

THE HISTORY OF CONDITIONALISM ¹

ALFRED-FÉLIX VAUCHER

Séminaire Adventiste du Salève,
Collonges-sous-Salève (Haute-Savoie), France

The first chapters of Genesis present us with two contradictory declarations. In ch. 2 : 16, 17, God gives a commandment to Adam; in case of disobedience the penalty would be: "Thou shalt surely die," a threat later recalled by Eve (ch. 3 : 3). Our first parents were to abstain from the forbidden fruit under pain of death. To this ominous word is opposed the false promise of Satan: "Thou shalt not surely die" (ch. 3 : 4).

From that moment these two doctrines have not ceased battle. One affirms that man possesses in himself, by his very nature, an incorruptible principle that assures him of immortality, whatever his relation with God may be. Advanced by brilliant philosophers, this doctrine ultimately infiltrated into the teaching of the Christian church. The other doctrine makes immortality depend upon the communion of the creature with his Creator and his obedience to divine law. This latter teaching is based on biblical revelation; it has maintained itself throughout the centuries and in our day has made remarkable advances.

LeRoy Edwin Froom, Professor Emeritus of Historical Theology at Andrews University, has undertaken to set forth the vicissitudes of this biblical truth. *The Conditionalist Faith of Our Fathers, the Conflict of the Ages Over the Nature and Destiny of Man* is the title of this monumental work, of which Volume II has just appeared. Its sub-title is "Revival

¹ A book review of LeRoy Edwin Froom, *The Conditionalist Faith of Our Fathers, the Conflict of the Ages Over the Nature and Destiny of Man* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1965), vol. II, 1344 pages.

and Restoration of Trampled Conditionalism (A.D. 600 to 1963).”

It is difficult to appreciate the real value of a work when its first part has not yet seen the light of day. Here we shall concern ourselves only with what is suggested by a reading of Volume II, which thus far is all that has appeared. This volume is the fruit of long labor recounted by the author in a pamphlet, *Finding the Lost Conditionalist Witnesses*.²

Froom has already shown vast erudition in his main previous work, *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers* (Washington, 1946-54), 4 vols. Here again he offers extremely rich documentation. With consummate art he has known how to use the results of his own research and that of his collaborators. He has employed documents collected in Great Britain as well as in America. The writings of the principal Conditionalist authors in the English language have been analyzed conscientiously, and their ideas have been set forth with the greatest of care. Less important authors have simply been mentioned with the titles of their writings. Eleven well constructed tables permit us to follow the development of the doctrine across the ages. The names of the protagonists of Conditionalism are given with their dates, their countries of origin, their religious affiliations, their ecclesiastical positions, and their attitudes in regard to three problems: a) the nature of the soul, b) the intermediate state, c) the fate of the wicked.

By accepting the philosophical thesis of the natural immortality of the soul, Catholic theologians have fallen into two errors: that of conscious survival after the dissolution of the physical organism, and the horrible dogma of eternal torment prepared for the wicked, concerning which someone has said that if such tortures existed it would be fitting to reserve them for the one who invented the idea and attributed it to God.

In all times there have been generous spirits incapable of

² Froom, *Finding the Lost Conditionalist Witnesses* (Washington, D.C., 1965), 32 pages.

accepting the doctrine of eternal punishment. Held, however, by their philosophical presuppositions to maintaining the idea of the immortality of the soul, they have been able to liberate themselves from this nightmare only by advancing the hypothesis of universal salvation. Thus they found themselves sacrificing the justice of God to His love, while others were sacrificing His love to His justice.

The biblical doctrine of conditional immortality re-establishes an equilibrium between these divine attributes in postulating the destruction of those beings who have set themselves definitively in a state of revolt against their Creator, who willed also to be their Saviour.

