

EVANGELICAL REVIEW OF THEOLOGY

VOLUME 23

*Articles and book reviews original and selected from
publications worldwide for an international
readership for the purpose of discerning the
obedience of faith*

EDITOR: DAVID PARKER



Published by
PATERNOSTER PERIODICALS



for
WORLD EVANGELICAL FELLOWSHIP
Theological Commission

Volume 23 • Number 3 • July 1999

Evangelical Review of Theology

ISSN: 0144-8153
Vol. 23 No. 3 July 1999

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Editor

David Parker

Committee

The Executive Committee of the WEF Theological Commission
Dr Rolf Hille, Executive Chair

Executive Director

Dr. James Stamoolis
814 W. Hawthorne Blvd. Wheaton, IL 60187 USA
Phone: +1 630 690-7082
Fax: +1 630 690-0660
E-mail: JStamoolis@cs.com

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Editorial

We hear of corporations all over the world re-focusing on their 'core values'. This may involve disposing of some superfluous parts of the business, restructuring, staff re-deployment and new initiatives in marketing. If any theme can be identified as the 'core value' of the church, it must surely be salvation. As Molly Truman Marshall states in our opening article, it is the 'most encompassing category through which to describe the partnership of God and humanity'.

In an age of flux for the Christian community as well as for businesses, governments and other institutions, there is need once more to focus on our mission and to reflect upon its nature and meaning. While the saying 'Jesus saves' is true and easily grasped by everyone, Christian salvation reflects the 'magnificently varied grace of God' ([1 Pet. 4:10](#) Phillips) which needs to be understood clearly in its many perspectives and communicated with relevance in every context. So in this issue we present a number of articles which will help this process.

The first two articles, by Molly Truman Marshall and Marvin E. Tate provide a biblical and theological survey of salvation, identifying some neglected aspects which enrich our understanding and application of the gospel. Then Rolf Hille turns to the historical development of the doctrine of reconciliation, showing the radical impact of some key 19th century philosophers and theologians. Henry Mugabe's article is a case study showing how the Christian message of salvation can be appreciated by people in their own context when it is sensitively interpreted in terms that relate to their particular culture and history.

With J. Keir Howard's article we turn to the communication of salvation. With rich experience in both medicine and theology, this author issues a serious call to think theologically about the practice and content of evangelism. This call is echoed by Stuart Pigginn who explores the unfolding of salvation in revival as a work of the Triune God.

Finally, we present an extended review of a denominational report on Salvation which provides an example of how one historic church is handling the theme today. This is a report 'which informs the reader and stimulates responses and questions about issues at the very heart of the Christian tradition'. There can hardly be any more important task today than to study and share 'the unfathomable riches of Christ' ([Eph. 3:8](#) NEB) and, like the householder of the parable, 'produce from our store both the new and the old' ([Mt. 13:52](#)).

David Parker, Editor.

The Doctrine of Salvation: Biblical-Theological Dimensions

Molly Truman Marshall

*Reprinted with permission from
Southwestern Journal of Theology Spring 1993
Vol. 35 No. 2 pp. 12-17*

Keywords: Salvation, liberation, context, gender, perseverance, church, ecology

Theological study cannot be sequestered from reality. Daily it is tested by the agonizing questions and suffering in our world. Of all theological themes, it is the doctrine of salvation which raises the question of relevance most acutely.

Perhaps you are acquainted with the story of a Christian trying to convince an ageing rabbi that the Messiah has indeed come. The rabbi, wearied with the insistence of his interlocutor, goes to the window to survey the streets he knows so well. 'The poor are still with us and the lame still hobble', he retorted. 'The Messiah has not come'. And what is our response? The pressing challenge for proclamation, teaching, and witness is a constructive interpretation of Christian soteriology for our epoch.

Salvation is the most encompassing category through which to describe the partnership of God and humanity. The hope of salvation construes the theological dynamic of both Old and New Testaments.¹ It is not an isolated theme which we study after we set forth a systematic analysis of revelation, God, creation, humanity ... the traditional order of theological *loci*. It is, rather, the interpretive matrix in which all of these cohere.

Theology cannot lay exclusive claim to a concern for salvation, however, because 'salvation is the most basic problem, the problem presupposed in all the others'² in the words of Robert Neville. All fields of life, whether educational, economic, or scientific, pursue cosmological problems whose ontological dimension is 'salvation'—attempting to establish 'the right connections and fulfillments within the world'.³

Many of us assume that we know what the Bible has to say (and certainly what Baptists *ought* to say!) about the doctrine of salvation. No doubt the earliest verses of Scripture we committed to heart were related to the universal need for redemption. Yet numerous Christians have privatistic, transactional, and anthropocentric perceptions of God's saving work, each of which ignores the compass of Scripture. The depth and breadth of the biblical witness concerning salvation has, in the words of our Pilgrim forebear John Robinson, 'yet more truth and light' to shed upon the questions posed by our time. Thus, this article will investigate dimensions of salvation as they are debated in the present theological context and seek new illumination from Scripture to guide our understanding.

THE SOCIAL LOCATION OF SALVATION

When we consider biblical and theological dimensions of salvation, we properly accentuate the commonality of all persons as sinful beings *coram Deo*.⁴ Foundational to this doctrine is the confession 'all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God'; hence, every person stands in need of the salvation of God. The journey of conversion begins with the conviction that one is estranged from his or her Creator; awakening to sin beckons repentance and the experience of forgiveness. Indeed, this movement of 'turning from' and 'turning toward' (*epistrophe*) is both past event and present necessity, requisite for all

¹ 1. *The Meaning of Salvation*, by E.M.B. Green (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1965) remains among the most comprehensive surveys of what the biblical writers understood by *yeshua* and *soteria*, the primary words for salvation.

² 2. Robert Cummings Neville, *A Theology Primer* (Albany: State University of New York, 1991), p. 75.

³ 3. *Ibid.*

⁴ 4. Certainly this is the foundational motif of Scripture, e.g., [Ps. 143:2](#); [Isa. 53:6](#); [Rom. 3:23](#); [Gal. 2:16](#). No one can stand justified before God apart from God's own gracious provision.

who would follow Christ. Yet, repentance is fraught with an inescapable particularity because salvation occurs within a social location that dictates certain dimensions of a person's *metanoia*.

We can observe this particularity in Jesus' call to discipleship: what he asks of the rich man, that he sell all and give the proceeds to the poor, is tailored to the nature of his bondage ([Mk. 10:21-22](#)). Ironically, the woman of Samaria whose trips to the well were calculated to risk the least amount of public contact is prompted toward a ministry of proclamation ([Jn. 4:28-30](#)). Rendered ritually unclean by twelve years of constant hemorrhaging, the woman of [Mark 5](#) was excluded from the religious community and considered untouchable. Her healing, remarkably, requires that she touch Jesus, violating a cruel religious and social code which only perpetuated her disease. Further, the apostle Paul, who could boast of credentials academic, religious, and familial ([Gal. 1:14](#); [Ac. 22:3](#); [2 Cor. 11:22-23](#)), experiences salvation as 'strength made perfect in weakness' ([2 Cor. 12:9](#)). The character of repentance and forgiveness is clearly determined by the gestalt of the sinner's life.

The transformation that salvation brings is described by various images in the New Testament: 'enter the kingdom of heaven' ([Matt. 7:21](#)); 'to set at liberty those who are oppressed' ([Lk. 4:18](#)); 'born anew' ([Jn. 3:3](#)); 'turn from darkness to light' ([Ac. 26:18](#)); 'free from the law of sin and death' ([Rom. 8:2](#)); 'eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord' ([Rom. 6:23](#)); 'turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God' ([1 Thess. 1:9](#)).⁵ Just as the particularity of the believer's repentance conforms to social location, so does the transformation effected by faith in Jesus Christ address the specific context in which a person experiences salvation.

It is arguable that the most significant contribution of liberation theology is its consistent emphasis on the contextual nature of soteriology. Insistently liberation theologians have called for the ecclesiastical powers of North America and Europe to realize the devastating poverty in which most persons in Central and South America live and to consider this an ineluctable theological datum. A fully biblical theology of salvation (which does not ignore texts such as [Isaiah 58](#) and [Luke 4](#)) speaks to the material—geographic, economic, relational—conditions in which one lives, not simply about 'spiritual release'. Far removed from the 'health and wealth' claims of many contemporary television preachers, liberation theology probes the exodus tradition and teachings of Jesus that demonstrate God's salvation in its varied, yet concrete expression.⁶

Legion are the people in our world groaning for liberation from suffering: in famine stricken Somalia; in tattered Bosnia; in beleaguered South Africa; and in apathetic America. Does the salvation of God redeem even these seemingly impossible circumstances? Christian faith which abandons the centrality of the cross as that which defines the life of God and of humanity can offer only glib answers which trivialize the pathos of our world in its economic, social, and political aspects (all expressions of the

⁵ 5. Particularly helpful in analysing the varied images or metaphors for conversion is Beverly Roberts Gaventa's *From Darkness to Light: Aspects of Conversion in the New Testament*. Overtures to Biblical Theology (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986).

⁶ 6. An overview of liberation theology can be gained from Alfred Hennelly, ed., *Liberation Theology: A Documentary History* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990). See also Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1973); *The Power of the Poor in History* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1984); Max L. Stackhouse, 'Public Theology, Human Rights and Mission', *Human Rights and the Global Mission of the Church* (Cambridge: Boston, Theological Institute, 1985), pp. 13-21; and Rebecca S. Chopp, *The Praxis of Suffering: An Interpretation of Liberation and Political Theologies* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1986). Sharon H. Ringe's monograph, *Biblical Jubilee: Images for Ethics and Christology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), provides a helpful analysis of the images of liberation in the proclamation of Jesus.

spiritual estrangement of humans). The cross speaks not only to the sinfulness of humanity, however; it speaks also to the victimization perpetrated by violent oppressors and God's redemptive solidarity with the suffering.⁷ It reminds us that the power of evil and death which reflects both the brokenness and finitude of the shuddering history of creation cannot eclipse the *missio Dei*.

The suffering of Christ is the fulcrum of our doctrine of salvation, but we dare not glorify his suffering as passivity or fatalism. The crucifixion of God's beloved remains the scandalous exhibition of human resistance to the nearness and radicality of God's *basileia*.

'Being saved' does not insulate the Christian from such a threatening existence. As Hebrews recounts, by faith some 'escaped the edge of the sword' (11:34) and others by faith 'were killed with the sword' (11:37). This reality notwithstanding, the faithful testimony of countless saints both ancient and contemporary is that the sustaining presence of the risen Christ has allowed them to face the particular exigencies of their lives and find hope.⁸

Receiving considerable attention in contemporary theology is the function of gender as an essential dimension of social location. Centuries of domestic and ecclesiastical abuse have made women suspicious of any version of soteriology that is silent about their marginalized existence. Rosemary Radford Ruether has argued that repentance and conversion take different forms for women and men.⁹ The 'journeys of conversion' must retrace the pathways particular to discrete expressions of sin: for men it is the sin of pride and exploitation of others, and for women it is the sin of self-abnegation and willing complicity in their oppression.

Thus, feminist theologians warn against portraying Jesus as a victim of 'divine child abuse'¹⁰ or as 'suffering servant' who does not challenge or voluntarily choose this role. Women cannot be liberated from their oppression by one whose life legitimates their continued suffering. Rather, Jesus must be viewed as 'the divine co-sufferer, who

⁷ 7. Theological study in the second half of the twentieth century is marked by sustained reflection on the significance of the suffering of God and its relationship to the suffering of humanity. The attempt to construct a viable theodicy has spurred some of these studies; others have been the fruit of a revival in trinitarian concerns. The centrality of the cross of 'the Crucified God' is a feature of both approaches. See especially the following: Jurgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974); C.S. Song, *The Compassionate God* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1982); Eberhard Jungel, *God as the Mystery of the World* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1983); Douglas John Hall, *God and Human Suffering: An Exercise in the Theology of the Cross* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Press, 1986).

⁸ 8. For a discussion of the resurrection power of God with reference to the victims of injustice, see Peter C. Hodgson, *God in History: Shapes of Freedom* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), p. 224ff.

⁹ 9. Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983), writes: 'Metanoia for women involves a turning around in which they literally discover themselves as persons, as centers of being upon which they can stand and build their own identity' (p. 186). Men must repent of their 'will to power' (Niebuhr's understanding of sin) while women must repent of their lack of self assertion and compliance with systems of abuse. Valerie Saiving, 'The Human Situation: A Feminine View', *Womanspirit Rising*, ed. Carol P. Christ and Judith Plaskow (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979), pioneered the study of the relationship between gender and understanding of sinfulness. See also the further contribution of Judith Plaskow, *Sex, Sin and Grace: Women's Experience and the Theologies of Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul Tillich* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1980).

¹⁰ 10. This jarring phrase was first coined by Alice Miller and has been further popularized by Rita Nakishima Brock in her provocative *Journeys By Heart: A Christology of Erotic Power* (New York: Crossroads Press, 1988) and Joanne Carlson Brown and Carole R. Bohn, eds. *Christianity, Patriarchy, and Abuse: A Feminist Critique* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1989). Describing Atonement as abuse, in my judgment, depends upon 'satisfaction' or 'penal substitutionary' transactional theories which ignore scriptural and trinitarian safeguards.

empowers in situations of oppression',¹¹ as Jacquelyn Grant perceptively writes. Social location surely matters to the one who 'knows all about our sorrows'.

A PROCESSIONAL VIEW OF SALVATION

As a conversionist denomination, Baptists have a robust understanding of the inauguration of salvation but an anemic doctrine of sanctification. Bill Leonard observes 'the inability of many Baptists to distinguish between justification (entering into faith) and sanctification (growing up in grace)'.¹² Part of this deficiency is due to a truncation of the processive view of salvation which Scripture outlines. The apostolic affirmation, 'By grace you have been saved through faith' ([Eph. 2:8](#)) signals the beginning (not completion) of salvation. Other texts suggest that salvation is presently in process: 'Behold ... now is the day of salvation!' ([2 Cor. 6:2](#)); 'Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling' ([Philp. 2:12](#)). Further texts indicate the as yet unrealized dimension of salvation: it is those who 'endure until the end [who] will be saved' ([Matt. 10:22](#); See also [1 Pet. 2:2](#)).

One of the chief debates of the Protestant Reformation concerned the relationship between divine and human agency in salvation. Preaching justification by faith, the Reformers concluded salvation is entirely dependent upon God's initiative and grace. Understood as deliverance from God's wrath, the soteriology of these Christian forebears accentuated what has already been accomplished in the past. The emphasis on divine priority in human salvation has led to the neglect of theological and practical dynamics of sanctification as well as diminishing personal effort on the part of the Christian. Many Christians do not understand that people have a 'special responsibility in sanctification that they do not have in justification, though both depend on divine grace and both require human freedom'.¹³

A processive view of salvation sees the completion of our commitment to Christ as lying in the future rather than one decisive event in the past. Although it is important for us to realize the initiation of 'walking in newness of life', a retrospective view cannot assure our salvation. Only perseverance in Christian hope toward the future 'takes hold of that for which Christ took hold of us' ([Philp. 3:12](#)).¹⁴ With thanksgiving we can reflect on awakening to the call of God, yet we walk behind and toward the author and finisher of our faith, the pioneering Jesus. Our Saviour warned of the seductiveness of the 'broad way' and the difficulty of the 'narrow way' ([Matt. 7:13-14](#); [Lk. 13:23-24](#)). Pursuing the narrow way requires struggle ([1 Cor. 9:26-27](#)). While the disciple of Jesus may be assured that he or she will not be forsaken ([Matt. 28:20](#)), following the broad contours of 'easy street' leads away from the desired destination, full participation in the *basileia*.

Our Baptist theological quilt is a patchwork of Arminian and Calvinist strands, and the manner by which election, perseverance, and assurance have been stitched together is

¹¹ 11. See her *White Women's Christ and Black Women's Jesus* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 212. Jacquelyn Grant also speaks to feminist criticism of christologies which have made a biological gender positivism a part of Jesus' saving significance. She contends that 'The significance of Christ is not his maleness but his humanity' (p. 220).

¹² 12. *God's Last and Only Hope: The Fragmentation of the Southern Baptist Convention* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1990), p. 91.

¹³ 13. Neville, p. 76.

¹⁴ 14. Judith M. Gundry Volf offers a detailed analysis of this text in her recent *Paul and Perseverance: Staying In and Falling Away* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990), p. 256.

less than satisfactory. E.Y. Mullins faults both the 'extreme Calvinists' and those who 'exalt human freedom' (Arminians) for their failure to hold together the New Testament understanding of salvation. The divine and human aspects of the continuance of the Christian life are inseparable. If one accents the divine and makes Christian experience inconsequential, pantheism results, according to Mullins. The Arminian exaltation of human will as the determinant of perseverance, on the other hand, leads to a deistic perception.¹⁵ The result of this attempt to combine contradictory views is a diminished understanding of God's initiative and human responsiveness, the 'true doctrine of perseverance', in Mullins' view.

It is the dimension of human responsiveness which has received much needed attention in the lifelong work of Dale Moody, revered professor of theology at Southern Seminary for nearly forty years.¹⁶ No contemporary Baptist theologian has been more vocal about the role of transformed living as an expression of authentic salvation than he. His classrooms and writings reverberated with his concern about Baptists' presumption of the 'security of the believer' without concomitant perseverance. Further, Moody rightly diagnoses the effect of an accompanying neglect of the biblical warnings against apostasy.¹⁷ He staunchly argues that ignoring the New Testament's explicit exhortations to perseverance leads the Christian to an unwarranted sense of security that could eventuate in jeopardizing salvation. The Christian is promised security, 'but it is a conditional security', Moody avers, 'if only we hold our confidence firm to the end' ([Heb. 3:14](#)).¹⁸

A processive view of salvation calls one to heed the clear exhortations to perseverance found throughout the New Testament. This view suggests that the journey toward the city of God is not aboard 'rapid transit', and it is every bit as arduous as Bunyan's Christian experienced it.

