

PHENOMENOLOGY OF UNIVERSAL BENEVOLENCE

One of the questions which arises in discussing the dynamics of Sanctification is how to separate one pole from the rest in order to deal adequately with it. Perhaps a way to come at this is to see that you have the world or life which just comes at you; then a way in which you go toward life; and a relationship in the midst of life. Perhaps this is what Universal Benevolence is seeing that life as it comes to you is not maudlin, but benevolent or that life is good. Next there is Radical Integrity, or seeing that you are God's friend and that you pick up your life and live it out in this universe which crushes you. The relationship that you take to yourself is in terms of Endless Felicity or you see that this is the only life you are ever going to have on your hands to live in; and that this life you have and these relationships here are your fulfillment. And in that sense, you can dare to assume a relationship to that which crushes you and that you give yourself to. Actually, that is not sanctification at all; that is, sanctification is the indicative underneath that dynamic.

UNIVERSAL BENEVOLENCE				
Phenom. Intro. Cata. (3) Form. Cata.	EXTERNAL OCCASION (Event)	RADICAL INTERIORISATION (Process)	SPIRITUAL TEMPTATIONS (Escape)	WRESTLING THE EXISTENTIAL Q. (Resolve)
SANCTIFICATION	Beyond Justification	The Holy Life	Fight Against God	Indicative (Sovereignty of God)
IMPOSED DOMINION	Always Crushed	My Life Total Relationship	My Acts Are Inconsequential	Nature of Your Election
IMPOSSIBLE OBLIGATION	Completely Defeated	Respons'ity For Past & Future	My Models Are Inadequate	Continued Struggle
BOUNDLESS CARING	Ceaseless Pain	Living On Behalf of All	I Am Insignificant	Final End of Non-Our Destiny

I think we will find it helpful, in dealing with Universal Benevolence, to pull its dynamics of Imposed Dominion, Impossible Obligation and Boundless Caring through the phenomenological categories of 1) The External Occasion, or event; 2) The Radical Interiorization, or the dynamical process of on-goingness; 3) The Spiritual Temptations, or one's efforts to escape from that which has taken place, and 4) the Wrestling with the Existential Question, or perhaps it is more like the outcome or resolve of that struggle.

When you talk about sanctification, the very least you can say is that it is something beyond justification. Another way to talk about it is that it is beyond paragraph 15 of Tillich; or that the grace event has struck, and now the power of grace has enabled you to look into the eyes of another and to receive yourself; or to see that life, while it is always risk, is always that which is brought into unity by grace; that is, grace always conquers sin in the midst of life. Then what does it mean to live out of the power of that experience or that Word? It is beyond good and evil.

It is beyond morality. It is human life you are talking about here, and it is human life which is always lived out in terms of the transformation. It is an event.

In order to get at this, I'd want to talk about the holy life -- to see that there is always a Christ Event striking me in my life. I go this direction and I am hit, knocked on the back, and life is made new. I get up, move out, and then, "bang," I am hit again, and I go in another direction. If I begin to look back at my life, I see that what has happened is that these Christ events have come, and without them I would never know who I am. It has always been this "slap" which has given me the permission to have the self-consciousness and new decision to pick up my life. That is who I am. At first, it just comes as "wham! wham! wham!" with breath in between. But, as I begin to realize that that is my life, I experience the "well springs from on high" that spring up from your deeps. And that is where life is! Or that is the sea of grace, if you want to say it another way. I did not even know it was there. It is something wholly absurd. It is only when you fall into the abyss, that you even begin to have a hint it was there. The sanctified life, or the holy life, is where you begin to talk about growth in grace. In one sense there is not any growth here; it just always comes as that. What is the growth of living out of this life in this sea of grace? It is the life of the spirit.

Once one has stepped here life becomes fragile. Everything you see, touch, or feel becomes utterly filled with significance. When you begin to talk about your experience it is not as if you have to have another jolt to get clear about this. It is as if you could be thinking as you walk down the street and a leaf silently falls off a tree and your life happens all over again. It is not that somebody has to run over you with a truck or say something awful to you. It is as though the door slams a little louder than usual and your whole being is jarred inside. Your toenails "shatter" in the process.