Concerning the question of the intermediate state, Conditionalists remain divided. Some have preserved the idea of a conscious survival, a view that is really inconsistent. Others have accepted the biblical but unpopular teaching of the unconsciousness of the dead. It is surprising to find how large a number of theologians in Great Britain and the United States have professed this doctrine.

In such a voluminous work we may expect to discover certain weak points. Particularly the pages devoted to the Waldenses (pp. 26-35, 44, 48) are deserving of review. While without doubt these people had forerunners, their existence cannot be proved before the 12th century. Before the Reformation, the Waldenses rejected the Catholic doctrines of purgatory and the invocation of saints, as they did not find these in the Scriptures, their rule of faith. However, when they say in their *Catechism* that one must not believe that the saints, now in possession of paradise, should be invoked, this denial bears only on the question of their invocation and not on their presence in heaven. Indeed, in his *Liber sententiarum inquisitionis tholosanae*, which is a continuation of his *Historia inquisitionis* (Amstelodami, 1692), Philippus van Limborch (1633-1712), a Dutch Reformed theologian, presents the following testimony made to an inquisitor:

The said Waldenses believe and hold that in this present life

alone there is penitence and purgation for sins, and that when the soul leaves the body, it goes either to paradise or to hell, and therefore the said Waldenses make neither prayers nor other supplications for the dead, because they say that those who are in paradise do not need them, and those who are in hell do not come forth.³

We should add that the Waldensian *Catechism*, mentioned by Froom (p. 31) as existing already in the 12th century, and the treatise on *Antichrist*, mentioned (p. 32) as existing already in 1120 (thus before Waldo), are actually of more recent date. For the *Catechism*, preserved at Dublin (Ms. 22), see Édouard Montet, professor at the University of Geneva, *Histoire littéraire des Vaudois du Piémont* (Paris, 1885, p. 175), where its Hussite origin is demonstrated. For the treatise on *Antichrist*, see *ibid.*, p. 173; this writing is taken from the *Barka* of Lucas of Prague, composed in 1491. The Waldensian recension is preserved at Geneva (Ms. 208) and was published by Jean-Paul Perrin, *Histoire des Vaudois*, II (Genève, 1618, pp. 253-295; Eng. tr., *History of the Old Waldenses* [Philadelphia, 1847], pp. 242-251); by Jean Léger, *Histoire générale des églises évangéliques des vallées de Piémont*, I (Leyde, 1669, pp. 71-83), by Samuel Morland, *The History of the Evangelical Churches of the Valleys of Piemont* (London, 1658), pp. 142-160, with an English translation, and by Antoine Monastier, *Histoire de l'église vaudoise* (Lausanne, 1847, II, 324-363). The Waldensian treatises on *Purgatory* and the *Invocation of Saints*, preserved at Geneva in the same manuscript, are likewise of Hussite origin.⁴ These texts were also published in the above-mentioned works of Perrin, Léger, Morland, and partially by Monastier.

It is entirely too optimistic to classify the Waldenses as Conditionalists (p. 63) simply because their *Catechism* defines

³ Fol. 201, paragraph 93: "Dicti Valdenses credunt et tenent quod in ista presenti vita solum sit penitencia et sit purgatorium pro peccatis, et quando anima recedit a corpore vadit ad paradysum vel ad infernum, et ex tunc dicti Valdenses non faciunt orationes nec alia suffragia pro defunctis, quia dicunt quod illi qui sunt in paradiso non indigent, et illi qui sunt in inferno non prodessent."

⁴ See Montet, *op. cit.*, pp. 169, 171.

man as a mortal creature; the truth of the matter is that the partisans of the immortality of the soul give to the word "mortal," which they regularly employ to designate man, quite another sense from that adopted by Conditionalists, in accordance with the Bible.