Martin Luther taught young Christians that conversion (the process of becoming 'conformed to the image of God's Son') included the head and the heart, but warned that the last thing to be converted is usually the 'purse'. Sanctification takes very concrete form as we alter every dimension of our lives according to the prompting of the Spirit. We have not 'given our hearts to Jesus' if our style of living is not moving from self-centred concern to a 'voluntary displacement' on behalf of others.¹⁹ Continuing in the faith requires patient attentiveness to the One who will 'lead us into all truth' ([Jn. 16:13](#)).

¹⁵ 15. E.Y. Mullins, *The Christian Religion in Its Doctrinal Expression* (Philadelphia: Judson Press, 1917), pp. 433–34.

¹⁶ 16. Dan R. Stiver has written an excellent exposition and evaluation of Moody's theology, especially his distinctive construction of the doctrine of salvation. It is included in the recent collection edited by Timothy and David S. Dockery, *Baptist Theologians* (Nashville: The Broadman Press, 1990), pp. 539–66.

¹⁷ 17. Moody's fullest treatment of soteriology is found in his systematic theology, *The Word of Truth* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1981), pp. 308–65. In the year before he died, Professor Moody authored a brief book on the warnings against apostasy in Hebrews in light of Baptist history and confessions of faith, *Apostasy: A Study in the Epistle to the Hebrews and in Baptist History* (Greenville: Smyth & Helwys, 1991).

¹⁸ 18. Moody, *Apostasy*, p. 28.

¹⁹ 19. The concept of 'voluntary displacement' is drawn from a provocative essay on Christian spirituality which engages a world shaped by dominative power rather than the power of compassion. Authors Henri J.M. Nouwen, Donald P. McNeill, and Douglas A. Morrison, *Compassion: A Reflection on the Christian Life* (New York: Doubleday, 1982), describe voluntary displacement as the basic movement of the Christian life in its attempt to '... disappear from the world as an object of interest in order to be everywhere in it by hiddenness and compassion ...' (p. 67).

SALVATION AS INCORPORATION

Baptist hymnals offer a significant perspective on our understanding of the doctrine of salvation. In stanzas and refrains are etched a theology of individual salvation; instances of corporate confession of the need to be saved or of the believer becoming incorporated into the Body of Christ are seldom found in this hymnody.²⁰ Nietzsche's piercing commentary, "They would have to sing better songs to make me believe in their Redeemer: his disciples would have to look more redeemed!"²¹ could well apply to the truncated formulation of salvation which we confess in our singing. In a day when religious belief assumes a privatized form in American culture,²² we need once again to hear the biblical insistence on the soteriological importance of community.

Jesus' proclamation of the *basileia* and Paul's characterization of the church as *soma tou Christou*²³ underscore the corporate dimension of salvation which was so prominent in the Hebrew Scriptures. Salvation was never portrayed as 'the rescue of isolated souls to fellowship with God',²⁴ but as a pilgrimage undertaken in the company of God's people. Paul Tillich's understanding that salvation is incomplete or limited when approached by the 'individual in isolation' is an important step toward understanding the importance of corporate salvation.²⁵

Christian baptism expresses the incorporating work of the Holy Spirit who joins the believer to Christ and his members ([1 Cor. 12:13](#)). As the Christian participates as an interdependent and inseparable member of Christ's body, he or she shares in the embodiment of Christ's resurrection presence in the world. Thus, sanctification as an expression of growth as a Christian cannot occur as a personal 'self-improvement' project. It must be pursued within the community of faith for the well being of the larger interdependent nexus which sustains our lives.

Sanctifying the society and environment, being concerned for justice for all, is an integral aspect of the biblical view of salvation. Humanity's vocation as the image of God upon the earth mandates a care for all (dominion) that is of God. We who are undergoing the *conformitas Christi* have a responsibility for all the groaning creation which awaits the liberation of the sons and daughters of God ([Rom. 8:21-23](#)).

SALVATION WHICH INCLUDES CREATION

²⁰ 20. An unscientific review of the hymns found under the 'Salvation' heading in the *Baptist Hymnal* (Nashville: Convention Press, 1956) illustrates the prominence of personal pronouns, e.g., 'I, me, my' (there are even a couple of 'yes') and the near absence of pronouns ('we' and 'our') which signify a corporate understanding of salvation. No substantial difference seems apparent in the 1975 and 1991 editions.

²¹ 21. Frederich Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, quoted by Hans Kung, in *The Church* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1967), p. 150.

²² 22. See Robert N. Bellah, et. al., *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985).

²³ 23. John A.T. Robinson maintains that the concept of the body forms the keystone of Pauline theology. Robinson's sustained emphasis on the solidarity of the recreated universe in the body of Christ offers an incorporate (organic) rather than societal vision. See his brief work *The Body: A Study in Pauline Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962).

²⁴ 24. Daniel L. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1991), p. 157.

²⁵ 25. Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. I (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), p. 147. Tillich's inability to examine differences in power and privilege of individuals within the community of faith left his notion of 'ground of being' disconnected from the real experiences of humanity.

'Ecology' entered our vocabulary only recently; however, the term *oikonomia* has a lengthy history. It is a biblical concept which refers to the householding of all the earth by God,²⁶ a divine economy in which humans participate. Biblical theologians have long contended that creation and redemption are virtually inseparable in Scripture and that salvation must include the consummation of creation. Perhaps no one stated this more succinctly than Karl Barth: 'The end is also a goal: the Redeemer is also the Creator'.²⁷ The destiny of all things determines what they most truly are in God's economy.

Yet we have not sufficiently linked our soteriology with our responsibility to care for God's creation. In many ways Christian theology has contributed to the current catastrophic course of our earth. Conventional Christian anthropology has so accentuated the centrality and superiority of the human that the rest of creation has served only as the 'theatre' for our starring role. In the words of Douglas John Hall.

While biblical—and especially Old Testament—faith obviously knows how to speak graphically about the solidarity of humankind with all other created beings and things, the clear tendency within historic Christianity has been to emphasize their difference.²⁸

This 'difference' has been claimed as licence for humans to 'subdue' creation as an expendable commodity at our disposal. Our Christian culpability in the groaning of creation (Hall's phrase) shows few signs of abating although awareness of the warnings of the scientific community seems to be growing in theological studies.

A certain ambiguity about our world has always coloured the church. The community of faith has either been preoccupied with survival over against movements of persecution or through the influence of the world-negating impulse of Hellenistic thought has discounted the world's significance. Late twentieth-century Christianity cannot remain dispassionate about the vulnerability of our planet. As Hendrikus Berkhof insists, we 'can no longer, not in our study of the faith either, avoid the question concerning the world and its renewal'.²⁹

The completion of God's creating and redeeming work lies in the future. Just as our lives are given their true identity through the Word made flesh, so we can help bring creation to its true destiny through our participation in God's *creatio continua*. Then will all of creation celebrate the sabbath, the feast of creation, in the presence of God's eternal glory.³⁰

Molly Marshall is Professor of Theology and Spiritual Formation at Central Baptist Theological Seminary, Kansas City, Kansas. When this article was first published, she was

²⁶ 26. This concept serves as the paradigm for understanding the partnership between God and the world (which includes humans) for Letty M. Russell's book *Household of Freedom: Authority in Feminist Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1987).

²⁷ 27. *The Epistle to the Romans*, 3d ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 77.

²⁸ 28. Douglas John Hall, *Imaging God: Dominion as Stewardship* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1986), p. 53.

²⁹ 29. Hendrikus Berkhof, *Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Study of the Faith*, trans. Sierd Woudstra (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1979), p. 500.

³⁰ 30. Jürgen Moltmann offers a significant insight in his correlation of the consummation of creation with the rich sabbath theology of Scripture. See his provocative *God In Creation: A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), pp. 276–90.

Associate Professor of Theology at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky.

The Comprehensive Nature of Salvation in Biblical Perspective

Marvin E. Tate

*Reprinted with permission from Review and Expositor Fall 1994 Vol. 91
No. 4 pp. 469–485*

Keywords: Creation, peace, community, individual, family, mission, church, cosmic powers, holism

The reader will readily recognize that I am trying to squash a very large subject into a relatively short article. Salvation from the biblical perspective involves the whole Bible, from beginning to end. In one way or another, the Bible from Genesis to Revelation bears witness to the saving work of God. Biblical interpreters and theologians have sometimes tried to separate the creation accounts which begin the Bible from salvation; assuming that the understanding of YHWH (the LORD) as Creator developed subsequently and was dependent on the experience and understanding of YHWH as Saviour.¹ However, regardless of how the concepts developed and interacted in the tradition-history behind the biblical narratives, the texts themselves present the creative works of God in the beginning as salvific.²

¹ 1. For example, Gerhard von Rad, 'The Theological Problem of the Old Testament Doctrine of Creation', *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays*, trans. E.W. Trueman Dicken (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966, pp. 131–43. Von Rad has been very influential in maintaining this position. He argues that the doctrine of creation does not exist in the Old Testament as an independent doctrine, but it is 'invariably related, and indeed subordinated, to soteriological considerations', (142), though the doctrine of creation is not necessarily of later origin. Von Rad argues that the exclusive commitment of Israel's faith to historical salvation subordinated creation. The article above was written in 1938 (also found in *Creation in the Old Testament*, ed. B.W. Anderson (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), pp. 53–64. Von Rad maintains his position in later writings. See his *Old Testament Theology*, trans. D.M.G. Stalker (New York: Harper & Row, 1957) I, pp. 138–39. However, in his later work he notes the exception of the wisdom literature in which 'Creation was in reality an absolute basis for faith, and was referred to for its own sake altogether and not in the light of other factors of the faith'.

² 2. George M. Landes, 'Creation and Liberation', originally in *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 33, No. 2 (1978), pp. 78–99; now in B.W. Anderson, ed. *Creation in the Old Testament*, 135–51 opposes the arguments of Von Rad (136–38) and argues that [Gen. 1](#) does not set forth a 'liberating act', i.e., it is not salvific, and thus did not need to be mentioned with YHWH's liberating deeds. His argument seems ineffective to me, and he finds it necessary to qualify his position by saying that 'Cosmic creation, though not itself an activity of liberation, was nonetheless the crucial supposition of God's liberating work in history, where it was also a form of creation' (139). He also stresses the importance of linking the work of YHWH as liberator with YHWH as creator.

The creation account in [Genesis 1](#) begins with a description of the desolate ‘stuff’ of the ‘heavens and the earth’, essentially noncreation ([Gen. 1:2](#)): formless, totally dark, lifeless watery ‘deep’. The description reminds one of a kind of primordial ‘black hole’, without light and utterly barren of life, except for a divine wind/spirit sweeping across the surface of the waters. By divine commands and actions, the ordered world of the ‘heavens and the earth’, is brought into existence and forms a brilliant counterpart of the ‘black hole’ in [Gen. 1:2](#). Where there was only primordial darkness there is now light; where there was only waste and the void of the vast ‘deep’ there is now a structured world where all types of creatures, including human beings, can live in the context of the divinely declared ‘goodness’ (‘beauty’). The culmination of the creative work of God is the sabbath ‘rest’ of the seventh day, a symbol of the victorious achievement of the Creator and the blessed state of creation. Surely this is the master paradigm of salvation in the Bible; the Creator is the Saviour, who brings forth life and saves in the mode of blessing.

The account in [Genesis 2](#) also has salvific features. The earth in this case is a barren desert, a landscape where death reigns unmolested: no plant grows, no rain falls to fertilize the ground, and there is no living creature. God intervenes and forms a living human being ([2:7](#)) from the ground and plants a Garden of Eden in the midst of the desert of death. The human being and other creatures are put in the Garden, planted by God and provided with abundant water from rivers (more stable than rain) and with plants and trees (‘every tree pleasant to the sight and good for food’), plus the ‘tree of life’ and the ‘tree of knowledge of good and evil’. This old story tells us that God’s purpose is to create a Paradise for human beings, for all his other creatures, and for himself (note [Gen. 3:8](#)). God is the Saviour who creates and works to give life and well-being to humanity and nonhuman creation alike.

Thus in subsequent biblical material we should not be surprised to find that the Saviour-God is concerned with salvation in a comprehensive sense that responds to the endemic need for saving on the part of human beings:

I will give you your rains in their seasons, and the land shall yield its produce, and the trees of the fields shall yield their fruit. Your threshing shall overtake the vintage, and the vintage shall overtake the sowing; you shall eat your bread to the full, and live securely in your land. And I will grant peace (*shalom*) in the land, and you shall lie down, and no one shall make you afraid; I will remove dangerous animals from the land, and no sword shall go through your land. I will place my dwelling in your midst and I shall not abhor you. And I will walk among you, and will be your God, and you shall be my people. ([Lev. 26:4-6, 11-12](#), NRSV).

YHWH intends that Israel’s land be a huge Garden of Eden, shared with him and blessed with fertility and *shalom*. Walter Brueggemann comments on the *shalom* (‘peace’) in such passages as this and says that it is the

... well-being that exists in the very midst of threats ... It is the well-being of a material, physical, historical kind, not idyllic ‘pie in the sky’, but ‘salvation’ in the midst of trees and crops and enemies—in the very places where people always have to cope with anxiety, struggle for survival, and deal with temptation.³

We may not think very often of salvation as *shalom* (‘peace’; better, ‘well- being’), but it is one of the major biblical words for the state which results from God’s saving work.

³ 3. Walter Brueggemann, *Living Toward a Vision: Biblical Reflections on Shalom* (Philadelphia: United Church Press, 1976, 1982), p. 16.

In the Fourth Gospel, Jesus speaks to his disciples with this declaration before leaving them:

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid ([John 14:27](#), NRSV).

According to Peter in [Acts 10:36](#), God had sent a message to the people of Israel, ‘preaching peace by Jesus Christ—he is the Lord of all’, and Paul declares that ‘peace with God’ is the result of being ‘justified by faith’ ([Rom. 5:1](#)). Early Christians, both Jews and Gentiles, discovered that Jesus Christ was their ‘peace’, breaking down the ‘dividing wall of hostility’ between them and making ‘both groups into one’ ([Eph. 2:13–14](#)). Christ Jesus is declared to have come and ‘proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near’ ([Eph. 2:17](#), NRSV). Both those ‘far off’ and those ‘near’ have the well-being of access to God through the Spirit; they are ‘no longer strangers and aliens’ but ‘citizens’ and ‘members of the household of God’ ([Eph. 2:19](#)).

The discussion of salvation in biblical contexts thus far reveals a number of major characteristics of divine saving work. One of the major features is its comprehensive nature. According to Claus Westerman, God’s saving in the Old Testament has ‘comprehensive significance’.⁴ By this he seems to mean that being saved is a universal human need:

It is something that everybody knows and which has occurred always and everywhere throughout the history of humanity ... Being saved is a part of human existence.

The need of being saved in this universal sense arises from the finitude and limitations of human beings as creatures. Humans always live dangerous lives, vulnerable to damage and death. ‘To the extent they survive the danger, they know the experience of being saved’ (Westermann, 40). Apart from this broad human experience, but included within it, salvation in biblical contexts is comprehensive in the sense of involving the totality of human and nonhuman existence. The scope of God’s saving work in the Bible is as limited as a single individual and as broad as the cosmos: ‘No boundaries exist for God’s saving action’ (40). Of course, the comprehensive nature of biblical salvation has multiple aspects, and I will examine some of them in the following sections.

COMMUNAL AND INDIVIDUAL

In both Testaments of the Bible, God’s salvation is both communal and individual. The salvation of Israel as individual people and as a nation is clearly evident in the Old Testament.⁵ The Exodus event is a primary act of saving, the historical paradigm of the salvation. The Exodus event even became part of the name of YHWH, as in the self-introduction at the beginning of the Decalogue when God said, ‘I am YHWH your God who brought you out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage’ ([Ex. 20:2](#); [Deut. 5:6](#)). The self-introduction is really a unity, all the elements are parts of the ‘name’ of the God who

⁴ 4. Claus Westermann, *Elements of Old Testament Theology*, trans. Douglas W. Stott (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1978, 1982), p. 40. Westermann’s entire section on ‘The Saving God and History’ (35–84) is important for the subject of this article.

⁵ 5. Westermann is very emphatic about this, arguing that oracles of salvation to individuals especially ‘show that God’s activity in the Old Testament is by no means concentrated only on the people of God, on Israel, but rather it is directed with equal intensity to the individual person ... to individuals as people’ (*Elements of Old Testament Theology*), p. 66.

speaks Torah for Israel. YHWH's very identity is inseparable from his saving action in becoming the God of Israel and the Exodus.

The significance of the Exodus event appears in numerous contexts: e.g., in the transmission of the commandments of God to children ([Deut. 6:20-25](#); [Jud. 6:13](#)), at Passover ([Ex. 12:1-20](#)), in the presentation of first fruits ([Deut. 26:5-10](#)), and in Psalms ([78](#); [80](#); [105](#); [106](#); [114](#); [135](#); [136](#)). The Exodus is cited as a saving work of YHWH in prophetic literature (e.g., [Am. 2:10](#); [9:7](#); [Hos. 2:14-15](#); [Jer. 2:6](#); [7:21](#); [11:4](#); [Ezek. 20:9](#); [Isa. 43:2](#), [19-21](#); [52:4-5](#)) and is also projected into the future as a new Exodus ([Isa. 40:3](#); [41:17-20](#); [44:3](#); [51:9-11](#)). In [Ezek. 36:24-25](#) the Babylonian exiles receive a divine promise of future saving action in terms of a new Exodus-like experience:

I will take you from among the nations, and gather you from all the countries, and bring you into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleanness, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. (NRSV).

The future prospect continues in this passage with the promise of a 'new heart' (a 'heart of flesh' rather than a 'heart of stone') and a new infusion of the Spirit of God so that Israel can obey the divine commandments and live in the abundantly supplied land as the people of YHWH ([Ezek. 36:6-12](#), [28-30](#); [Lev. 26:4-6](#), [11-12](#)). The comprehensive nature of YHWH's saving work is evident in this passage, which involves both spiritual and physical aspects; salvation has a holistic nature. Indeed, the Exodus should not be separated from YHWH's creative work and treated as only a historical event. It can be argued that the Exodus is YHWH's second great act of creation, in which he created a people for himself and provided a context for his dwelling in history. Thus the creation story contains two acts: 'The first secured the foundation of the cosmos and humankind in general; the second, the foundation of God's people'.⁶ The creation nature of the Exodus is expressed in the 'cosmic proportions' of the description of the event in the book of Exodus and is especially evident in [Isaiah 40-55](#), where the Exodus event is described with creation language.⁷ The concept of God's creation of his people is found also in [1 Peter 2:10](#): 'Once you were no people, but now you are God's people'. In an individual sense, Paul uses creation as salvation: 'So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!' ([2 Cor. 5:17](#), NRSV; also [Gal. 6:15](#)).