In the midst of this holy life, there is always the Spirit Temptation or escape. I would like to have had time to put those out in terms of certain kinds of responses of the stoic and the gnostic. Here, you are dealing with apostasy. What I mean by that is that this is not what we call in the God Lecture "floating" or "hiding." This lucidity is beyond this. It is seeing to the bottom, and responding, "No!" or "I deny!" It is my war with God. I put shields in between myself and that which drives in upon my life; I am clear about that which drives in upon my life and I just will not have it. I will find some way to get my life out where that will not happen to me. Wesley used to say that between justification and sanctification he lost more people to the devil than ever he did before justification. He had a great passage about people who would come struggling in life, get justified, go out and make a lot of money, and then fall off the wagon and just quit; they would pull out of life. A colleague has a great story about a fellow who went to one of the seminars down in Austin, Texas, and he did just great, coming alive during the Tillich seminar. After it was over, he ran upstairs and came back down with his bags packed. He was going out the front door, when the pedagogue said, "What's wrong? What the matter?" He replied, "Nothing. Nothing." The pedagogue asked, "Why are you leaving?" He said, Well, I had waited all my life to hear that 'you are accepted' and now that I've heard it, I'm leaving!" Once you get clear can you just go out? No! It is dangerous.

After that you always are clear that you live out of the indicative. There is nothing left except the indicative, or, to use the classical theological term, there is the sovereignty of God over life. Sanctification is the living struggle with the way life is, or it is the living struggle of the way life is. Life is always this self-conscious struggle, creation. All is relative and all is good. When you see that this is the way life is, you see that your neurotic anxieties are never going to be a summation of what life is about. You see that the relationship you take to this is not going to be the summation of what life is all about. Your world gets pushed out in terms of the indicative. That happens in the midst of this struggle with self-consciousness, and you see that you are your own creativity in response to everything that is. Ever after this you are always living before the indicative. And then, it begins to make sense how you would say, "Not my will -- not my petty little crummy will -- but Thine be done." That "ever-after-that" is sanctification, not my will, but Thine be done.

Let us deal with Imposed Dominion. It seems to me that it is stories that get hold of what is going on in this situation. I will tell the story under the label of "Always Crushed" but it is not an innocence. I once taught a Bonhoeffer seminar that went especially well. I was rather ecstatic over myself, and I went into my room. The crowd had broken in this beautiful place where we were teaching. As I looked out the window, I saw the lake and autumn leaves were fluttering down. I thought about my son. I thought it would be good to think about my son. In many ways I am very proud of my son. But then I remembered a discussion I once had with a doctor who told me, "Your son almost went deaf because of your neglect. You thought he was just not listening to you, but he had this infection in his head, and something is beginning to go wrong. I reflected that I never had had but one or two

serious conversations with my son. You could see somebody had pulled the plug out of the drain, and I was going down. It was not just my son, but I began to remember all those young fellows I had known all over the world, the inadequate relationship that I had had there. And it was not only them, but all of creation that I had just failed with. It was like being at the bottom of a coal bin. Have you ever been in one of those old coal bins where they pour the coal down? At first it is just one chunk of coal, then it is two, three, five, ten, twenty-five, a thousand, and you are all covered up; you cannot move; you are weak; pinned to the floor in the midst of the world -- Imposed Dominion.

I want to talk about something that happened while I was there. Not that the coal gets moved off you or the crane gets lifted, but while you are crushed down there, something takes place. There you are lying pinned down and from this perspective you begin to see something you have never seen before in your life. It is not a seeing, it is a depth experience of being crushed. And you have always seen that in moralistic terms before. Now, that is changed, and you are thrown out to see that being crushed here. Or you see that, finally, your life is mortal. This shaft that has come in and impaled you is not meant to be the evil, but it is the good. That is absurd! You see that all those things which pinned you are really one -- just one. And that one you can dare to name G-O-D. God does love me, and what that brings with it is the absurdity of seeing that my weakness, my crushedness, is the Might of God. That it is for the sake of all creation; that it is pleasing; that my life in that particular situation is good. And forever after that, if you want to name your souvenir, you are humiliated. Forever after if somebody goes by you in a hallway and talks the wrong way you feel like crawling under the bed. But at the same time. there is intense love. I am loved by this shaft that has impaled me; therefore it is love that I have for that shaft, for without that I would never have come to this. I would never have seen the crushedness that I always am, as the treasure of the universe. There is love for that, not an emotional love, or feeling good but an embracing, decisional love. I am always under the rock, and what I discover is that this is my I AM. This is who I be.