It would be difficult indeed to prove (p. 63) that the Waldenses professed the unconsciousness of the dead. Quite like the Catholics, the early Waldenses believed in eternal punishment, as is proved by the following passages in *The Noble Lesson*:⁵

The good will go to glory and the evil to torment (l. 21).
 Heaven and earth will burn, all the living will die,
 Then all will rise again to everlasting life (ll. 463, 464).
 "Go to the fire of hell which never will have an end;
 There you will be placed under three hard conditions:
 A multitude of punishments, violent torment,
 And damnation without remedy" (ll. 469-472).

This Waldensian poem, the composition of which Froom places (p. 32) about the year 1100, is in reality more recent. Montet is mistaken in indicating the date as the 15th century or the end of the 14th, although he was followed by Antonio De Stefano, who produced a critical edition of its text (Paris, 1909). Charles Schmidt and Alexandre Lombard have suggested the end of the 12th century; Jean Jalla, the end of the 13th. The most probable date is that proposed by Emilio Comba, the beginning of the 13th.⁶

Since the work of Froom has been destined above all for English readers, it is understandable that he has given preference to Conditionalists of Great Britain and America,

⁵ See the edition by Monastier, *op. cit.*, pp. 246-269:
 Li bon iren en gloria e li mal en torment (l. 21).
 Lo ciel e la terra ardren, e murren tuit li vivent,
 Pois rexucitarent tuit en vita permanent (ll. 463, 464).
 "Ana al foc infernel que mays non aura fin;
 "Per trey greos condicions sere constreit aqui,
 "Per moutecza de penas e per aspre torment,
 "E car sare dampna sencza defalhiment" (ll. 469-472).

⁶ Emilio Comba, *History of the Waldenses of Italy* (London, 1889), pp. 231ff.

with the one exception of the Swiss, Emmanuel Petavel-Oliff (not Oliff, as on p. 602), who has received the attention he deserves.

Another Swiss, Aloys Berthoud (1845-1932; not Bertoud, as pp. 1018, 1022, 1336), was one of the rare theologians writing in French who taught the unconsciousness of the dead at a time when this idea appeared unthinkable. His book, *L'état des morts d'après la Bible* (Lausanne, 1910, 302 pp.), contains a first part giving a critique of the opinions then dominant, a second part concerning the unconsciousness of the dead, and a third dealing with theoretical and practical results. Early in his career he had published a thesis, *La doctrine du rétablissement final est-elle dans l'évangile?* (Lausanne, 1868, 132 pp.), in which he maintained the traditional doctrine of eternal torment. Much later in an article he taught the sleep of the dead in an intermediate state. ⁷

Charles Byse (died 1925, not 1885, as p. 625), who finally became a Swedenborgian, published *Notre durée* (Paris, 1885, 70 pp.). In one of his books devoted to Swedenborg, *Le prophète du nord* (Paris, 1901), pp. 314-317, Byse showed himself a partisan of conditional immortality.

Oscar Cocorda, from the Waldensian valleys of Piedmont (mentioned pp. 419, 420, 456, 459, 610, 1337), figures in the table on p. 538 (No. 21). He must be classed among those few theologians of continental Europe who remained faithful to the biblical doctrine of the sleep of the dead. In addition to his great work on conditional immortality, which would have been useful to analyze, Cocorda published several other books. ⁸

One might add that the sleep of the dead was affirmed by the Hungarian reformer, Matyas-Biró Dévay (*ca.* 1500 - *ca.*

⁷ *Revue de théologie et de philosophie*, XIV (1926), 262-286.

⁸ *Il soggiorno dei morti secondo le Sacre Scritture* (Torre Pellice, 1883), 23 pp.; *Beffe e Calunnie contro la Dottrina della Vita in Cristo* (Torre Pellice, 1885), 42 pp.; *La résurrection de vie est-elle nécessaire au salut?* (Pignerol, 1886), 60 pp.; *La Discesa di Gesù agl' Inferni* (Venezia, 1907), 79 pp.