The discussion thus far has focused on the communal side of God's saving work and largely ignored the individual. In popular treatments of the Old Testament it is rather common to assume that the relationship between God and the individual person is secondary, or mediated only in terms of communal participation, with little requirement of faith on the part of the individual. This approach involves a serious distortion of the biblical materials and is rooted in dogmatic theologies of salvation which are essentially nonbiblical. The primeval narratives in [Genesis 1-3](#) begin with God's creation and establishment of humanity (*Adam*), but the focus in the narratives narrows to fix on only two people in the Garden. Of course, these persons are also representative embodiments of humanity, but the story reminds us that humanity exists as individuals, who must

⁶ 6. Bernard F. Batto, *Slaying the Dragon: Myth Making in the Biblical Tradition* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1992), p. 119. The creation aspect is more evident in the priestly narratives of the Pentateuch, though the J and E material has been incorporated into a composite narrative. See Batto, pp. 102-27.

⁷ 7. See [Isa. 43:1-3](#); [44:24](#); [45:11-12](#); [51:9-11](#); [54:5](#); see also [Jer. 10:12-16](#); [27:4-6](#); [Pss. 74:12-19](#); [77:16-20](#); [89:5-18](#). For further discussion see Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, I, pp. 137-8.

decide for themselves, one by one, about their relationship to God their Creator.⁸ Likewise individuals like Abraham decide to obey or not to obey the divine will. In a striking way, the book of Ezekiel incorporates the polarity of communal and individual obedience. In chapters [18](#) and [33:1–20](#) there is an emphasis on highly individualistic response to the divine will, while most of the book focuses on God’s communal enterprise.

Claus Westermann observes that oracles of salvation are directed to individuals and argues that ‘God’s activity in the Old Testament is by no means concentrated only on the people of God, or Israel, but rather that it is directed with equal intensity to the individual person’.⁹ In the course of his discussion, he notes that ‘God’s activity includes the personal life of the individual, his promises reach into the houses, the places of work, and into the days and nights of every individual’.¹⁰ He is surely correct. In this regard, the Psalms are of special interest. The personal element is strongly evident in the numerous examples of prayer to God in terms of ‘my God’ or the like (e.g., [Pss. 3:7; 5:2; 7:1; 13:3; 18:2, 6; 19:14; 22:1, 2](#)). The expression ‘God of my salvation’ is found in [Pss. 25:5; 27:9; 38:22; 51:14; 88:1](#) (‘O YHWH, God of my salvation’). The speaker in [Ps. 4:3](#) prays to the ‘God of my righteousness’, who has delivered him or her in past times of distress. Personal faith and piety is manifest also in descriptive epithets used of God, such as ‘my Shepherd’ ([Ps. 23:1](#)), ‘my King’ ([Ps. 5:3](#)), and ‘my helper’ ([Ps. 54:4](#)). Rainer Albertz¹¹ has argued persuasively that the statements of personal faith and piety are rooted in the family heritage of individuals and the tradition of personal creation by the deity worshipped. For example, the speaker in [Ps. 22:9–11](#) appeals to God on the ground of personal creation:

For it was you who took me from the womb;
You kept me safe on my mother’s breast,
On you I was cast from my birth,
and since my mother bore me you have been my God.
Do not be far from me,
for trouble is near
and there is no one to help (NRSV).

In a similar manner, the speaker in [Ps. 71:1–6](#) says:

For you, O LORD are my hope,
My trust, O LORD, from my youth.
Upon you I have leaned from my birth;
it was you who took me from my mother’s womb,
My praise is continually of you (vv. [5–6](#), NRSV).

These statements are marked by a lack of any statement of conversion or reference to a time of decision to trust God (Albertz, 35–36). The individuals base their prayers on family relationships to God which began for them in their personal creation and birth. The

⁸ 8. William James remarks in passing that the educator Louis Agassiz was wont to say that, ‘One can see no farther into a generalization than just so far as one’s previous acquaintance with particulars enables one to take it in’. *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (New York: Mentor Book, The New American Library, 1902, 1958), p. 177.

⁹ 9. *Elements of Old Testament Theology*, p. 66.

¹⁰ 10. *Ibid.*, p. 67.

¹¹ 11. *Personliche Frömmigkeit und offizielle Religion* (Stuttgart: Calwer, 1978), especially 23–49, and *Weltschöpfung und Menschenschöpfung* (Stuttgart: Calwer, 1974).

statements are also characterized by lack of appeals to the salvation history of Israel. For example, in [Ps. 23](#) there is no reference to YHWH's saving work with Israel (cf. [Ps. 80](#), where YHWH is addressed as the 'Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock').

However, the separation of personal-family faith from the 'official' faith of the nation is not maintained in pure form in the Old Testament.¹² The two traditions interact in a significant number of cases and the canonical texts indicate a considerable degree of intermixing and integration of the traditions. In the course of Israelite religious history, individual-family faith and communal religion became synthesized, though the individual-family dimension was never lost. A full discussion of this matter would vastly exceed the bounds of this article; a few examples will have to suffice. In [Ps. 22](#) both elements appear; a faith based both on personal history (vv. [9-17](#)) and the salvation history of Israel (vv. [3-5](#)): 'In you our ancestors trusted; they trusted, and you delivered them' (v.4, NRSV. See also [Pss. 77:14-21](#); [143:5-6](#); in a different manner in [Ps. 130](#)). The lament in [Isaiah 63:7-64:12](#) makes use of the language of the family- individual tradition to apply to a communal group:

For you are our father, ...
You, O LORD, are our father;
our Redeemer from of old is your name.
... Yet, O LORD, you are our father,
We are the clay, and you are the potter;
We are all the work of your hand ([63:16](#), [64:8](#), NRSV).

See also [Micah 7:7-20](#); [Lamentations 3:21-33](#).

The integration of personal faith and the communal salvation history of Israel is represented also by the prophets Hosea and Jeremiah, at least as they are presented in the biblical texts. Hosea's involvement of his personal life with Israel's salvation history is well-known: 'Go, love a woman who has a lover and is an adulteress, just as the LORD loves the people of Israel ...' ([Hos. 3:1](#), NRSV). Jeremiah's call to be a prophet is rooted in his personal creation history:

Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you;
I appointed you a prophet to the nations ([Jer. 1:5](#), NRSV).

See also [Jeremiah 15:10-12](#); [Amos 7:14-15](#).

Albertz (167-78) argues for a major integration of personal-family piety and 'official' religion in Deuteronomy. The future of the nation in the land which YHWH is prepared to give them is dependent on the faith decisions and behavior of families and individuals. The words of the great *Shema* are to be carefully and persistently taught to the children ([Deut. 6:7-9](#), [11:19](#)), and the rationale of the decrees and statutes of YHWH are to be explained to the children, when they ask about them, in terms of the Exodus event and the gift of the land ([6:20-25](#)). The blessings of YHWH are dependent on individual and family decisions relating to obedience and trust (e.g., [7:12-16](#); [8:11-20](#); [23:19-20](#); [25:13-16](#); [28:1-19](#)). In this regard, [Deut. 26:5-10](#) is especially interesting. In this passage, a worshipper brings a basket of the fruit of the ground to the altar of YHWH as an offering. As the offering is made, the individual worshiper recites a credo setting forth the theological rationale of the offering. The speaker begins, 'A wandering Aramean was my ancestor, he went down into Egypt and lived there as an alien'. Note the singular 'my ancestor', the use of third person and the past tense. The narrative continues until there

¹² 12. Ibid., p. 36.

is a change in vv. [6–9](#): ‘When the Egyptians treated us harshly and afflicted us ... we cried to the LORD, the God of our ancestors; the LORD heard our voice ... [and] brought us out of Egypt ... and he brought us into this place and gave us this land’. The individual speaker suddenly identifies with his or her ancestors who were once in Egypt, but who are now ‘us’ and ‘we’. The Exodus from Egypt becomes actualized as a saving event for the speaker, a present reality for the one who identifies with it. The individual identity of the speaker returns clearly in v. [10](#): ‘So now I bring the first fruit of the ground that you, O LORD, have given me’. The integration of the individual worshiper with the salvation history of Israel is clear. Each person in subsequent generations would make the saving work of the Exodus and the gift of the land their own.

THE COMMUNAL NATURE OF SALVATION IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The individual aspect of salvation in terms of the work of Jesus Christ is self-evident and so strongly propounded in Christian theology as to require no extended discussion here. On the other hand, the communal aspect has often been neglected, especially in Protestant theology, with excessive stress on individual experience. The following comment expresses a common approach:

Jesus’ message of salvation brings about a complete shift from the collective to the individual. The individualizing tendency is tangible everywhere. The prefiguration of the Old Testament—Jewish relationship to God, constituted through the relation of Yahweh to the people through covenant, cult and Torah loses its normative power.¹³

This is a common assessment of the Christian message (too common in my opinion) in which the saving work of God in Christ is almost exclusively confined to individuals. The church is ultimately only a gathered group of saved individuals, an organizational union of the regenerate, a spiritual fellowship in human hearts, and inherently separate from all external forms. ‘Being saved’ is fundamentally differentiated from the communal. This hyper-individualistic concept of salvation does not fit well with biblical perspectives and leads to serious theological, ecclesial, and ethical distortions.¹⁴

The Gospels clearly present Jesus as a creator of community. When he called his disciples, they responded individually (e.g., [Mk. 1:16–20](#)), but in [Mark 3:16](#) (cf. [Lk. 9:1](#)) Jesus is said to have ‘made’ (or ‘created’) ‘the Twelve’, a communal unit, which surely functioned as a symbolic re-creation of the twelve tribes of Israel, and fits with the

¹³ 13. Quoted in Gerhard Lohfink, *Jesus and Community: The Social Dimensions of Christian Faith*, trans. John P. Galvin (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), p. 3; the quotation is from E. Grasser, ‘Jesus, und das Heil Gottes: Bemerkungen zur sog. “Individualisierung des Heils”’, *Jesus Christus in Historie und Theologie*, ed. Georg Strecker (Tubingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1975), pp. 182–3.

¹⁴ 14. Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1989) comment that, ‘American Christians have fallen into the bad habit of acting as if the church really does not matter as we go about trying to live like Christians’ (p. 69). Hauerwas and Willimon argue strongly for the church dependent nature of Christian ethics. They contend that the Sermon on the Mount is intended not for ‘heroic individualism’ but for ‘the formation of a visible practical, Christian community’ (76–7). Ethics ‘make sense only when embodied in a set of social practices that constitute a community’ (79). Individuals isolated from the communities to which they belong are bound to fail (86). Obviously, Hauerwas and Willimon are not favourably disposed toward ethics grounded in foundationalist epistemologies, e.g., categorical imperatives (Kant) derived from maxims which could be extended to become universal laws. See Hauerwas, *After Christendom* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1991), pp. 15–19.

emphasis on the ministry of Jesus to Israel. According to [Matt. 10:5–6](#) the Twelve were sent out by Jesus with the following instructions:

Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

Jesus himself never conducted a mission to the Gentiles and was devoted to the continuation and fulfilment of God's saving work in Israel, the chosen people of YHWH (note [Acts 10:30](#)). Of course, the accounts in the Gospels were written after the Gentile mission had become a reality and Jesus had been rejected as Israel's messiah by the Israelite leaders and most of the people ([Matt. 27:25](#)). A new community, intrinsically related to the old, but new, is already composed of those who have 'come from east and west' to eat with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven ([Matt. 8:11, 15:24](#); see also [Matt. 21:43](#)). This discussion only 'touches the hem of the garment' of an exceedingly complex subject (plagued by a lack of solid historical evidence),¹⁵ but it seems clear that Jesus incorporated his followers into dynamic communal groups.¹⁶ There was no fundamental 'shift from the collective to the individual'; both aspects had always been involved in God's saving work and they continued to be. There was, of course, a radical shift in the focus of faith and the nature of communities. The early Christians continued the worship of YHWH, the one true God and Creator, but with the important modification of doing so in terms of the lordship of Jesus (N.T. Wright, 362). The worshipers of YHWH no longer were 'identical with ethnic Israel, since Israel's history had reached its intended fulfillment; they claimed to be the *continuation of Israel in a new situation*, able to draw freely on Israel—images to express their self-identity' (Wright, 457). As such they considered themselves thrust out 'to fulfill Israel's vocation on behalf of the world' (Wright, 458).

The comprehensive and communal nature of salvation is manifest in the early Christian communities as presented in the book of Acts. As is well known, the community in Jerusalem is said to have had a powerful communal life, generated by the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, in which there was a fellowship of shared support and life: 'All who believed were together and had all things in common' ([Acts 2:44; 4:32–35](#)). We are told that 'day by day the Lord added to their number' ([2:47](#)), which can hardly mean anything else but that God's saving work for those who believed involved adding them to the community.¹⁷ The powerful nature of the communal experience is illustrated by the terrible account of the death of the two deceivers, Ananias and Sapphira, in [Acts 5:1–11](#); a story set in contrast to the sharing of the money from the sale of a farm by Barnabas ([Acts 4:36–37](#)). Life in the community of the church was a matter of life and death, hardly something essentially unrelated to salvation. Other references in the New Testament confirm the radical commitment and the reordering of life demanded by

¹⁵ 15. N.T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992, I, p. 341, comments: 'We know far less about the history of the church from AD 30–135 than we do about second-temple Judaism'.

¹⁶ 16. Lohfink, p. 88, remarks that, 'It was characteristic of Jesus that he constantly established community'. On community in the teaching of Jesus, see Paul D. Hanson, *The People Called: The Growth of Community in the Bible* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986), pp. 382–426.

¹⁷ 17. For exegetical matters see John B. Polhill, *Acts, The New American Commentary*, 26 (Nashville: Broadman 1992), p. 122.

conversion to new communities of faith (e.g., [Mk. 3:31-35](#); [10:17-31](#); [Lk. 9:57-62](#); [Matt. 5:1-7:28](#); [1 Pet. 1-5](#)).¹⁸

The major biblical metaphors for the church also express the vital importance of the communal in salvation. For example, the Pauline metaphor of the body of Christ ([Rom. 12:4-8](#); [1 Cor. 12:12-31](#); [Eph. 4:12](#)) includes individual participation: 'Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it' ([1 Cor. 12:27](#)), through baptism and through the 'drinking' of the Holy Spirit ([1 Cor. 12:13](#)). Is it true that the act of baptism is an 'individualistic act, in which a man makes up, and expresses, his own mind to be a Christian'?¹⁹ However, as members of the 'body of Christ' each individual functions as part of the living whole—without the other parts any single part would die. The metaphor is not simply that of a body of Christians, but the 'body of Christ', united with Christ, who exercises authority over it and who is the source of the spiritual gifts which make it a living organism. N.T. Wright (448) argues for the common life of the early Christians as an 'alternative family'. The church was not a 'part-time voluntary organization of the like-minded which left normal social and familial attachments unaffected', but 'if one belonged to it, one did not belong anymore, certainly not in the same way, to one's previous unit, whether familial or racial'. Jesus and his followers did not set loose a cadre of 'Lone Rangers' to carry out the newly conceived and empowered mission of God through Israel for the world.

TWO OTHER MATTERS

The comprehensive nature of salvation involves two other subjects of major importance. First, from a biblical perspective, *salvation encompasses the whole person*. A long history of western anthropology, philosophy, and theology has worked with the thesis, in one form or another, that the soul is inherently separate from the body and is the real

¹⁸ 18. Caution is in order regarding the use of the style of life in the early Christian communities as suitable for ongoing Christian communities. A.F. Segal, 'Conversion and Messianism: Outline for a New Approach', *The Messiah: Developments in Earliest Judaism and Christianity*, ed. James H. Charlesworth, et al. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), notes the strong religious commitment generated in communities dominated by persons with major conversion experiences. However, radical conversions with emphasis on affective commitment, without enough gradual conversions, tend to produce unsatisfactory groups (301-02), conversions with emphasis on affective commitment, without enough gradual conversions, tend to produce unsatisfactory groups (301-02).

Radical conversions are less stable than gradual ones. But some radical conversions may be important for the development of commitment, where emotions are understood to be the mark of religious experience. Radical conversions can dramatize the workings of spirit, the ecstasy, or the bliss sought within the movement, and give urgency to the claims of the group. But, for the stability of the membership, it is important to balance the emotional contribution of radical converts with the more even enthusiasm of gradual converts, who appropriate the rules and roles of the group more thoroughly, and so add stability (302).

Indeed, Christian communities that try to live permanently on the basis of radical conversion experience are prone to become exclusionist in fellowship, develop autocratic leadership, become schismatic, be intolerant of anything less than absolute loyalty, 'flame out' spiritually, and become violent.

¹⁹ 19. C.K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), p. 289. Also, E.P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), pp. 453-58, who stresses the participatory union in Pauline thought reflected in [1 Cor. 6:13b-18a](#), with particular attention to the statement: 'Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ?' (cf. [Rom. 12:5](#); [Col. 1:18, 24](#)). 'The many human bodies are members of Christ, each several one united to him' (Barrett, 148). Also, James D.G. Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), pp. 264-5.

repository of selfhood, which should subordinate the body and liberate itself from it. In this approach

The liberty of self-control grows in proportion to a person's detachment from his own body ... The 'commanding self' subjects 'the submissive body'.²⁰

In more modern forms of this anthropology, the body is conceived of as the property of the soul and viewed as a machine used by a soul-self which can exist without it. This anthropology frequently involves the concept of the natural immortality of the soul, separated from the mortal body at physical death. In terms of the doctrine of salvation, such anthropology has often been translated into an evangelism focused on the 'salvation of the soul' with only secondary concern for the body and the whole person. In some forms of Protestant evangelical evangelism this is even called 'saving souls'.