In the midst of that, there is always the wanting to get out. The way that experientially comes is that I begin to depreciate the world that is on me. My acts are inconsequential, or again, this cannot be that important, it really can't! Did you ever run into yourself that way? You are somebody else, and you can see what it is -- it is crushed. You find yourself thinking that anything crucial is what has already happened or what will occur in the next few years, or in another situation, like remembering when you were a teenager, and people used to say to you, "It is a phase you are going through". Life is finally inconsequential; my acts really count for nothing, all I have to do is just lay here and quietly whimper. And that is a drawn-out option for me in that situation; to find a way to whimper about my poor relationship with my son, or the fact that I had some poor experiences with certain kinds of human beings, in certain places. But in the midst of this is the glory and in the midst of that there is a wanting to get out of that dynamic.

The nature of your election, you see, is to be always crushed, always to behold that that is the love of God in your life; and to love that, yet always want to escape from it. The nature of your election is that there is no escape. You could not get off if you wanted to. The nature of your election is always to receive that shaft, when it comes in your life, and to embrace it. Every day, when I drove into Kuala Lumpur, during my stay in SEAPAC, I would see an old Chinese man carrying a long pole with burdens hanging on each side. Now, if you walk just the right way with those things they do not hurt, but if you take a wrong step then your back can be broken for those things come down really hard if you get out of rhythm with them. I used to watch that old man go down the road, always on schedule. He had a little white wispy beard and was all bent over. One morning while caught in a traffic jam, I looked off the side of the road, and by one of the little cold drink stands stood the old man. He had taken his burden off and was having a drink. I got to see the shape of the old man's shoulders. His shoulder blades through the years had been bent down so there was a deep, deep crevasse from that pole, bouncing, bouncing, bouncing; the bones had curved deeply into his body. That is what I want to point to here. Imposed Dominion comes and you meet it and that scab, that scar, is being shaped.

That may be what you mean by Perfection. Perfection does not have anything to do, in the first instance, with your neurotic propensities or wrestling, or with the meeting of that weight, the scab of the curvature, or how your shape is changed. Your whole life is shaped by the love of God, and then you see how that scar, or that shape or that gnarledness is perfection from God. It is trusting that all that comes, forever after that, is from God and not from anything else. This was sociologically manifested by Trudeau. When he got whipped over there in Canada, he made a statement, quoting from Hammerskjold, (from Hammerskjold it goes back to Paul) that everything that happens works together for good. He wasn't clear about what was going on then, but he trusted that whatever

would go on in the universe would go on for the good. That is not something remote or abstract in terms of experience of our world. That is a sociological reality.

Then you find thrust upon you an Impossible Obligation. I was walking down the street one day in India during the International Training Institute. We had worked hard on social methodology that week, teaching 5th City, doing the theoretical and social methodologies, and we had taken the group out to look at the city. We would usually pick a pretty bad part of town. I was walking down that street, seeing millions of people in a block. You see more people there just by walking through four city blocks than you see in a year around here. It became clear to me that those great 5th City social models -- we would have to build a million of, if anything in history was going to be impacted. I felt like a little bitty speck. How in the world could anybody get up and audaciously say that he was going to transform the world! I had got off the bus where I had had pointed out the great glories of Fifth City in a discussion with somebody. All of a sudden, it was as if all the power of my life was seeping out. I had to go into one of those little shops and have a cup of coffee. Life is just impotent! I wanted to call up and ask if I could just come home. Could you retire me to Pago Pago, right now. All those great models -- impotent! You are Atlas undone. You had the world on your back and you knew it was heavy, but now, you are just undone.

But then in the midst of that doom of being completely defeated, the responsibility comes. Or, what you get kicked out to see is that that comes only out of the I AM RESPONSIBLE. You never know that apart from Impossible Obligation-that is the expression of I AM RESPONSIBLE, and that I AM RESPONSIBLE has been transformed, because now it is beyond my impotency. I mean before, I was responsible because I could get a job done. Now I am responsible beyond my being just the impotent character I am. Ever after that, you are "whipped." You know what it means to get beat. At the same time, joy, joy inextinguishable. I AM RESPONSIBLE for all that has gone on before and all that is going to be going on in the future, as well as for that which goes on now. How does this strange "I am responsible" come? I remember sitting in a restaurant some time after the earlier incident and there wee this very dignified middle-aged lady waiting on our table. This lady's slip was showing, and I tell you could not concentrate on the menu because I was so bothered. I saw people chuckling in their groups in the restaurant. She was so busy she did not have time to notice. How could I tell this lady nicely that her slip was showing? Anything that happens -- I am responsible. Whipped! It becomes strange; whipped -- and yet, at the same time, there is inextinguishable joy. I am responsible.