1545). He was author of a *Disputatio de statu in quo sint beatorum animae, post hanc vitam, ante ultimum judicii diem*; a copy of the first edition (Basel, 1535) may be found in the National Library at Vienna, and two copies of the second edition (Nuremberg, 1537) are in the possession of the university libraries of Marburg and Göttingen.

The sleep of the dead was taught by the Neapolitan historian Pietro Giannone d'Ischitello (1676-1748), a victim of the papal inquisition. In a large work of three volumes entitled *Il Triregno*, composed 1725-34 but not printed until 1895, in Rome, he shows that there is no immediate translation of the soul at the moment when the believer dies and that there is no future life without the resurrection.

The unconsciousness of the dead was also set forth by the Swiss pastor Louis Burnier (1795-1873), *Études élémentaires et progressives de la parole de Dieu* (Lausanne, 1847-1852), 7 vols.⁹

Louis Gaussen, whom Froom mentions on p. 252 with respect to premillennialism, and on p. 602 in connection with Petavel-Olliff, may be remembered almost as an apostle of the biblical doctrine concerning the state of the dead. In a thesis entitled *Louis Gaussen et l'époque du réveil* (Montauban, 1897), p. 68, F.-C. Hugon says of Gaussen: "During his studies he conceived his theory of the sleep of the dead. It is striking to see how this idea became more and more settled with this theologian."¹⁰ The library of the Theological Faculty of the Free Church of the Canton of Vaud at Lausanne possesses a manuscript of Gaussen entitled, *État des âmes après la mort*, where, among others, one reads these declarations:

The doctrines of the resurrection, of the second coming of Christ, and of the universal judgment have been killed. - The dead are

⁹ Revised edition in four volumes by Theodore Naville and James-Alfred Porret (Lyon, 1900).

¹⁰ "Pendant ses études il conçut sa théorie du sommeil des morts. Il est frappant de constater comment cette idée s'est de plus en plus affermie chez ce théologien."

always spoken of as being in a state of sleep. - The Scriptures refer all hope, all consolation, all thoughts, all recompense, all joys, all rewards of the faithful, all sufferings, all shame, all opprobrium, all tribulations, all weeping and gnashing of teeth to the day of Christ, to the day of the resurrection of the righteous when the Son of Man shall appear. ¹¹

According to a copy of an unpublished letter addressed to Adolphe Monod, February 6, 1855, he wrote: "The dead will not ascend to heaven until after the resurrection. - The dead sleep until the coming of Christ." ¹²

Presumably American readers will appreciate the presence in Froom's volume of five paintings in color by Harry Anderson and other artists. Granted its mentality, the cultivated European public will rather regret these illustrations, which one is not accustomed to see in a work of scientific interest.

One might mention in Froom's work a few rare printing errors, such as the following (p. 625): Nesmes, instead of Nîmes; Englise Cretinenne, instead of Église Chrétienne. At the same time, we are astonished that of such a voluminous work touching so many different subjects and presenting the thought of such a great number of authors, we can speak with so few reservations. Such as it is, with the imperfections inherent in every human work, which may indeed be corrected in the volume to follow, Froom's book will be of the greatest use both to theologians and to simple readers who desire an initiation into the history of theology. We await impatiently the first volume, "Origin, Development, and Penetration of Innate Immortality (900 B.C. to A.D. 600)."

¹¹ "On a tué les doctrines de la résurrection, du second avènement de Christ et du jugement universel. - Les morts sont toujours dits dans un état de sommeil. - L'Écriture ramène toutes les espérances, toutes les consolations, toutes les pensées, toutes les compensations, toutes les joies, toutes les récompenses du fidèle, toutes les douleurs, toute la honte, tout l'opprobre, toutes les tribulations, tous les pleurs et les grincements de dents à la journée de Christ, au jour de la résurrection des justes, où le Fils de l'homme paraîtra."

¹² "Les morts ne montent au ciel qu'après la résurrection. - Les morts dorment jusqu'à l'avènement de Christ."