The traditional anthropology encounters major problems in the Bible and its predominantly holistic view of human beings.²¹ [Genesis 2:7](#) is a key verse: 'Then the LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being' (NRSV). The 'living being' (traditionally, 'living soul') is an attempt to translate the Hebrew *nephesh hayah*, which indicates a 'living person' in the context. More than one interpreter has pointed out that this text does not say that the human being *has* a soul but rather *is a soul*.²² H. Wheeler Robinson summarized the matter in his statement that 'The Hebrew conceived man as animated body and not as an incarnate soul'.²³

Without further ado the holistic nature of soul and body can be postulated as overwhelmingly predominant in the Old Testament. On the whole, the New Testament continues this anthropology, showing the influence of Hellenistic thought (at least in terminology) now and then (as in some Jewish literature; e.g., [Wisdom of Solomon 3:1, 4:14; 16:13-14; 4 Mac. 13:13-15; 14:6](#)).²⁴ Even [Heb. 12:23](#) is not a clear reference to 'spirit' as the surviving part of a human being.²⁵ Other partite expressions may actually indicate a holistic understanding: e.g., the 'soul and body' which may be cast into *gehenna* ('hell') in [Matt. 10:28](#) is a way of referring to the whole person ([Matt. 6:25, Mk. 8:35-36](#)).

²⁰ 20. Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God*, trans. Margaret Kohl (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), p. 244.

²¹ 21. On the soul and the body, see G.C. Berkouwer, *Man: The Image of God*, trans. Dirk W. Jellema (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1962), pp. 194-233; Moltmann, *God in Creation*, pp. 244-75; Dale Moody, *The Word of Truth: A Summary of Christian Doctrine Based on Biblical Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1981), pp. 170-87; Johs. Pedersen, *Israel: Its Life and Culture, I-II* (London: Geoffrey Cumberlege, 1926), pp. 99-181.

²² 22. Moody, p. 173.

²³ 23. H. Wheeler Robinson, *Inspiration and Revelation in the Old Testament* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1946), p. 70.

²⁴ 24. Berkouwer, pp. 200-11, who notes that the Bible does use 'various localizing expressions' (201), but the purpose of the localization is 'to represent the whole man' (202), and that 'Scripture never pictures man as a dualistic, or pluralistic being', with a higher and lower part (203). Rudolf Bultmann's analysis of 'anthropological concepts' is still the master exegetical analysis of terminology and expressions in Paul (*Theology of the New Testament*, trans. Kendrick Grobel [New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951, 1955], I, pp. 190-227).

²⁵ 25. See William L. Lane, '[Hebrews 9-13](#)', [Word Biblical Commentary](#), vol. 47 (Dallas: Word Books, 1991), pp. 470-1, who says that in this context the phrase 'the spirits of the righteousness made perfect' is an idiom for the godly dead.

The same may be said for [1 Thess. 5:23](#) ('the spirit and the soul and the body'). Possibly [Heb. 4:12](#) is more partite, but 'the souls of those who had been slaughtered for the word of God' in [Rev. 6:9-11](#) need mean no more than 'those who had been slaughtered'. The 'spirits in prison' of [1 Pet. 3:19](#) is very uncertain and may refer to supernatural beings or to human beings who have died. Stephen's prayer 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit' (like the prayer of Jesus in [Lk. 23:46](#)) simply means 'receive me'. Thus holistic anthropology dominates and salvation involves the whole person, a holistic embodiment of the self. There can be no 'saving of the soul' independently of the body. The 'soul' is not some spiritual part of a human being which is not subject to death. The whole person is subject to judgment, death, and salvation.²⁶

Second, *the cosmic dimensions of salvation* are important, although they can be discussed only briefly here. Molly Marshall comments that 'Biblical theologians have long contended that creation and redemption are virtually inseparable in Scripture and that salvation must include the consummation of creation'.²⁷ [Rom. 8:18-25](#) is a passage of prime importance in this regard. In this passage, Paul centres on the 'freedom of the glory of the children of God', which they do not yet have in full measure, and so they wait in hope through their suffering for the full revelation of the glory ([5:2](#)). Creation also has a similar role, for it groans and 'waits with eager longing' for the same glory. Meanwhile it continues in 'futility' and 'bondage of decay', not of its own accord, but by the 'will of the one who subjected it'; subjected however with hope of being set free and sharing in the glory to be revealed. Creation and humanity share a 'comprehensive solidarity'²⁸ in the 'sufferings of this present time' and in the hope of glory to be revealed. The human and the nonhuman creation wait in hope for the redemption of their existence. Jürgen Moltmann comments that,

Creation in the beginning started with nature and ended with the human being. The eschatological creation reverses this order: it starts with the liberation of the human being and ends with the redemption of nature.²⁹

The thought in [Rom. 8:19-23](#) does not flow smoothly, but it seems best to conclude that God is the one who has subjected creation to 'futility' (*mataiotes*, 'emptiness', 'frustration', ineffective in attaining its purpose) and 'creation' (*ktisis*) should be understood as nonhuman creation and not as human creatures (an interpretation with a long lineage), as the context indicates (note v. [23](#)). The passage probably presupposes that the reader is aware of [Gen. 3:17-19](#); [5:29](#) and the eschatological ideas of a 'new heaven and a new earth' ([Isa. 65:17](#); [66:22](#)) with the world transformed for a new humanity (e.g., 1 Enoch 45:4-5; 2 Apoc. [Bar. 31:5-32:6](#); [4 Ezra 7:11, 30-32, 75](#); [Rev. 21:1](#); [2 Pet. 3:13](#)). It seems clear that the 'groaning' of humanity for the full revelation of the glory and redemption of God is matched by the 'groaning' of the nonhuman creation, which will eventually be 'freed from its bondage to decay' and share in the 'freedom of the glory of the children of God'. Creation has shared in the 'bondage and decay' of humanity, and it will share in the glory which is awaited with 'eager longing'.

²⁶ 26. Moody, p. 182, citing Berkouwer.

²⁷ 27. 'The Doctrine of Salvation: Biblical-Theological Dimensions', *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 35 (1993), p. 16.

²⁸ 28. Jürgen Moltmann, *History and the Triune God*, trans. John Bowden (New York: Crossroad, 1992), pp. 139, 130.

²⁹ 29. Moltmann, *God in Creation*, p. 68.

This Pauline hope is in keeping with the holistic nature of creation generally throughout the Bible. Old Testament texts presuppose an ontological structure in which there is an inseparable relationship between the divine, the human, and the physical world (what we usually call the ‘natural world’). A ‘profound interaction’ lies behind the usual economic, legal, and political causes of events. Beyond ‘the outward face of a brutal reality’, there is an inner connectedness, or solidarity, between the multiplex aspects of life.³⁰ This inner connectedness is apparent in the discussion on the creation accounts in [Gen. 1-2](#) and the quotation from [Lev. 26](#) at the beginning of this article (the whole of [Lev. 26](#) should be read, noting the interplay between the obedience of the people, the land, the conditions of the people who live on it, and YHWH’s covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob). In New Testament terms, the high Christology in [Col. 1:15-20](#) refers to all things in heaven and on earth as ‘holding together’ in Christ. The solidarity between human beings and nonhuman creation appears in prophetic visions of future redemption and new creation.

I will make for you a covenant on that day with the wild animals, the birds of the air, and the creeping things of the ground; and I will abolish the bow, the sword, and war from your land; and I will make you lie down in safety ([Hos. 2:18, 20](#), NRSV; cf. [Lev. 26:6](#); [Ezek. 34:25](#); [Job 5:23](#)).

This oracle of the future in Hosea goes on to declare that the new order of the future will be marked by a chain of responsiveness to the divine will:

On that day I will answer, says the LORD,
I will answer the heavens
And they will answer the earth;
And the earth will answer the grain, the wine and the oil,
and they will answer Jezreel.
([Hos. 2:21-22, 23-24](#))³¹

³⁰ 30. The language is borrowed mostly from Klaus Koch, *The Prophets: The Assyrian Period*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978, 1982), pp. 70-3.

³¹ 31. J. Moltmann, *History and the Triune God*, p. 133 writes of a ‘perichoretic understanding of the relation of God to creation’, which would involve divine ‘creating, forming, sustaining, enduring, receiving, accompanying, moving and suffering’. In some biblical passages the term ‘perichoretic’ seems appropriate. The word is from *perichoresis*, which refers to cyclical movement (from a verb which means ‘go round’ or ‘recur’). The word has a history in discussion of the Trinity which goes back to John of Damascus (675-749 CE) and to Augustine’s use in Christology. The better Latin translation is *circumincessio*, and the terms indicate a dynamic ‘interweaving of things with each other’ (Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* [New York: Crossroad, 1993], 220.). The perichoretic relationship would indicate a relatively fluid exchange of life, a living interaction. In this regard attention may be given to [Ps. 104](#) (for example), where the nonhuman world is continually dependent on God’s creating work. The whole ecological organism of the world lives in the ordered patterns created and recreated by God (vv. [21-23, 27-30](#)). YHWH is both Creator and Provider, who daily functions with the earth in a perichoretic manner. *Perichoreuo* is a related word to *perichoresis* and means to ‘dance around’, which reminds one immediately of the exuberance and praise which God’s creation evokes in biblical passages; a ‘radical amazement’ which breaks forth in singing and dancing. (For example, see the summons to praise in [Pss. 148-149](#)). For the expression ‘radical amazement’, See Jon D. Levenson’s discussion of [Ps. 104](#) in *Creation and the Persistence of Evil* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), 63. The term is from Abraham Joshua Heschel. Of course, the problem of the relationship of God to his creation is an ongoing one. Brevard S. Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993) criticizes Moltmann’s stress on the creative role of the Holy Spirit (395, 407) and engages the polarities of the otherness of God vis-a-vis creation and the immanent presence of God in his creation, again in critique of Moltmann (406-11).

The visions of the future in the book of Isaiah often involve nonhuman creation (e.g., [11:6-9](#); [25:6-10](#); [35](#); [40:1-11](#)) and reach their ultimate scope in the creation of a new heavens and a new earth ([65:17](#); [66:22](#)), a vision which finds its New Testament complement in [Rev. 21:1](#) and [2 Pet. 3:13](#).

SALVATION FROM COSMIC POWERS

A discussion of the comprehensive nature of salvation in biblical perspective can hardly omit attention to the saving work of God in relation to the 'powers', however brief. From the biblical perspective the world is 'with devils filled', led by the 'Prince of Darkness grim' and in league with 'all earthly powers' (Martin Luther, 'A Mighty Fortress is Our God'). Anyone who reads the New Testament knows that from beginning to end there is an almost continuous concern with the conflict between Christ and the church and the Powers which challenge the sovereignty of God and his saving work. Indeed, near the beginning of the New Testament, Jesus is led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the Devil ([Mk. 1:12](#) says that the Spirit 'drove him out into the wilderness'). Already the very existence of Jesus had been threatened in [Matt. 3](#) by the world power represented by Herod. At the end of the New Testament, Satan (the Devil) is thrown into a lake of fire forever, along with the great powers of Death and Hades ([Rev. 20:7-15](#)).

Walter Wink has pointed out that 'the language of power pervades the whole New Testament'; no book is without it.³² Of course, the 'powers' are of different types, as indicated in the well-known passage in [Eph. 6:10-17](#) admonishing Christians to 'be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power', for the struggle is not confined to that with enemies of "blood and flesh," but is against 'the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness' and against 'the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places' (v. [12](#), NRSV). Note also that the 'dominions', 'rulers', and 'powers' are both human and nonhuman. Commenting on [Eph. 6:12](#), Markus Barth says that, "The 'principalities and powers' are at the same time intangible spiritual entities and concrete historical, social, or psychic structures or institutions of all created things and all created life'.³³ Behind and in human history and the nonhuman world there is a network of powers engaged in a perichoretic relationship with the realms of the human and nonhuman world.³⁴ These powers of darkness and evil are not merely the result of human sin. J. Christian Beker summarizes the outlook of Paul as follows:

Although Paul teaches in accordance with Jewish apocalyptic tradition that death and suffering are caused by sin (cf. [Rom. 5:12](#)), he nevertheless leaves room for the thought that there is a crucial and mysterious 'dark' residue of evil and death in God's created

³² 32. *Naming the Powers: The Language of Power in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), pp. 7-12. This is the first volume of a trilogy; the other two are: *Unmasking the Powers: The Invisible Forces that Determine Human Existence* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986); and *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992).

³³ 33. *Ephesians*, Anchor Bible 34A (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, 1974), pp. 800-801; also Wink, *Naming the Powers*, 11, 'These Powers are both heavenly and earthly, divine and human, spiritual and political, invisible and structural'.

³⁴ 34. For 'perichoretic', see note 31 above. Wink, p. 107, argues that 'the Powers are simultaneously the outer and inner aspects of one and the same indivisible concretion of power'. His comment on page 15 is well-taken: 'The world of the ancients ... was a single continuum of heaven and earth, in which spiritual beings were as much at home as humans'.

order, which is not the outcome of human sin ... it is therefore inappropriate to attribute to human sin every form of the power of death in the world.³⁵

In general, I would say this reflects the whole of the New Testament, except that the realm of the powers of darkness seems to be an extremely active and dynamic 'residue'.

Not all the Powers are evil, of course. For example, after the temptation of Jesus in [Matt. 4](#), we are told that the Devil left him and 'angels came and ministered to him' (v. [11](#)). The angels of the seven churches in [Rev. 1:20–3:22](#) are assigned to lead and care for the churches in a manner analogous to the assignment of angels (or divine beings) to the nations in [Deut. 32:8–9](#) (the Greek text has 'angels of God'; the Hebrew text has 'the sons of Israel') and [Daniel 10:13; 12:1](#).³⁶ Most important, however, is the engagement of God with the Powers through the work of Christ. In the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus assaults the realm of Satan. When the disciples report after the mission of the Seventy that the demons are submissive to his name, he exults: 'I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning!' ([Lk. 10:17–18](#)). In the Fourth Gospel, 'the prince (*archon*) of this world' (Satan) is driven out and condemned ([John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11](#)). The gospel is for Paul 'the power of God for salvation' ([Rom. 1:16; 1 Cor. 1:18](#)). The New Testament brings to a furious climax YHWH's purpose to overcome the Powers of darkness and death, exemplified in the defeat of the Egyptian Pharaoh, who embodies those nations and peoples whose kings and rulers plot and conspire against the divine will and purpose ([Ps. 2](#)). The triumph of God over the Powers is not yet fully revealed, but its final denouement is certain. Thus Paul can make his famous affirmation that nothing in the realms of the Powers can 'separate us from the love God in Christ Jesus our Lord' ([Rom. 8:38](#)). And Luther could sing:

We will not fear, for God has willed
His truth to triumph thro' us:
The Prince of Darkness grim,
We tremble not for him;
His rage we can endure,
For lo, his doom is sure—

CONCLUSION

My thesis in this article is basically a simple one: salvation in biblical perspective has a comprehensive nature. God's saving work is holistic in terms of humanity, history, and nonhuman creation. An extraordinary amount of theological work is required to fill out the comprehensive programme, even partially to fill it out. But the comprehensiveness of the divine saving work is the proper framework for any doctrine of salvation. Perhaps this is obvious and the emphasis is unnecessary. However, a considerable segment of Christian theology has worked with an excessively anthropocentric understanding of salvation, with little concern for the rest of creation and the solidarity of humanity with the nonhuman world, which encourages the treatment of the world and its resources as expendable for any human endeavour. It makes a difference if God is both the Creator and the Saviour of the world and all that pertains to it: 'The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it/the world and those who live in it' ([Ps. 24:1](#), NRSV).

³⁵ 35. *The Triumph of God: The Essence of Paul's Thought*, trans. Loren T. Stuckenbruck, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), pp. 30–1.

³⁶ 36. For discussion, see Wink, pp. 26–35.

The comprehensive framework is also important relative to the type of individualistic, personal salvation espoused by some strands of Protestant evangelical theology. In this approach, usually associated with evangelism aimed at producing a conversion experience for large numbers of people, salvation tends to become attenuated to a punctiliar experience, readily recognized among those who emphasize the importance (and even the necessity) of a conversion which can be fixed to an 'hour of decision', or even to a minute of change. The experience is frequently formulaic (following a 'plan of salvation' with various defined stages) and related to a theology of almost totally passive receptivity on the part of the convert. Repentance may be avowed, but it usually has a secondary role, as does baptism. Salvation becomes an individual affair: personal punctiliar salvation. Even the whole rich field of conversion in terms of its history and nature receives little attention.³⁷ 'Saving souls' usurps making disciples of Christ, and the comprehensive nature of God's saving work is lost.

Marvin E. Tate Jr. is Senior Professor of Old Testament Interpretation at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, where he has served since 1960. His doctorate is from the same school; he has done advanced study at Oxford University and written commentaries on Job, Proverbs and the Psalms.

The Radical Modernizing of the Christian Doctrine of Reconciliation

Dr. Rolf Hille

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Keywords: Schleiermacher, Ritschl, Hegel, Kant, atonement, reconciliation, wrath, salvation, righteousness, judge, guilt, sin

INTRODUCTION

With a trembling hand and tears young Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher, who had just turned eighteen, wrote the following in a letter to his father, a Prussian army chaplain, on January 21, 1787:

³⁷ 37. A selection from the extensive literature could include: William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (see note 8 above), 157–206; A.D. Nock, *Conversion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933, 1961); Marilyn J. Harran, *Luther on Conversion: The Early Years* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1983); Hugh T. Kerr and John M. Mulder, *Conversions: The Christian Experience* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1983); H. Newton Malony and Samuel Southard, *Handbook of Religious Conversions* (Birmingham, Alabama: Religious Education Press, 1992); Karl F. Morrison, *Understanding Conversion* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1992); *Conversion and Text: The Cases of Augustine of Hippo, Herman-Judah, and Constantine Tsatsos* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia press, 1992); and the work of A.F. Segal cited in note 18 above.