In the midst of that, you want out. You want to leave. You rationalize, I can't do it at all; or, I can see I can do it, but I won't. There is real struggle here. The rebellion that comes is that you find you can't be responsible. It is always in the middle of this, never outside.

What comes out of that is the continuing struggle. Your life from then on is never a respite from struggle. It is continual, there is no final blotting out of what you have seen in life. There is only creating a model, and pushing that model into history. Now I want to manifest this sociologically. We went into a mayor's office in India, because he was the only one who had a map of the city. It was beautifully done and he was so pleased. He got his map down and showed us the city. I don't imagine very many people get to see it. He knew every dog tunnel in that town, and he proceeded to trace every part of it. We discovered it was a town that was just enmeshed by its poor sewer system. You can imagine what the health problem had been like for years and years. The whole town was collapsing, the agriculture had not been handled well, industry had moved further up the road. Things were not going well at all. Yet here was this little old man, the mayor, just loving that map. He could recite every statistic and problem of the town But he did not have a model. He did not even know where to begin to reformulate the city. One day he had forty men go to the main part of the town and pick up the cow dung off the street -- which was immediately replaced in the next fifteen minutes. Oh, the continual struggle to build a model and push it to creativity, continually struggling as the responsible one. After that you never are out to be responsible, you are responsible. The struggle is as the responsible one.

Boundless Caring is an experience. It is ceaseless pain. I took a trip in from where we were to Perth with Aboriginal people. We were driving to a summer program to get the leadership trained. We decided to stop at every Aboriginal village or rural spot along the way, to tell the good news to the Aboriginal people about what was taking place. Ceaseless Pain. The first few stops were delightful, as they gathered around the car. But at the next couple of spots, you noticed that all the little children had runny noses and they smelled bad. Those huts they lived in were just shambles. People were like animals. First I felt sorry. Then, I got angry at what other people had done to them. Then I got angry at the people themselves living that way. Finally, as I got closer to Perth, I found myself just wanting to stay in the car. On one occasion I made excuses, dropped the Aboriginal people off, stayed in the

car, and went on into town and got a cup of coffee. As I sat there I began to get hold of what was going on there. I was angry at the world; I was angry at white Australia; I was angry at the black Australians. I was angry at my wife because she had not gone on the trip. In the midst of that anger there came a numbness. I didn't care to listen to music, talk to anybody, drink coffee, anything -- just sit there and be numb.

In the midst of that numbness, I began to realize that I cared. My whole life has just been care. Once I saw that, I saw that my life was never for anything else but for the sake of all other men. I care. My anger is God beckoning me to come and join his creation. My anger is part of God's love. The question that comes is, where is it that you need to go and thrust that anger? You spend the rest of your life being mad, and in the midst of being mad, being confident.

But in the midst of that there is always the apostasy -- that you are insignificant. There is a cynicism towards your fate, After all, in the end, everybody gets a six-foot hole so what is all this wrestling and struggling about anyway? You can not really finally solve it. That is when it comes to you that you can just put up with anything. You turn to a rebellion that says, "I'll just find one thing to howl about, and I'll spend the rest of my life howling about it." And that is always in the midst of that interiorization; it is not apart from it.

Lastly, the final end of man is your destiny. Life never takes "no" for an answer. It just keeps coming at you; it never lets you off the hook. In that dynamic you see your whole life as cruciformity. In one sense, you didn't choose it, it chose you. In cruciformity, you are like a bird barely able to walk. You flap your wings and a rock crushes you. Whether you stay there and let it squeeze you or whether you try to lift it up, it crushes you. But there is a whole world between lying there and letting it squeeze you out, or flapping your wings and lifting it three inches off the ground. I like the story of the bird that flew down to catch a little fish for breakfast, dug into a whale and under he went. It is in that setting your shoulder and letting the rock bear down upon your shoulder blades, or putting the scar on your life. That is where spirit is squeezed out and blesses the world. It is not my blessing, it is God's blessing on the world. Look at Anthony, for example. When people said they could not do anything, that they were just frozen in their tracks, and life was not meaningful any more, Anthony went out on the desert. Nobody would go there because that was where you went to die. He lived in a graveyard in the desert off nothing, and he flung a 400 pound rock around his neck. It sounds absurd. He dragged that around, and he gave spirit to an age. That is sanctification. You see that all that God loves, he crushes. And what he destroys, he gives back anew. Though I descend to the depths of hell, lo, he is there. God, and nothing else. That is to see that life is universally benevolent.

