the good Shepherd not only of the sheepfold of Israel, no, He had other sheep which were not of this stable, and He had to bring them also. And what is much more, when he was about to part with his disciples, he pronounced that they should be his witnesses "not only in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, but to the uttermost parts of the earth," partly by their spoken word, partly by their written word and by the after-effects of their preaching. Jesus explicitly declared in the Baptismal Commandment: "Go ye and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost". And already beforehand he had said that "his Gospel should be preached to the whole world, for a witness to all nations", and that then the end would come. (Matt. 24:14). When he ascended into heaven and sat down at God's right hand, God highly exalted him, "so that all the knees of those in heaven, on earth and under the earth, may bow in the name of Jesus, and so that all tongues may confess that Jesus is the Christ, for the glory of God the Father. In the revelations of Pathmos, therefore, the song of praise is sung by all, "those who have been bought by the blood of the Lamb, from all nations, peoples and tongues", and it is God's anointed King who is glorified as the King of all kings, and the Lord of all lords.

Herein lies something much higher than Universalism, which protests against the narrow-minded view that the Christ is only the Messiah of the Jews. Therein lies the great, the powerful, the all-embracing idea that the world, to the uttermost ends of the earth, including all peoples and nations, constitutes one and the same human race; that the whole of this world must be drawn together in the same bond of life; and that it is our entire human race which God is calling upon in His anointed King to fulfill our high destiny. In order to grasp the very far-reaching scope of this thought, you have to imagine how the world was conceived in Jesus' day. When we read in Luke 2 that a commandment went out from Emperor Augustus that the whole world should be described, this refers only to a very small part of Africa, a somewhat larger part of Asia, and not even half of present-day Europe. This is how far the reign of Rome's emperor extended, and the empire of the Roman emperor was taken for the whole world. People did have a vague notion that barbarians also lived or roamed outside the borders of that empire, but they did not count. They

formed the wilderness of the peoples that surrounded the empire at its borders. There was no knowledge of a unity of all mankind, no idea of an all-encompassing human race. The world, as we know and understand it, sank into mystery. And "the world" was only called that small part of our earth which was subject to the scepter of Rome's emperor.

It is precisely because of this that it is so important that Scripture should always have in view the unity of the whole human race. Jesus tells us that His Gospel is to be taken not only to the peoples of the Roman Empire, but to "all nations", and that His Kingdom is to be extended to "the ends of the earth". Thus, Jesus rejects the narrow view, as if the empire of Rome's emperor were the whole world, and opposes it with his empire, which will extend far beyond the borders of that Roman empire to all peoples, yes, to the uttermost ends of the earth. Thus, it is only here that the cosmopolitan idea emerges, that grandiose idea of the world which is now in the process of being realized. And it is in this light that we must understand it when it is testified to us in the Gospel of John that God so loved "the world" that He gave it His only begotten Son for its salvation; or what is testified to us in the Epistle of John, that the Christ is an atonement "not only for our sin, but for the sin of the whole world. And that the Apostle Paul saw and understood this with perfect clarity is evident from what he wrote in Col. 3: 4, that there is "in Christ no Jew and Greek, Barbarian and Scyth, but that it is Christ all in all". It is precisely by the name of Barbarian and Scyth that he meant those groups of remote or wandering peoples who were to complete the concept of humanity as a whole. In connection with this, it is of great significance that the Scriptures of the Old Testament teach us that the whole human race originated from one human couple; that after the Flood it was divided into three families; that after this the peoples were divided at Babylon; and that they even present us with tables of families, in order to show the unity of all nations in the progenitor of the whole human race. \*

There is thus no question of the inclusion, by means of rapid connection and better transportation, of all parts of the earth and of all peoples and nations in one comprehensive human action, going against the basic idea of Christianity, and should be regretted by us Christians. That this all-embracing development of our human life has also been and is being misused, and is now increasingly turning against Christianity in no small measure, cannot be denied, but it must never lead us astray. On the contrary, the incorporation of the whole world into a single context and into a single traffic on earth is the realization of an idea which, although alien to Paganism, arose from the Christian root, and is most intimately

connected with the confession of true modernity and of Christ as the King of the world. When this powerful idea had not yet arisen outside Israel, and was rather thwarted by the idolatrous division of the peoples, the awareness of the unity of our human race had already germinated in Israel to the very ends of the earth; And in so far as it was still oppressed by national narrow-mindedness in Israel, especially after the Maccabees, it was brought to the fore by no one less than Christ Himself as the glorious idea of unity that was to lead the peoples, as surely as it could. The conception of the whole world, of our human race, and thus also of all nations, peoples and tongues, as one inseparable organic whole called into being by God, and thus also the calling to express this unity of our human race through connection and intercourse, is a fundamentally Christian idea, and one that would never have been realized without Christianity. Far from deploring the mighty events that led up to it, because of its dark side, it suits us to greet this turn in the history of this world with joy, and to see in it a reversal of events that could not fail to occur if the Kingship of Christ were to unfold in its full splendor. That we, Christians, are not ready to take full advantage of this at once, that this reversal overwhelmed and divided us and thus found us powerless, we have to lament before God as our own fault. Wailing is of no avail here. Only repentance within ourselves and an awakening of Christian energy can be the medicine that promises better days. Even the mission, which in this context has already accomplished such a great task, but which, compared to its high calling, is still too absorbed in the limited and small, it adds to its calling to reconsider. But above all, this self-examination adds to the need of the Christian churches in our European and American States to return to Christ as their God-anointed King, so that the Church which sends out its Mission to the foreign peoples is not itself flooded with heathen ideas, loses its influence over its own people, and is not ashamed when Buddhists or Mohamedans from a distant land come to see Christ's Church in the midst of the Christian nations.