Faith is a regale (i.e., a sovereign right) of the divinity, you wrote me. Oh, dear Father, if you believe that without this faith, there is no salvation, at least not in the life hereafter, and no peace in this life as there is in the other, and that is indeed what you believe, oh, then ask God that He grant this faith to me, because right now I have lost it. I cannot believe that it was the eternal, true God who merely called himself 'Son of Man'. I cannot believe that his death was a substitutionary atoning one because he himself never expressly said so, and because I cannot believe that it was necessary, for it is impossible, therefore, for God to want to eternally punish people whom He apparently created not for perfection, but, rather, only for striving after the same, just because they did not become perfect.¹

The far-reaching break with tradition, the revolution in the theological thinking of modern times, can hardly be summarized more briefly than in this confession of young Schleiermacher, who quickly rose to become one of the leading Protestant theologians of the nineteenth century. What occurred with respect to the history of ideas which allowed a young man who sincerely believed, who was completely influenced by his father in the piety of older Pietism of the Herrnhuter sort, and who orientated himself as a young theologian to the Bible and the basic principle of the Reformation of the justification of the sinner by faith alone, to fall into such serious doubt and temptation?

One thing must be made clear here: Schleiermacher was certainly familiar with the basic principles of the classical biblical doctrine of atonement, which can be summarized as follows: man, who was created by God as 'good', rebelled against his Creator because of his original freedom, and fell away from God. He came thereby under the enslavement of sin and death. God redeemed man from temporal and eternal damnation in that he himself became a man in Jesus Christ and suffered the curse of death in a substitutionary way. By this redemptive act of God man is liberated from the power of sin and death. He is placed into new fellowship with God the Father when he accepts in faith the forgiveness of sin given by Christ. As a pardoned sinner, the Christian is empowered to become obedient to God's command. In a world of suffering and death he may hope for the fulfilment of the promise of God in eternal life. The goal of the reconciliation of God in Christ is 'the new heaven and the new earth in which righteousness dwells' (see [2 Peter 3:13](#)). The salvific work of substitutionary atonement is completed in the Kingdom of Heaven, in which all believers have a part.

Why then does the message of the Christian faith just summarized, which is centred on the gift of reconciliation of the holy God with sinful man, no longer seem believable to Schleiermacher? After all, theology had throughout sixteen centuries of church history developed this very gospel. Certainly different aspects of the event of reconciliation move into view in differing epochs of the church, but the biblical doctrine of salvation was held unchallenged as the foundation of the faith. The revelation of the work of divine redemption was confessed as unalterable truth.

In this article we will try to clarify how radical changes of thought came about and how these influenced important theologians of the Modern Age; we will use as examples some important philosophical positions of the European Enlightenment and of German Idealism. This can, of course, be shown within the bounds of a short essay only in some especially representative source texts. In this essay, it is important for us to confront, example for example, the basic biblical ideas with the convictions of modern thought in order to show how philosophical presuppositions and evaluations have become definitive for the theological understanding of reconciliation even up to the present.

¹ 1. *Aus Schleiermachers Leben. In Briefen. Erster Band (Vol. 1): Von Schleiermachers Kindheit bis zu seiner Anstellung in Halle October 1804.* Berlin, 1858, p. 45.

First of all, it is clear in this that the great thinkers of the Enlightenment and of Idealism were completely aware of the foundational upheaval brought about by their approach compared to the classical doctrine of reconciliation. We have, therefore, started from Schleiermacher's crisis which most certainly was not merely an intellectual problem but was also a deeply existential one as well. The renunciation of the traditional Christian doctrine of reconciliation in all essential arguments, which is representative of the Modern Age, can be demonstrated in an exemplary fashion in the writings of Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831). They established the 'ideal type' of the Christian understanding of reconciliation which Count Aulen of Lund presents in a well-informed manner in his essay on 'The Three Main Types of the Christian Idea of Reconciliation'.²

Schleiermacher (1768–1834), Albrecht Ritschl (1822–1889) and Wilhelm Herrmann (1846–1922) took up the idealistic type of the doctrine of reconciliation in the nineteenth century and thereby completely reshaped Christian dogmatics in an effort to convey the gospel to modern culture. In the twentieth century, Rudolf Bultmann (1884–1976) and Paul Tillich (1886–1965) advanced these ideas further. Further development of these ideas, somewhat trivialized, appears in the currently fashionable theologies of feminism and psychological exegesis. We will examine here aspects of the work of these theologians and philosophers which have contributed in a definitive way to the reshaping of the biblical doctrine of atonement, quoting relevant source texts in detail and contrasting them with the statements of Scripture.

1. ATONEMENT AS THE CALL OF THE 'LOVING GOD' A THEOLOGICAL CRITICISM OF THE DOCTRINE OF ATONEMENT

1.1. The Rejection of the Divine Attribute, 'the Wrath of God'

Central to the development of the Christian doctrine of God is the reflection on the essence and the characteristics of God, his so-called attributes. The attributes of God in theology are not, of course, deduced from the speculative thought of man about what God could or must be like theoretically, but they go back to the historical revelation of God given in the Holy Scriptures. Religious and philosophical speculation very quickly and for good reasons becomes a slave to the criticism of religions, which argues from a psychological standpoint. Man works out his concept of a god from his open or hidden illusions. If this is so then God is in fact only a projection of Man in the sense meant by the philosopher Ludwig Feuerbach (1804–1872).

In modern theology, which starts with a very human conception of Man, the idea of the wrath of God is an intolerable thought which cannot be harmonized with the modern concept of love. This position is represented especially by Albrecht Ritschl, one of the most important liberal theologians of the 19th century. According to Ritschl, wrath is not an attribute of God and atonement cannot be completed properly in legal statutes and structures because the realm of morality is, theologically, not that of law, but of love. The idea of the God of love is, thereby, derived less from the biblical history of redemption, and more from a purely idealistic conception which Ritschl determines with a philosophical definition:

First, it is necessary that the objects which are loved should be of like nature to the subject which loves, namely, persons. ... *Secondly*, love implies a will which is constant in its aim. If the objects change, we may have fancies, but we cannot love. *Thirdly*, love aims at the

² 2. *Die drei Haupttypen des christlichen Versöhnungsgedankens* (ZsTh 8, 1930).

promotion of the other's personal end, whether known or conjectured. ... *Fourthly*, if love is to be a constant attitude of the will, and if the appropriation and the promotion of the other's personal end are not alternately to diverge, but to coincide in each act, then the will of the lover must take up the other's personal end and make it part of his own.³

In short, love is '... that will which accepts, as belonging to one's own end, the task of advancing permanently the end of other personal beings of like nature with oneself'.⁴

The biblical understanding of the wrath of God stands opposed to this: 'For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men who by their wickedness suppress the truth'. ([Rom. 1:18](#)) 'But by your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed'. ([Rom. 2:5](#)). It is noteworthy that these witnesses are from Paul's Epistle to the Romans, the basic document in the New Testament dealing with the doctrine of atonement, from which Luther gained his crucial Reformation understanding of justification. Corresponding to this is Jesus' own testimony: 'He who believes in the Son has eternal life; he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God rests upon him' ([John 3:36](#); see also [John 3:16](#)).

Misunderstanding God's actions in love, Ritschl believes he can demonstrate that

the asserted necessity of a penal satisfaction to God as a condition of the exercise of this grace has no foundation in the Biblical conception of God; on the contrary, it is an intellectual inference from the principles of Hellenic religion that the gods practise a twofold retribution.⁵

In looking at the matter more carefully, exactly the opposite is shown to be correct: the idea of satisfaction for a penalty to God is offensive to the human mind (see [1 Cor. 1:23](#): '... foolishness to the Greeks'.) whereas the Scriptures see the basis for our salvation therein: 'Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us' ([Gal. 3:13](#); see also [Deut. 21; 23; 1 Peter 3:18](#)).

1.2 A Rejection of God, the Judge of the World

The rejection of God's function as Judge is directly connected with calling into question the wrath of God as an inappropriate and thereby unworthy idea of God. If God's love excludes his holy wrath toward sin and the unrepentant sinner, then forgiveness remains as the only business of the 'loving God', which is completely in accordance with Voltaire's (1694–1778) polemic statement: *pardonner c'est son métier* ('forgiveness is his business').

For Schleiermacher,

... the separation contemplated at the Last Judgment remains ... both inadequate and superfluous. All that might be said is that it takes place for the sake not of the blessed but of the others ... But either this would mean attributing jealousy to the Supreme Being, an idea against which even the higher paganism protested; or it must rest solely on that familiar and widespread idea of the divine righteousness which in its one sidedness looks so like caprice that before we could feel ourselves entitled, not to say obliged, to regard the idea as in harmony with the mind of Christ, it would have to be much less equivocal in

³ 3. Albrecht Ritschl, *The Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation* (3rd ed.) English translation by H.R. Mackintosh and A.B. Macauley (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1900), p. 277f.

⁴ 4. Ritschl, *Justification and Reconciliation*, p. 381.

⁵ 5. Ritschl, *Justification and Reconciliation*, p. 478.

its origins, the expression given to it much more decisive, and the Apostles' use of it much more comprehensive.⁶

It can be clearly seen in this statement by Schleiermacher how very detestable the idea of God's wrath is to the man of the Romantic period who considered himself to be modern. He is no longer able to combine the wrath and judgment of God with the holiness and righteousness or justice of God, but only still with the blind capriciousness and the vengeful malice of pagan gods.

According to Ritschl, the penal justice of a judging God is also not compatible with divine freedom and love; he writes:

But since Divine justice, in relation to human sin, operates merely in a one-sided way, namely in its character as penal power, the juridical complexion of this theory comes out still further in the notion that the primitive justice of God manifests itself in the same positive impartiality as befits a judge when hearing each particular case of accusation. Just as a judge, when forming his opinion of a punishable act, must disregard everything of the nature of moral disadvantage which the punishment of the criminal will entail upon his relatives and himself, so God, it is maintained, is bound so strictly by His punitive justice that He is entirely in different to the form which the fate of the human race may take as a result of punishment. The proverb which is used to illustrate the impartiality which ought to characterise any particular sentence—*Fiat iustitia, pereat mundus* —[Let justice be done, even if the world is destroyed!] is literally applied to the alleged Divine dispensation.⁷

While Schleiermacher turns the judging God almost into an idol with religious historical arguments, Ritschl approaches the problem with the idea of a trial within the rule of law. God must at least satisfy the elementary requirements of procedural law. Here, though, a particular weakness of modern humanism results in a criticism of the judgment of God which leads ultimately to utter absurdity. A God who is not oriented to the rules of the game defined by man cannot be good and just. What is overlooked is that God's being is holy in itself and, therefore, his present and eschatological judgment on Judgment Day is and will be just. What righteousness is cannot be derived theologically from Man's awareness or sense of justice, but must be taken in a normative theological sense from God's being, and from the way in which he has revealed himself in the biblical history of salvation.

The modern illusion of the 'loving God' which the nineteenth century especially nurtured with considerable intensity broke down in the horror of the First World War as a traumatic culture shock. After the catastrophe of the Third Reich, Wolfgang Borchert, in his theatre production *Draussen vor der Tuer* (Standing Outside the Door) rebelled against the '... loving God bloody with ink'. In the catastrophes of the twentieth century the naive cultured Protestant talk of the love of God, which does not include his anger and his judgment, could no longer be defended. In the argument over the loving God, who could not be reconciled with the realities of the world, God was denied by many completely and finally. The teachings of Ritschl and Schleiermacher about the nature of God fail because of the realities of life. (see [Isa. 13:9](#); [James 5:8f](#); [Acts 10:42](#))

⁶ 6. Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith* (2nd German edition) edited and translated by H.R. Mackintosh and J.S. Stewart (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1928) p. 716 § 162.

⁷ 7. Ritschl, *Justification and Reconciliation*, p. 255.

2. THE PROUD EGO NEEDS NO ATONEMENT AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL CRITICISM OF THE DOCTRINE OF ATONEMENT

2.1 Tthe Moral Protest of Autonomous Man

Among the philosophers of the Modern Age, none was as influential for Protestantism as Immanuel Kant. His understanding of the autonomous moral man had an especially profound influence on the Protestant criticism of the Reformation understanding of the doctrines of justification and atonement. According to Kant, the Law enables man to recognize the Law and to obey it:

So far as morality is based upon the conception of man as a free agent who, just because he is free, binds himself through his reason to unconditioned laws, it stands in need neither of the idea of another Being over him, for him to apprehend his duty, nor of an incentive other than the law itself, for him to do his duty.⁸

This is essentially saying that man, who is completely dependent upon his own freedom and morality, is autonomous in and of himself. He needs God neither for knowledge nor for the foundation of moral norms because these result from the reasonableness of the moral imperative itself. The inner motivation to live up to the obligation recognized as reasonable also needs no God. For man who is so emancipated from God, there is nothing more to be said on the questions of forgiveness and atonement. To demand these would be unreasonable and would therefore injure the pride of man.

In contrast to this, in [Romans 7:15–19](#) Paul writes in his analysis of human existence how every human being is confronted with his own entanglement in guilt before God and his fellow human beings. Every attempt at self-justification leads to despair and hopelessness.

According to Kant, one's own responsibility is first of all based on his freedom of action. Paul knows about the depravity of man under the power of sin. Man is warped and cannot liberate himself from the bondage to his own ego with all the blackest depths of his soul. In contrast to this basic insight, Kant points man back to himself. Man is an absolutely free personality, who is defined and determined entirely by his own individual action. So the philosopher from Koenigsberg, Germany declares that there is therefore 'nothing morally evil in that which is our own deed'.⁹

In contrast to this, throughout the entire Bible it is taught and recognized that man is in enmity to God from birth onwards due to original sin, and is responsible although he cannot decide for himself 'on the basis of his own reason or power' for or against God: 'Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow' ([Ps. 51:7](#)). 'Therefore as sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all men sinned'. ([Rom. 5:12](#); see also [Rom. 5:15–19](#), [Eph. 2:3](#), [John 3:6](#)).

2.2 Moral Protest in the Name of Human Freedom of the Will

⁸ 8. Based on the translation of the Preface to the First Edition (1793) of *Religion with the Limits of Reason Alone*, by T.M. Greene and H.H. Hudson, (LaSalle, Illinois: 1934), taken from a Kant website created by Steve Palmquist.

⁹ 9. I. Kant, *Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der blossen Vernunft*, (hg. V.K. Vorlaender (PhB 45), 6 Aufl. (ed.) 1956, III.) p. 25f. (translation, J.L. Kautt).

The moral optimism of Kant is rooted in his basic anthropological conviction of the unlimited freedom of the will of the individual. He writes:

Every thing in nature works according to laws. Only a rational being has the capacity of acting according to the *conception* of laws, (i.e., according to principles). This capacity is the will. Since reason is required for the derivation of actions from laws, will is nothing less than practical reason. If reason infallibly determines the will, the actions which such a being recognizes as objectively necessary are also subjectively necessary. That is, the will is a faculty of choosing only that which reason, independent of inclination, recognizes as practically necessary (i.e., as good).¹⁰

According to the testimony of the Scriptures and the confessions of the Reformers, man has lost this free will by reason of sin and is subjected to his own affection (tendencies) and lustful desires: '... everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin' ([John 8:34](#)).

For the Protestant Reformers, the teaching of the basic lostness of natural man under the power of sin is a non-negotiable biblical truth which must be maintained against the philosophical dogma of freedom of the will. Luther writes: '*Liberum arbitrium post peccatum res est de solo titulo, et dum facit quod in se est, peccat mortaliter*'. (Once sin enters, there is only free will in name. If man does that which is in him according to his will, he commits mortal sins.)¹¹

3. SIN, THE DEFICIENT CLOUDING OF THE AWARENESS OF GOD HAMARTIOLOGICAL CRITICISM OF THE DOCTRINE OF ATONEMENT

What does the power of sin actually consist of? According to Ritschl, sin is simply that which is inappropriate, that which contradicts the Christian ideal of life.¹² The only 'existence' which sin has is its 'being made to disappear'. This innocuous idea of the power of evil is completely consistent with idealistic philosophy. Evil has no power of its own, or existence in and of itself, but, rather, is only a '*privatio boni*', that is, a deficit of good. For this liberal theology of Ritschl, the Pauline connection of sin and evil is untenable. Sickness, suffering, and death are not results of the sinful Fall of man. For, according to the biblical understanding, evil things as such are the outwardly visible power and consequence of the effective enslavement under sin of the heart of man ('The wages of sin is death', [Rom. 6:23](#)).

In contrast to this, for Ritschl, external evil serves merely as a means of instruction for moral betterment. The serious consequence of playing down sin in modern Protestant theology is visible here. If sin has nothing to do with complete reality, from whose sphere

¹⁰ 10. Immanuel Kant, *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals and What is Enlightenment?* (2nd ed. Rev.) translated, with an introduction by Lewis White Beck (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1985, 1990) p. 29.

¹¹ 11. Heidelberg Disputation, (These 13, WA 1,359) and see also Luther's lyrics to the hymn, 'Nun freut euch, Lieben Christen g'mein', (*Evangelisches Gesangbuch* (Ausgabe fuer die Evangelische Landeskirche in Wuerttemberg, 1996, Gesangbuchverlag Stuttgart GmbH, Stuttgart, Germany. First edition.) No 341, St 3 'Dear Christians, One and All, Rejoice' from 1523, translated by Richard Massie, text transcribed from: *The Handbook to the Lutheran Hymnal*, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1942), pp. 277-8. The third stanza: 'My own works availed me naught, No merit they attaining. Free will against God's judgment fought, Dead to all good remaining. My fears increased till sheer despair Left naught but death to be my share. The pains of hell I suffered'.

¹² 12. Ritschl, *Justification and Reconciliation*, p. 334f.

of influence or control we must be redeemed and freed by God's saving action, then there is also no longer any complete redemption and deliverance from the bad/ evil things of our personal lives and of the fallen world as a whole. The defeat of sickness, suffering, and death along with sin becomes ineffective and powerless as well. Sin is, then, finally, only about the acceptance of and a new Christian understanding of evil, but has nothing to do with its ultimate elimination by a new heaven and a new earth, which Christ will bring about as the Judge of the world at his return.

The relationship between the status of sin and the status of salvation must not be considered as an immediate contrast, but, rather, 'the earlier and the later states are combined in a single self-consciousness'. Punishment in this view is the awareness of guilt and, corresponding to this, atonement is the 'removal of the consciousness of guilt'.¹³

Ritschl continues:

Guilt, in the moral sense, expresses the disturbance of the proper reciprocal relation between the moral law and freedom, which follows from the law-transgressing abuse of freedom, and as such is marked by the accompanying pain of the feeling of guilt. Guilt is thus that permanent contradiction between the objective and the subjective factor of the moral will which is produced by the abuse of freedom in non-fulfilment of the law, and the unworthiness of which is expressed for the moral subject in his consciousness of guilt.¹⁴

Understood in this way, guilt as such is not eliminated in the process of atonement, but what is removed is the distrust resultant from guilt, in the sense of alienation between God and man. Ritschl writes:

Among the relations which go to make up the separation of sinners from God, the rest are overtopped by the consciousness of guilt, partly as a condition of the varied gradations of punishment, partly in so far as it is not an objective attribute, but a subjective function of the sinner. We ought therefore rather to transpose 'the removal of the separation of sinners from God' into *the removal of the consciousness of guilt*.¹⁵

If the real power of sin in the sense implied by Ritschl is thus minimized, then the entire question of sin and atonement becomes a matter which takes place only in the innermost parts of the human person. However, according to the entire biblical record and Christian conviction, sin has its location not just in the consciousness of man, but is a real power which separates him objectively from God, rules him, and brings temporal and eternal death to him if he is not freed by Christ from the power of sin. Although the Christian remains a sinner throughout his life, he is no longer under the dominion of sin: 'You who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart' ([Rom. 6:17](#); see also [Gen. 2:17](#), [Isa. 6:5](#), [Rom. 6:23](#)) The German lyricist and hymn-writer of the first part of this century, Jochen Klepper, knows about the power of sin which separates one from God when he writes in the following hymn 'God dwells in inapproachable light. Sin's ban separates us from his face.'¹⁶

According to Kant, the basis of evil lies in the arbitrary use of human freedom. This misuse of freedom arises when the empirical subject, i.e., the individual human being alone, is strongly influenced by moral as well as by immoral (especially by sensually-driven) impulses. In order to overcome this fateful mixture of morality and immorality, in

¹³ 13. Ritschl, *Justification and Reconciliation*, pp. 48, 54.

¹⁴ 14. Ritschl, *Justification and Reconciliation*, p. 57.

¹⁵ 15. Ritschl, *Justification and Reconciliation*, p. 54.

¹⁶ 16. *Evangelisches Gesangbuch*, No. 379, v. 1.

Kant's view, practical reason is needed. This practical or morally-guided reason produces insight into the morally good which man can then follow also by free will. Because man can know what is good and evil he also gains power by the insight of reason to do what he understands and agrees with and what is good. Although Kant can speak practically about radical evil in other places by accepting what the Bible says about this, he still is bound to his idealistic optimism, which simply maintains the following: one who knows what is good can also do it. Evil, better yet, sin, is only a relative defect which man can overcome himself by virtue of his own autonomous reason.

4. ATONEMENT IS MERELY SUBJECTIVE A SOTERIOLOGICAL CRITICISM OF THE DOCTRINE OF THE ATONEMENT

4.1. It is Just the Awareness of Guilt Which Must be Removed

According to Schleiermacher, sin is first and foremost a matter of the human consciousness. Thus Schleiermacher's doctrine of sin remains trapped completely in the feeling of the pious subject. Sin is the dulling of the awareness of God; sin occurs where sensory self-awareness remains without the influence of the consciousness of God. If sin is something purely subjective, then the ideas of atonement and redemption also lack the objective aspect. Atonement is, then, not understood as Christ's once for all act before God, but rather it consists 'in the rebalancing of the disharmony between the sensory and the human awareness of the divine'.¹⁷

Schleiermacher himself explains:

We have the consciousness of sin whenever the God-consciousness which forms part of an inner state, or is in some way added to it, determines our self-consciousness as pain; and therefore we conceive of sin as a positive antagonism of the flesh against the spirit.¹⁸

Schleiermacher, therefore, defines sin 'as an arrestment of the determinative power of the spirit, due to the independence of the sensuous functions'.¹⁹

The concept of sin as purely subjective cannot be harmonized with the seriousness with which sin is opposed in the Bible. The facts of the wrath of God and the cross of Christ already noted, prevent any minimizing of sin.

The break with tradition is reflected most sharply when one compares the modern positions on the topic of sin with the radicalism of the understanding of sin in, for instance, Anselm of Canterbury (1033/34–1109), who wrote: '*nondum considerasti quanti ponderis sit peccatum*' (You have not yet considered how heavy sin weighs)²⁰ Anselm's approach in the treatise *Cur deus homo* (Why God became a man) is based on a deep horror of the power of sin which can, in no way, be overcome by an act of human consciousness.

4.2. Redemption by a Change of Way of Thinking

¹⁷ 17. C.G. Seibert, *Schleiermacher's Lehre von der Versöhnung in ihrem Zusammenhang mit der Schleiermacher'schen Christologie überhaupt, sowie in ihrem Verhältnis zur rationalistischen, altorthodoxen und rein biblischen Lehre dargestellt und beleuchtet*, (Wiesbaden: 1855), p. 25., translated by J.L. Kautt).

¹⁸ 18. Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, p. 271 § 66.

¹⁹ 19. Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, p. 273.

²⁰ 20. *Cur deus homo, besorgt und uebersetzt von F.S. Schmitt*, Muenchen 1986, p. 74. (translated from the German by J.L. Kautt).

In his discussion of justification, Anselm started with the basic idea of the offended honour of God. Every sin, even when it appears to man to be minor and insignificant, is rebellion against God. With every sin the dominion of God is fundamentally called into question by man, in fact, even contended. This is what makes up the infinite weight of sin. Kant took up the idea of honour as well but only in the sense of his modern philosophy. Of course it is no longer God's honour which is offended by moral evil but that of man. The 'transcendental subject', that is, the complete reality of the 'ego', is attacked in its dignity by amorality. Man sins not against God, but against himself.

On the other hand, according to Kant, one can detect the inappropriateness of the idea that God holds sins against those committing them. Kant gets out of this conflict by attributing to the process of the changing of the mind (repentance-*metanoia*) the *mortificatio* (mortification) of the old man alongside the *vivificatio* (making alive again) of the new man, and by attaching atoning value to the former. Man who considers himself transcendental achieves atonement for the sins of the old man who is passing away. Atonement occurs in which the penalties are thought to be included in the change of mind, '... which the new right-thinking man can view as those which he is responsible for in another relationship and as such penalties whereby satisfaction occurs for divine justice'.²¹

Atonement, it must be emphasized, is therefore in no way reconciliation between God and man, but the reconciliation of man with himself. All of this occurs within the inner being of the person, his thoughts, and his consciousness.²²

However, as far as the relationship to God can be seen at all in Kant's writings, reconciliation is completed by virtue of the already familiar 'professional obligation to pardon' of an ultimately good-natured grandfather God. The holiness of Christ remains always for us as a distant example; God is not bound by our limitation, but rather the moral act as an already completed whole. The guilt of man can never then be completely removed, now or in the future through a surplus of good works; rather, God refrains from punishment in view of the moral thinking about punishment 'because man is already walking in new life, and, morally, is another person'.²³

It is obvious that according to this view man justifies himself by reason of his changed attitude and no longer needs the service of Christ. Christ is merely the historical example or the philosophical prototype whom one is supposed to imitate. The idea that redemption is something which occurs entirely in the consciousness was also maintained by Schleiermacher. The degree of the consciousness of God corresponds to the degree to which one is redeemed. Redemption and Atonement are, according to this, purely subjective processes:

The Redeemer, then, is like all men in virtue of the identity of human nature, but distinguished from them all by the constant potency of His God-consciousness, which was the veritable existence of God in Him.²⁴

The act of salvation corresponds to this:

²¹ 21. I. Kant, *Die Religion*, p. 97f. (translation, J.L. Kautt).

²² 22. I. Kant, *Die Religion*, p. 98ff.

²³ 23. I. Kant, *Die Religion*, p. 84ff., p. 96.

²⁴ 24. Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, p. 385 § 94.

The Redeemer assumes believers into the power of His God-consciousness, and this is His redemptive activity.

The Redeemer assumes the believers into the fellowship of His unclouded blessedness, and this is His reconciling activity

The self-consciousness characterising those assumed into living fellowship with Christ may be set forth under both conceptions, Regeneration and Sanctification.²⁵

According to biblical teaching, by contrast, the fruit of the work of Christ, the atonement which occurred on the cross, is truly independent of the respective conditions of awareness of man. Man experiences redemption neither by reason of his change of mind nor by reason of the degree of his consciousness of God: 'So it depend not upon man's will or exertion, but upon God's mercy' ([Rom. 9:16](#), see also [Heb. 9:15](#)).

5. ATONEMENT NEEDS NO MYTH CONCERNING THE SON OF GOD CHRISTOLOGICAL CRITICISM OF THE DOCTRINE OF ATONEMENT

5.1. Human Self-Redemption Needs No Son of God

If the idea of a judging God is given up, so also is the necessity of the justification of man before his Creator. Man, as the highest authority of responsibility, knows only his own conscience. This can be satisfied by honest effort. In the case of a possible relative deficit of human ability, man may be content with a 'supernatural' interim bridging of some kind. The whole weight of sin, which only God himself could bear in Christ, is thereby minimized. In this vein, Schleiermacher explains:

Where one's own action for the justification of man is not enough before one's own (strictly judging) conscience, then reason is authorized to accept by faith, if need be, a supernatural complementation to its deficient righteousness (even without being allowed to determine what it consists of).²⁶

Even in Ritschl's writings the moral incentive of the message of the Son of God is done away with:

... the revelation of God through his Son, [extended likewise to His community] however, embraces the community which acknowledges His Son as her Lord, and how it does so, is explained by saying that God manifests Himself to the Son and to the community as *loving Will*.²⁷

In contrast to this, Luther paints the picture of God's will to love not as a demand, but as a gift for us in Christ when he writes: 'Do you see the picture of the Crucified One, then view it as a picture which properly frightens you, so that your heart says: O woe is my sin and God's wrath so great upon me!'²⁸

²⁵ 25. Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, p. 425 § 100, p. 431, § 101, p. 476 § 106.

²⁶ 26. *Der Streit der Facultaeten in drey Abschnitten von I. Kant, Koenigsberg 1798, in: ders.(Kant), Werke in zehn Baenden* (hg. v. W. Weischedel, Bd. 9: Schriften zur Anthropologie, Geschichtsphilosophie, Politik und Paedagogik. Erster Teil, Darmstadt 1975 (4. Nachdruck der Ausgabe von 1964)), p. 60f.

²⁷ 27. Ritschl, *Justification and Reconciliation*, p. 272f.

²⁸ 28. *Karfreitagspredigt* 1538, WA 46,286. Cf. also: *Sermon von der Betrachtung des Leidens Christi*, 1519, WA 2,137).

5.2. Jesus, the Good Man from Nazareth—The Idea of the Dual Nature of Christ Can be Rejected

According to the New Testament, the atonement is based upon the fact that Jesus is truly God and truly Man. The divine and human natures come together in the person of Jesus completely and inseparably. This Christological fact is the basis for the atoning, salvific activity of Christ. Because God came into this world in the form of sinful man, he defeated sin in the flesh and reconciled God and man in this way. Because modern philosophy and, following it also modern theology, reject the classical doctrine of the dual nature of Christ as an inappropriate and unreasonable metaphysics of being, they have also given up and destroyed the factual basis of the New Testament doctrine of atonement.

In Kant's theory of atonement, the historical figure of Jesus of Nazareth is dissolved into the principle of the good. Christ is ultimately identical to the idea of the moral law which confronts man as a demand. In this way Kant can present to the customary formulations of tradition a content which is opposite to it. God does not become flesh, but the idea of the moral law becomes a man. In the end, Christ is only a symbol for a redemption which man works out himself through appropriate actions.²⁹

For the young man Hegel also, Christ is interesting only as the idea of the morally perfect man in which he serves as an example for mankind. In contrast to rationalistic theology, it was important for Schleiermacher to keep together the person and work of Christ, when he wrote: "The peculiar activity and the exclusive dignity of the Redeemer imply each other, and are inseparably one in the self-consciousness of believers".³⁰ The uniqueness of Christ is therefore of definite importance to Schleiermacher when he explains: "... as an historical individual He must have been at the same time ideal (i.e., the ideal must have become completely historical in Him), and each historical moment of His experience must at the same time have borne within it the ideal".³¹ In this unity of idea and historical reality, Schleiermacher sees the unity of God and man in Christ. Schleiermacher's offer to mediate between faith and science in this way met justifiably with disapproval because for him the divinity of Christ exists merely in the 'constant potency of his God-consciousness, which was a veritable existence of God in Him'.³²

Christ is distinguished from Christians, then, only in the strength of his awareness of God; there can be no mention of an identity of being between the earthly figure of Jesus and God, according to Schleiermacher. If Jesus' divinity, however, exists in the 'strength of his awareness of God', then every kind of temptation or suffering of Jesus is thereby ruled out, according to Schleiermacher. A classical example of this idea of Christ is Schleiermacher's exposition of the account of Jesus being forsaken by God ([Mt. 27:46](#)), which argues against the exact words of the text as a foregone conclusion.³³ The lack also of a doctrine of the trinity in Schleiermacher's Glaubenslehre (E.T., *The Christian Faith*) shows that no kind of divinity should be expressed in talking about Jesus' consciousness of God.³⁴

²⁹ 29. I. Kant, *Die Religion*, p. 98ff.

³⁰ 30. Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, p. 374 § 92.

³¹ 31. Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, p. 377 § 93.

³² 32. Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, p. 385 § 94.

³³ 33. *Fr. Schleiermacher's saemmtliche Werke*. (Zweite Abtheilung. Predigten. Zweiter Band. Neue Ausgabe, Berlin 1843), p. 401f.

³⁴ 34. See Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, p. 742ff § 170ff.

According to Ritschl, Christ is an insurpassable example in the fulfilment of the task of the 'true development of the spiritual personality'. Maintaining his divinity is simply a value judgment which is related to Christ's normative behaviour.

Now this religious vocation of the members of the Christian community is prefigured in the person of its Founder, and rests upon His person as its abiding source of strength for all imitation of Him, because He Himself made God's supreme purpose of the union of men in the Kingdom of God the aim of His own personal life; and thereby realised in His own experience that independence toward the world which through Him has become the experience of the members of His community. This ideal, the true development of the spiritual personality, cannot be rightly or fully conceived apart from contemplation of Him Who is the prototype of man's vocation. Thus what is the historically complete figure of Christ we recognize to be the real worth of his existence, gains for ourselves, through the uniqueness of the phenomenon and its normative bearing upon our own religious and ethical destiny, the worth of an abiding rule, since we at the same time discover that only through the impulse and direction we receive from Him, is it possible for us to enter into His relation to God and to the world.³⁵

The positions presented here show that the different attempts to make the miracle of the incarnation of God plausible to the human mind ultimately end in a dissolution of the historical person of Jesus (prototype Christology), or in the reduction of his divinity to the uniqueness of his consciousness of God or his moral life (exemplary Christology). In any case Christ the Son of God who became flesh as the Bible depicts him has been lost ([John 1:14](#); see also [John 20:28](#); [Tit. 2:13](#); [Heb. 1:8](#); [Rom. 9:5](#)).

5.3. Jesus' Uniquely Strong Awareness of God is Sufficient

Christ's obedience has no representative significance for us, according to Schleiermacher's view. His obedience becomes effective for us only in so far as the consciousness of God which is already inherent in us becomes active through the example of his consciousness of God. For Schleiermacher, it is true that

... the total obedience—*dikaioma*— of Christ avails for our advantage only in so far as through it our assumption into vital fellowship with Him is brought about, and in that fellowship we are moved by Him, that is, His motive principle becomes our also—just as we also share in condemnation for Adam's sin only in so far as we, being in natural life-fellowship with him and moved in the same way, all sin ourselves.³⁶

If this were only about states of awareness in Christ, then the temptation of Jesus and the agony of his temptation in Gethsemane would be types of exhibition fights. Ultimately, Jesus' wrestling with temptation and the satanic opponent of God would not have been the battle for the existence or non-existence of the salvation of the world at all. Basically, nothing would have been at stake, in fact, in Jesus' mission because there was also nothing real at all to be lost or gained. Contrary to this, the Scriptures teach that we have redemption not through Christ's consciousness, but by his act of salvation: 'there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all . . .' ([1 Tim. 2:5f.](#)).

5.4. Jesus, the Model of Faithfulness to One's Calling

³⁵ 35. Ritschl, *Justification and Reconciliation*, p. 387.

³⁶ 36. Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, pp. 456–7 § 104.

Christ's death, according to Schleiermacher, should not be connected to the redemption given by him, but rather his death is a consequence of his faithfulness to his calling. Jesus' exemplary character is expressed in this.

Schleiermacher writes:

Only one misunderstanding still remains to be guarded against at this point; we must not set forth Christ's surrender of Himself to death as a free decision on His part in any other sense than that which is here taken as fundamental, namely, that His self-surrender was identical with His persistence in redemptive activity. For otherwise the suffering of Christ, ... appears arbitrary ... He must therefore have accepted it [his death] as a duty involved in His vocation to appear in the holy city for this feast, in spite of the foreknowledge He possessed; and beyond question it was an element in the development of his great crisis that Christ met His death in His zeal for His vocation relatively to His Father's law ³⁷

Ritschl, who, as we have seen, shares Schleiermacher's reserve concerning the idea of an angry God, also accepts his reduced understanding of the meaning of Jesus' death for salvation when he writes:

It is not the mere fate of dying that determines the value of Christ's death as a sacrifice; what renders this issue of His life significant for others is His willing acceptance of the death inflicted on Him by His adversaries as a dispensation of God, and the highest proof of faithfulness to His vocation. Thus it is impossible to accept an interpretation of Christ's sacrificial death which, under the head of satisfaction, combines in a superficial manner His death and His active life, while at bottom it ascribes to the death of Christ quite a different meaning, namely, that of substitutionary punishment.³⁸

Gratefully recognizing Christ as our example is certainly biblical, but the significance of his substitutionary atoning death must never be thereby diminished. A passage from I Peter makes clear how both aspects have lasting significance: 'For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example ... He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness' ([1 Pet. 2:21-24](#)).

SUMMARY

The criticism of the biblical and Reformation doctrine of the atonement current today is rooted very deeply in the understanding of God, sin, and man defined by the Enlightenment. The rejection of classical Christology and soteriology follows on necessarily from these positions. Although there are individual differences in the detailed philosophical and theological concepts, the radical departure from tradition is constant throughout. In the end, man needs no divine redeemer because he succeeds morally by himself and completes self-redemption in his consciousness, whether this is individual, as it is with Kant, Schleiermacher, and Ritschl, or universal, as with Hegel.

Dr Rolf Hille is Executive Chair of the World Evangelical Fellowship Theological Commission and Principal of Albrecht Bengel Haus, Tübingen, Germany. As well taking an active part in his own church, he is also a leading figure in the Evangelical Alliance movement and theological associations in his own country and elsewhere in Europe. This article is adapted from Dr Hille's chapter (with some sections omitted) in *Warum das*

³⁷ 37. Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, p. 462 § 104.

³⁸ 38. Ritschl, *Justification and Reconciliation*, p. 477.

Kreuz?, (Wuppertal: Brockhaus Verlag, 1998) a collection of essays by faculty members of Bengel Haus, edited by Volker Gaeckle. Unless otherwise noted, all translation is by James Louis Kautt of Tübingen.

Salvation from an African Perspective

Henry J. Mugabe

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Keywords: Salvation, culture, sin, healing, deliverance, liberation, ancestors

Not all African theologians share the same views or belong to the same school of thought concerning salvation, notwithstanding the fact it is a key theme in the Christian message. This is not surprising, for in Christian tradition the theme of salvation proliferates in many facets of meaning and colourful interpretations. So it is to be expected that African theologians could not have a unanimous grasp of this key concept. While some Africans have not explored its meaning beyond the theology of the missionaries who introduced them to the Christian faith, others have wrestled with the meaning of salvation within their respective African contexts.

This paper is written from the perspective of an African Baptist Christian who believes that African Christian theologies must be rooted in the cultural, social, political, religious and economic context of African life and thought. Cultural and societal differences are so intrinsic to human nature and inculturated in human existence that theology has to be contextual.¹ The contents of this paper are reflections of one among many African Christians who are wrestling with what it means to be an African Christian.

The discussion of salvation from an African perspective is appropriate and proper, because African voices which are often excluded from theological conversations must be heard and acknowledged as being legitimate. African theology is often viewed as being radical, reactionary, or novel, and not to be taken seriously. A growing number of missiologists, however, are giving credence to the authenticity of Africa's viewpoint of the gospel, its scope, its message and its meaning.²

It does not take much research to show that from the time of the early church to the present, people have always come to Jesus out of their varied experiences, contexts and needs.³ Their reading of the scriptures have been coloured by different traditions and experiences. It is therefore appropriate that the discussion about African perceptions of salvation be taken seriously from African traditional viewpoints of wholeness and well-

¹ 1. Every theology is always someone's theology. All claims to a pure universal biblical theology are illusory and unsustainable.

² 2. A survey of standard texts in systematic theology in the West simply ignore any theological reflection from Africa.

³ 3. See Jaroslav Pelikan, *Jesus through the Centuries*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985). He presents eighteen 'images' of Jesus that emerged in the history of Christianity.

being which helped Africans to appreciate, appropriate and interpret the theme of salvation preached by missionaries from EURICA (Europe and North America).

1. SALVATION IN TRADITIONAL AFRICA

It is crucial that we be specific in any treatment of salvation. In order to avoid such methods of generalization, I will refer more specifically to the Shona for African perspectives. It is important to realize that in any discussion about salvation in African traditional religions (or any other religion for that matter) we should not assume that what is considered to be crucial in Christian thought necessarily carries the same weight in other cultures and religions. Salvation in Shona religion, for example, does not relate specifically to the afterlife. Shona religion is anthropocentric; it is life affirming. This worldly religion is concerned about protection, restoration, preservation, survival and the continuance of human, societal, and environmental life in this world.⁴ John Mbiti had this to say on the subject:

In these religious considerations of the concept of *salvation*, we take note that salvation in African religion has to do with physical and immediate dangers (of the individual and more often of the community)—dangers that threaten individual or community survival, good health and general prosperity or safety. This is the main religious setting in which the notion of salvation is understood and experienced. Salvation is not just an abstraction, it is concrete, told in terms of both what has happened and is likely to be encountered by people as they go through daily experiences.⁵

With this in mind, the Shona use a number of words for the concept of salvation or redemption. All these words used to translate salvation or redemption have to do with preserving and sustaining the life of the individual or community in this present life. Their concerns are not with detached abstractions of ontological distance. This is borne out in the Shona word *ruponeso* which is commonly used to translate salvation. It comes from the verb *kupona* which means to give birth, to survive, to sustain life, to rescue, or to deliver a baby.⁶ Not only among the Shona is this the case. In his discussion about salvation among the Akan of Ghana, Abraham Akrong has pointed out that the central soteriological concern of the Akan has to do with protection, preservation of life both physical and spiritual from the threats of evil doers like witches, sorcerers, vengeful spirits and all those who seek to destroy life.⁷ He continues,

Salvation, therefore, means the condition, context or space in which human well-being and the ultimate fulfillment of the individual destiny are made possible. It means the absence of everything that threatens and destroys human life or disturbs the conditions that guarantee prosperity and well-being. Finally, salvation means the conditions that

⁴ 4. For a fuller discussion see Henry J. Mugabe, 'Tilling With Our Own Hoes: Shona Religious Metaphor for An African Christian Theology', (Ph.D dissertation, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1993).

⁵ 5. John Mbiti, 'Some Reflections on African Experience of Salvation Today', in *Living Faiths and Ultimate Goals* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1974), pp. 1-138.

⁶ 6. Mugabe, 'Tilling', pp. 184-185.

⁷ 7. Abraham Ako Akrong, 'An Akan Christian View of Salvation from the Perspective of John Calvin's Soteriology' (Ph.D dissertation, Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, 1991).

preserve or restore the harmonies of creation so that the 'rhythm of life' may go on undisturbed in order that human beings may have the space to be human.⁸

Like all African people I know, the Akan have a holistic view of salvation which encompasses all aspects of life in this world. Akrong goes on to point out the following aspects of salvation in an African traditional context. (1) Salvation is viewed as the ideal condition for human well-being and ultimate self fulfilment; (2) It also has to do with protection from evil forces of destruction; (3) with preservation of cosmic and social order and harmony; and (4) with restoration of the broken life.⁹ Those Christians who claim that there is no salvation in African traditional religions do so only because they fail to appreciate that salvation means different things to different religious systems.¹⁰ In fact, the reason why many African Christians embrace both Christianity and African traditional religions is because they perceive traditional religion as being able to meet real needs in procuring salvation in this real world of ours, while Christianity merely concerns itself with the hereafter. An understanding of salvation that is preoccupied only with the salvation of souls from eternal damnation has left this impression on the bulk of African people.

Then again the concept of sin, *chivi* to the Shona, is any and all anti-social activities that are aimed at hurting individuals and communities. Although sin includes evil thoughts, Africans do not view sin and evil in abstract metaphysical terms. Sin has to do with real life situations. For the Shona there is no idea of a fall or of original sin. Children are born without sin and get maladjusted only as they grow. Sin is committed in this present life, so it is in this life that sin must be dealt with. There is no place for punishment in the afterlife. Anxiety about judgment in the hereafter is not part of African experience. 'There are no punishments to be avoided nor rewards to look forward to in heaven or paradise.'¹¹ This being the case, sin is dealt with in terms of appeasement, by compensating the person or community that has been wronged here and now. To many Africans, sinful acts are those which destabilize or destroy the community, and threaten the well-being of one's neighbors. David Bosch rightly observed that

The word used for 'sin' in several African languages means to 'spoil', particularly to spoil or harm human relationships. The witch is sinner par excellence, not primarily because of his or her deeds, but because of the evil consequences of these deeds: illness, barrenness, catastrophe, misfortune, disruption or relationships in the community, poverty, and so on.¹²

This being the case, salvation for an individual means being integrated into the community of ancestors and becoming one. Hell in the after life means having no children to commemorate you when you are gone.

⁸ 8. Ibid., p. 193.

⁹ 9. Ibid., pp. 157–198.

¹⁰ 10. African traditional religions have never claimed to offer the kind of salvation taught by Christians; see T. Adeyemo, *Salvation in African Tradition*, (Nairobi: Evangel Publishing House, 1979). For a contrary view see S. Maimela, 'Salvation in African Tradition Religions', *Missionalia*, 13 (1987), pp. 63–77.

¹¹ 11. Maimela, 'Salvation', p. 65.

¹² 12. David B. Bosch, 'The problem of Evil in Africa: A Survey of African Views on Witchcraft and of the Response of the Christian Church' in *Like A Roaring Lion: Essays on the Bible, the Church and Demonic Powers*, edited by P.C.R. de Villiers, (Pretoria: University of South Africa, 1987), p. 50.

2. AFRICAN CHRISTIAN PERCEPTIONS OF SALVATION

In their understanding of salvation, many Africans are influenced in their mindsets by their African cultures and their understanding of scripture. For many of them, Christianity in its biblical representation appears to be significantly African. An African does not have to read far into the Old Testament before realizing that this is familiar territory. A great deal in the scriptural understanding of salvation is analogous to much of African outlook and expectation. For example, the biblical teaching on salvation does include rescue, healing, liberation and being delivered from physical danger. Missiologists such as Daneel and Bosch have perceptively pointed out that one of the major weaknesses of western missionary communication of the gospel in Africa had been the dichotomizing of the horizontal and vertical relationship in human spirituality. Individual sins against God were played off against sins committed against a neighbour. 'God was imported to forgive a burden of sin of which Africans were not persuaded, while the actual evil in their experiential world was never addressed'.¹³ Salvation was equated with 'soul winning' rather than with the salvation of the whole person. As the missionaries and their African protégés preached about a Jesus who saved only souls, other Africans began to wonder where the salvation of their whole lives was going to come from. As they read the Bible for themselves, Africans found the corporate and holistic dimensions of salvation to be prevalent in scripture rather than the rescuing of souls. New Testament theologies of salvation are diverse and use a number of metaphors for salvation such as redemption, expiation, justification, liberation and salvation. The Greek verb (*sozo*) (to save) has the idea of being snatched away from peril, of being healed, of being preserved in health and well-being.¹⁴ This wholeness is expressed in the All Africa Baptist Ibadan Declaration which speaks of the whole church with the whole gospel, for the whole person, in the whole of society, for the whole world.

However defective the preservation of the gospel in the missionary preaching may have been, Christianity nonetheless brought a new understanding of salvation wrought in God through the life and death of Jesus Christ. It broadened the parameter and the perspectives of traditional African concerns with a preoccupation of salvation which they present.

3. ACCEPTING CHRIST AS LORD AND SAVIOUR

In the words of Gabriel Setiboane, we cannot resist Jesus because he has 'bewitched' us. Many African Christians bear witness to how their lives have been transformed by Jesus Christ. Many Africans equate accepting Jesus Christ in their lives with salvation. This emphasis is on the transformation that their experience brought. The one who has accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour (*Kutambira Jesu salshe Nomponesi*) has been captivated with hope in this life and in the world to come. For those who have experienced Jesus' salvation, there is no one else comparable to him. Many of the African choruses bear witness to this.

Those who have accepted Jesus as Lord and Saviour live by the rules of the kingdom of God. Their primary allegiance is to Jesus Christ. This is a celebratory allegiance. Most of

¹³ 13. See Robert Hood, *Must God Remain Greek?: Afro-Cultures and God-talk* (Minneapolis: Fortress press, 1990). He lists the kinds of things Africans need to be saved from. See also K. Enang, *Salvation in a Nigerian Background*, (Berlin: Verlag von Dietrich Reimer, 1979).

¹⁴ 14. Denis Edwards, *What are They Saying About Salvation?* (New York: Paulist Press, 1986).

this African theology is heard in songs and prayers. Although it is not necessarily written, it is very real to its practitioners within the communities of Christians.

4. SALVATION AS HEALING AND DELIVERANCE

The healing ministry of Christ features strongly in African Christianity. Jesus Christ is the healer par excellence. It is not uncommon to hear Christians address Jesus Christ in prayer as '*Nanga Yedu*' that is 'Our Healer', literally our traditional healer/diviner. It is for this reason that a number of African theologians are using the metaphor of the *n.anga* (traditional medicine person) for articulating an African Christology.

The healing that Christ brings is an integrative healing. Healing is interpreted in the broadest sense of inclusiveness, thus it is not limited only to physical ailments but to illnesses of oppression, racial discrimination, tribalism, joblessness, and all sorts of conflicts in one's life. It is holistic healing which does not make any distinction between the body and soul. When healing crusaders are held by faith-healers across the continent, attracting huge crowds, many Africans point out that infants who die of malnutrition do not need a faith healer, they need adequate nutritious food. Holistic healing among Africans treats suffering symptomatically and looks at the causes of deterioration in their health services. Such healing does not focus on the health of an individual at the expense of the whole nation.

In one of his writings about the comprehensive and holistic interpretation of salvation among the African Independent Churches in Zimbabwe, Daneel had this to say:

Pneumatologically, the work of the Holy Spirit comprises both eternal salvation for a redeemed humanity and a concretely experienced wholeness and well-being in this existence for those who place themselves in faith under his healing care. Hence the good news of eternal salvation is not superseded but acquires concrete and understandable contours through healing in this troubled and broken existence.¹⁵

Very significantly Matthew Schoffeleers has recorded the following chorus from one of the Pentecostal churches in Southern Malawi in which Jesus is depicted as *n.anga*.

Jesu sing' anga;	Jesus, the medicine-man;
Halleluya, bwerani!	Halleluia, come!
Yesu sing' anga;	Jesus, the medicine-man;
Amachiza matenda.	Cures diseases.
Yesu sing' anga;	Jesus, the medicine-man;
Amachotsa ziwanda	Drives out evil spirits

¹⁵ 15. M.L. Daneel, 'African Independent Church Pneumatology and the Salvation of all Creation' *International Review of Mission*, 82 (1993), p. 153.

Halleluya, bwerani!

Halleluia, come!¹⁶

Although Jesus is a healer who brings healing, overemphasis on healing can be very dangerous for churches in Africa. Many of the faith-healers who hold healing crusades in Africa come from countries whose policies towards Africa contribute to the problems the faith-healers claim they are able to solve. Schoffeleers has rightly pointed out that churches that emphasize healing tend to exhibit an acquiescent attitude towards oppressive political rulers, and depoliticize the cause of societal illness by individualizing the healings.¹⁷

5. SALVATION AS LIBERATION

Many Africans testify that Jesus Christ is the liberator who has liberated them from such realities as sin, death, fear of demons and witches, self-centred life, materialism, prejudice and the love of power. All this is in line with the biblical notion of freedom. Mira Hore gives her testimony in the following powerful words.

The study of the life of Christ in the New Testament studies has changed my being. I am a liberated person in Christ. Wherever I go in this world I am *not just a person*, but a follower of Christ. I have given up the things of this world. *Thus there can be no accusations of witchcraft against me, and even if people should accuse me it does not matter, because I am saved, protected by God.*¹⁸

This powerful testimony comes from a woman who has experienced Christ's liberating power. More and more African women are refusing to be defined by other people as to their identity. They have found a new identity in Jesus Christ and they refuse to be given dehumanizing labels like 'witch', 'prostitute', and the like. They relate to the gospel of Luke, when Jesus inaugurated his ministry with the following words.

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord ([Luke 4:18-19](#)).

In the synoptic gospels Jesus is depicted as the One who went about liberating people through healing, exorcisms and forgiving their sins. In John's gospel the life that comes from one's relationship with Jesus Christ is described as freedom. 'So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed' ([John 8:36](#)). The liberating work of God through Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit is not limited only to individuals but has cosmic dimension as well. The liberating work of Christ covers creation for 'creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and to obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God' ([Rom. 8:21](#)). Thus Christ does not only liberate and save human beings, but heals and protects the environment where nature also awaits its redemption ([Col. 1:15-20](#)).

16. Matthew Schoffeleers, 'Folk Christology in Africa: The Dialectics of the Nganga Paradigm' *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 19 (1989), p. 164.

¹⁷ 17. Matthew Schoffeleers, 'Ritual Healing and Political Acquiescence: The Case of Zionist Churches in Southern Africa', *Africa*, 61 (1991), pp. 1-25.

¹⁸ 18. Source unknown.

In Zimbabwe some African Independent Churches have taken a lead in the development of a sacramental theology of the environment.¹⁹ Some thirty-five churches joined together to form The Association of African Earthkeeping Churches, whose objective is the liberation or restoration of nature through Christian principles. Some of the things the AAEC is suggesting include an annual tree-planting eucharist by churches in ecologically ravaged areas. These churches also try to combat ecological sins, for they threaten human survival and life itself. Daneel rightly points out that

the current response of the AIC's to the Spirit as earthkeeper and the resultant widening perspective on salvation as extending to all creation, instead of overriding the evangelistic outreach in the traditional sense, is incorporated into and enriches the individual conversion experience. It enhances hope in the future fulfillment of salvation.²⁰

6. SALVATION AS A PROCESS

In African Christian thinking salvation is a process which is initiated by an encounter with Jesus Christ. There is a tendency among many African Baptists to equate salvation with being given a handout. Conversion means getting a ticket to enter heaven and once you have it your eternal salvation is secure. Such an understanding of salvation is detrimental to sanctification. Salvation is not getting an inheritance, it is becoming God's heritage ([Ephesians 1](#)). (W.O. Carver, *The Glory of the Christian Calling*, Nashville: Broadman, 1949.) Many of the pastors have a deep suspicion about 'once saved, always saved' teachings. African believers take scriptural warnings against apostasy seriously. Many of them would agree with the position taken by distinguished Baptist theologian Dale Moody who has warned us that the Bible does not teach an unconditional security of the believer, but believers are promised security if only they hold their confidence firm to the end. ([Heb. 3:14](#)).²¹ Conversion is a change in allegiance in which Jesus becomes the centre of one's life with the person accepting the responsibility to serve God and to promote God's reign. Kuhn has defined conversion as follows:

Conversion means a 'turning' away from old ways toward new ways, a basic reorientation in premises and goals, a wholehearted acceptance of a new set of values affecting the 'convert' as well as his social group, day in and day out, twenty-four hours of the day and in practically every sphere of activity —economic, social, and religious.²²

Changing people's worldviews is a protracted process. Charles Kraft rightly points out that we are so used to the dramatic 'bolt-out-of-the-blue' type of experiences that we forget that Christian conversion is a dynamic process which involves commitment and growth. Justification by faith based on a static view of salvation has tended to make many Protestant Christians suspicious about good works. Justification is not separate from sanctification. Jesus made it clear that one is worthy to worship only after he or she has been reconciled to the wronged neighbour. ([Matt. 5:23-24](#)). For many Africans retribution is part of the reconciliation process. There is no reconciliation without facing the realities and needs of restitution.

¹⁹ 19. Daneel, 'African Independent Church', pp. 159-166.

²⁰ 20. Ibid., p. 166.

²¹ 21. Dale Moody, *The Word of Truth*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), pp. 308-365.

²² 22. As quoted in L.J. Luzbetak, *The Church and Cultures*, (California: William Carey Library, 1975), p. 6.

7. SALVATION AND ANCESTORS

One of the most crucial questions that is often asked by African Christians is about the fate of their ancestors who died without having heard the gospel. With the noted exception of a few Christians who believe that all such persons are condemned to go to hell, a lot of African people tend to commit them to the hands of a merciful God who will act justly according to the light they had. On the basis of [I Peter 3:19](#) which says that Jesus went to preach to spirits in prison, John Mbiti has suggested that there may be a possibility of choice and change for the spirits of the dead, otherwise Jesus' preaching would be pointless. He writes

We venture to speculate that the opportunity to hear or assimilate the effects of the gospel is continued in the life beyond the grave (cf. [I Peter 3:19f](#)), and that death is not a barrier to incorporation into Christ, since nothing can separate 'us' from the love of God (cf. [Romans 8:38f](#))²³

Mbiti's contention is that death does not rule out the possibility of the dead being able to choose salvation. Whether one agrees with Mbiti or not, the church has always confessed that Jesus 'descended' to the realm of the dead. He is the Lord of the living and the dead. One's worldview will affect how one interprets [I Peter 3:19](#). An African reading of [I Peter 3:19](#) cannot rule out the possibility of the living-dead having qualitative spiritual change, for physical death is not the end of the road. Furthermore, whatever else the passage means, it shows us the extent to which Christ is prepared to go for the salvation of humanity. Many Africans like me find it very difficult to be preoccupied with the joys we are going to have in heaven if a lot of our ancestors are going to suffer in hell elsewhere. For Devlo, salvation consists also of joining ancestors after death and being included into the ancestral community.²⁴

CONCLUSION

Africans do not see salvation only in terms of an escape from the wrath of God and the salvation of individual souls in the hereafter. The salvation which Christ offers in his incarnation, life, death, resurrection and parousia is a comprehensive salvation which involves the individual as well as the society, soul and body, present and future. Christians must work for the reign of God, calling persons to faith in Christ, with the culmination of salvation yet to come. Salvation in the African context, however, means wrestling with issues that hinder Africans here from reaching their full potential now. These include oppression, neo-colonialism, poverty, disease, ethnic tensions, starvation, and sexism and racism. Comprehensive salvation will not tolerate false dichotomies which divide the gospel between horizontal and vertical, spiritual and secular, personal and social, individual and corporate sin.

Salvation means the humanizing of people who have been dehumanized by societal evil and by personal sinning. Africans are sinners but they have also been sinned against. Jesus refused to separate the love of God from the love of neighbour ([Matt. 22:36-40](#), [Mark 12:28-31](#)). We can express our love for God only through serving our fellow human

²³ 23. John Mbiti, *New Testament Eschatology in an African Background*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 175.

² 2. A survey of standard texts in systematic theology in the West simply ignore any theological reflection from Africa.

beings. We cannot claim to love God in our hearts and at the same time to turn a blind eye to human greed, hatred, sexism, police brutality, racism, adultery, bigotry, child abuse, and all kinds of perversions which are part of human existence. It was to identify with these issues, that in [Matthew 25](#) Christ assumed the role of a prisoner, one of the little ones, a hungry and thirsty person. John N. Jonsson has pointed out that there is no dichotomy between humanization and the glorification of Christ in the gospel. In the New Testament glorification of Christ is not posed as a counter to humanization. The conflict is not between God and humanity but between God and the enemy of humanity, for human liberation. The conflict is between God and ego-centrism.²⁵ African Christian humanization for this reason means

an ongoing commitment to advance from the less human conditions of disease, hatred, crime, war, racism, poverty, oppression, faithlessness, hopelessness, etc., to human conditions of health, love, peaceful coexistence, equity, justice, community fellow feeling, faith, and hope.²⁶

These are not peripheral to the gospel, they are inextricable ingredients kernel to the gospel. It is a progressive humanization of society based on 'being more' rather than having more, thus restoring meaning and wholeness to society and to the entire universe. The best compliment you can give to an African is saying to her or him, *uri munhu* you are human. We are human only because others are human. Salvation makes people more and more human while human sinfulness makes them less and less so. It is as humanized persons that Africans like Abraham look forward to the city which has no foundations, whose builder and maker is God ([Heb. 11:10](#)). A new Pretoria, Harare, Nairobi, Lusaka Abuja Accra coming down out of heaven.

Professor Mugabe Ph.D. is Principal of Baptist Theological Seminary of Zimbabwe, where he previously served as Academic Dean. He has served on the Shona Bible Translation Committee. This paper was presented at the Baptist International Conference on Theological Education, Johannesburg, South Africa in August 1993, and is reprinted by permission of the Baptist World Alliance and the author.

Thinking Theologically About Evangelism

J. Keir Howard

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(with later editing by author)*

²⁵ 25. John N. Jonsson, 'An Elliptical Understanding of Mission and Its Roles' *Missionalia*, 11 (1983), pp. 3-10.

²⁶ 26. George Omaku Ehusani, *An Afro-Christian Vision 'OZOVEHE' Toward a More Humanized World*. (Lanham MD: University Press of America, 1991), p. 243.

Keywords: Evangelism, Kingdom of God, communication, proclamation, righteousness, culture, pluralism

INTRODUCTION

An examination of the New Testament documents would suggest that the process of passing on the good news of Jesus Christ to others was seen as a central function of the life of the early Christian community. It has to be said, however, that this can hardly be held to be true for most church communities in the western world today. In fact, evangelism has tended to become divorced both from theology and from the main stream of church life, in spite of efforts such as the 'Decade of Evangelism' to refocus attention on the issue and bring it back into the centre of church activity.

Modern writers on evangelism have been almost exclusively concerned with techniques and methodologies, apparently assuming that the nature and content of the message to be proclaimed is self-evident and needs no elucidation. Modern evangelists generally seem to display little interest in theological reflection on their work and have been more concerned with practice than theory. It is equally true, on the other hand, that few theologians in recent years have been greatly concerned with considering the fundamental issues of the content of the Christian message¹. In consequence the theological issues that relate to evangelism have been largely ignored. Furthermore, the fact that many of those who have primary concerns for evangelism also tend to hold to what might be called 'fundamentalist' forms of Christianity, together with the high proportion of evangelistic effort that has come from 'parachurch' organizations, may be seen as additional factors in the process of alienating many churches from the whole area of evangelism.

As a result, the task of evangelism has become largely divorced from the life of the local church community and has come to be seen as the province of certain individuals or groups of individuals, rather than the whole community of faith. Furthermore, there is often the additional element of confusion over definitions so that words such as evangelism or the gospel come to mean different things in different circles.

There is a need to address this imbalance and restore evangelism to its proper place in the life of the church and develop a critical examination of the many complex issues which relate to it, such as the essence of the gospel, the nature of Christian commitment, the meaning and need for repentance and faith and the function and place of baptism. Issues such as the nature of the kingdom of God, as well as a consideration of the place of evangelism in a modern pluralist society and the problems of cross-cultural communication also require thought and attention. A consideration of evangelism will also redirect attention to the neglected area of Christian apologetics as well as the relationship between evangelism, teaching, nurture and other areas of pastoral activity which have tended to become fragmented, but which should probably be seen as facets of the church's single task of making disciples for Christ.

The fundamental locus of the New Testament is the conviction that God has acted decisively in Christ to inaugurate his 'kingdom', that is, his rule and sovereign authority in human lives and human affairs. This was construed as being 'good news' for all people. Initially, in the ministry of Jesus, following on from John the Baptist, and also in the early

¹ 1. To say that no theological writers have discussed the theology of evangelism would be less than fair (e.g., R.B. Kuiper, *God Centred Evangelism*. (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1966) (= 1961) and W. Abraham, *The Logic of Evangelism* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1989), but the great majority of works are about the 'doing' rather than the theology.

stages of the apostolic mission, it was 'good news' specifically for the Jewish community, seen as the people of God now being called back to him in repentance and commitment. The work of Jesus was primarily a mission to Israel, completing the preliminary call to repentance of John the Baptist. It was thus firmly rooted in the history of Israel and the prophetic tradition. The message of Jesus was set firmly in the context of the earlier prophetic ministries, pointing to the crisis which his coming had inaugurated and the stark choice between national repentance and national ruin.

The early disciples saw themselves as the true and faithful remnant of Israel who had responded to this call to renewal, a reality symbolised in the call of the Twelve. The initial work of passing on the 'good news' was thus directed to Jerusalem and to Jewish listeners. Even at a much later stage, some thirty or more years after the Easter event, Paul could still remark that the message of the gospel was to 'the Jew first' ([Rom. 1:16, 2:9, 10](#)) and the content of the message continued to be rooted in Israel's history as the people of promise. The inauguration of God's rule thus centred in the restitution and renewal of Israel and was seen in terms of the fulfilment of the prophetic promises, a matter which continues to be affirmed in the Acts of the Apostles, written another ten or fifteen years on from Paul's writings. The prophetic promises, however, also pointed to the fact that God's purposes were for universal blessing and that the nations would flock to Israel to witness and experience the salvation of God, particularly explicit in Deutero-Isaiah, but reflected elsewhere in the later prophetic writings. The Acts bears witness to the initial, very tentative attempts to include gentiles, but the Pauline mission saw its main thrust as being to the wider gentile communities in order to incorporate them into the people of God and bring them under the rule of God in Christ. In Paul's metaphor, they were the wild olive branches grafted into the original stock of the true olive tree of Israel ([Rom. 11:17-24](#)).

It is this task of bringing people to commitment and obedience to the will and rule of God in Jesus Christ that essentially constitutes evangelism. It is thus that activity of the church which calls people to repentance and the obedience of faith that they may become disciples of Christ, experience the forgiveness of sins, the new life in the Spirit of God and be incorporated by baptism into the community of faith. The boundaries between what is termed evangelism, nurture, teaching and related activities are thus somewhat artificial as they are all activities which merge into the single task of bringing people into lives of discipleship, obedience and service. Certainly these areas of ministry overlap in the New Testament documents which provide the starting point as well as the standard for any thinking about evangelism. At the same time, it also has to be recognised that while the New Testament can provide standards and principles, there are remarkably few close parallels between the biblical situation and the modern mission of the church. Nonetheless, the New Testament provides an indispensable guide for the understanding of those key words and concepts that lie behind all forms of evangelistic activity.

THE NEW TESTAMENT VOCABULARY OF EVANGELISM

The primary word relating to the Christian message is 'good news' or 'gospel' (*euangelion*), a word that occurs on almost eighty occasions in the New Testament, predominantly in the Pauline correspondence. Paul also uses the cognate verb, 'to proclaim good news' (*euangelizō, euangelizomai*) quite extensively. In the gospels, it is Mark that favours the noun, whereas Luke/Acts favours the verb. What is particularly striking is the total absence of this group of words from the Johannine writings—was this perhaps a reflection of the inward looking nature of this community?

The secular use of this word group related to the good news of victory and especially the good news of the accession of the emperor. This concept seems to lie behind the New Testament usage and the good news of Jesus Christ is the announcement of his victory over sin and death and his rights to universal lordship. The original picture probably derives from those passages such as [Isa. 40:9, 10](#) and [52:7](#) which, particularly in the LXX, are exact parallels of the New Testament message—the proclamation of God’s victory and his sovereignty exerted for the vindication and salvation of his people. The challenge of this announcement was thus the challenge to a choice of commitment and allegiance. Such a commitment required a redirection of life and hence there is a constant emphasis on repentance and the obedience of faith as the essential, indeed, only proper, response to the message. It is not possible to live under the lordship of Christ while continuing to claim human autonomy—an emphasis which seems sadly lacking in the church’s message today.

A variety of other words is used to express the essentially proclamatory nature of the evangelistic task, but two words are of major importance. Firstly there is the verb ‘to proclaim’ or ‘announce’ and its related nouns (*kruss* and its cognates). Originally this word group related to the formal activities of an official herald and his public announcements, especially in making known the arrival of a king. It always carries the sense of public proclamation and it came to be the favoured word group to describe Christian preaching. It was the verb used of John the Baptist and Jesus and it was therefore a relatively natural transition from this situation to its use to describe the Christian activity of proclaiming the kingly authority of God revealed in Jesus.

The second verb to note is ‘to bear witness’ (*martyre*). The whole concept of witnessing is central to New Testament thinking about the communication of the good news as it centres on the testimony of the community to the truth it has heard and seen and come to know in experience, particularly in relation to the historical events of the life, teaching, death and resurrection of Jesus, as well as the ongoing activity of the risen Christ in the community through his abiding Spirit.

Numerous other words are also widely used in relation to the early communication of the gospel, such as ‘persuade’, ‘argue’, ‘prove’ and ‘explain’. These words provide some evidence for the broad scope of the early proclamation and tend to suggest that preaching was not conducted ‘six feet above contradiction’, to use John Robinson’s famous expression, but was frequently in a setting of open discussion and argument. At the heart of all these words, however, lies the single basic concept of communication which, virtually by definition, lies at the heart of any genuine evangelism. No message can be passed on without understanding and this necessitates an agreed conceptual framework with common ideas. The early proclaimers of the gospel, in general, were able to communicate because they were speaking to people who shared a largely unified culture and a set of common presuppositions and beliefs. This was especially the case with the Jewish community and the gentile proselytes and ‘God-fearers’ who had close associations with the synagogue and who together made up the majority of those who accepted the Christian message in the period up to the mid-60s and even later.

The Acts, however, provides an example of an almost total lack of communication when Paul was at Athens. He proclaimed a message which seemed to be but another example of the strange eastern religions which were flooding the empire and Paul himself was probably viewed as just another pedlar of religious wares, this time of the god Jesus and his consort ‘Anastasis’ ([Acts 17:18](#)). The result was that his proclamation was almost completely misunderstood by those who did not share the religious heritage on which the essential concepts of the gospel were based. In spite of the attempts to find common ground, as Luke records the event, the episode at the Areopagus has very little effect and

it was probably because of this that Paul was in a depressed and anxious condition on his arrival at Corinth ([1 Cor 2:1-5](#)). His first real attempt to pass the message to educated pagans had met with incredulity, ridicule and indifference². The simple fact was that, unlike his successful mission in Corinth, a very pagan city indeed, Paul had failed to take the time to prepare the ground. He stayed at least eighteen months in Corinth according to Acts, and may well have been there longer in view of the way that Acts consistently compresses events and time scales. The result was a thriving and active church community, which, it should be noted, still seemed consistently to misunderstand much of the content of the gospel by attempting to 'contextualise' it into accordance with pagan norms of behaviour.

There seems to be an underlying lesson in this experience. It cannot be assumed in the neo-paganism of the modern western world that people will necessarily understand the underlying concepts of the gospel and some form of teaching is required to ensure that there is some commonality of language and ideas. The Christian message has its own technical language without which it cannot be passed on—the problem is that the modern world no longer understands that form of technical language and is rarely prepared to make the effort to learn it. Teaching is thus an essential and integral component of the evangelistic task and cannot be divorced from it. The other side of the coin, however, is the recognition that the primary focus of the early mission was to those who already saw themselves in some way as the people of God, that is the Jewish community and the gentiles who had come to be associated with it. As noted earlier, more than thirty years following the events of the first Easter, Paul could still emphasise that the gospel was to the Jew first.

The question thus arises as to what extent the primary emphasis of evangelism should be directed to those who have some association with the life of the church and who have a passing acquaintance with its forms and language—those, for example, who see the local parish church as 'theirs', who wish to use it for baptisms, weddings and funerals, but who lack any genuine commitment and are perhaps not even seen at Easter or Christmas. It is suggested that the primary work of evangelism might be better directed towards gaining commitment from such 'fringe members', rather than an initial concentration on the unchurched, 'pagan' outsider. The issue is where best to use the limited resource that the church has available and it is a matter which deserves careful thought.

THE NEW TESTAMENT CONTENT OF EVANGELISM

It was suggested earlier that evangelism is that set of activities which is concerned to bring the good news of Jesus Christ to people in order to obtain a response of faith and commitment. In a very real sense this embraces every activity of the church, for the life of the church should be a presentation of the realities of the gospel. The heart of the church's worship in the Eucharist is evangelistic by definition as it 'proclaims the Lord's death' ([1 Cor. 11:26](#)) and Sunday by Sunday as the words of institution are recited, so the reality of the cross is brought into the present experience of the people of God in all its saving power. Further, the community is to live by the values of the gospel and every proclamation of the word of God cannot help but be evangelistic since it will always point to Christ through whom and in whom God is reconciling the world to himself. Nonetheless, certain activities may be considered to be more specifically related to the church's mission

² 2. Not all would share this rather pessimistic view of the results of Paul's visit to Athens. However, even Luke with his hero-worship of Paul cannot do very much with his sources—the fact of the matter was that only a handful became 'believers' and Luke does not even suggest that an active church was left behind.

to the world and it is thus of particular importance to determine what actually constitutes the core essentials of the gospel which are non-negotiable, and what things are peripheral to it. It is in this area that there has been frequent difference of opinion.

The preaching of Jesus himself was centred in the kingdom of God, his kingly rule and authority. It was, as has been noted already, a proclamation to the Jewish people, firmly in the prophetic tradition, demanding repentance and offering God's forgiveness as the basis of a new relationship with him as his people. The proclamation of both John the Baptist and Jesus was to the people of God, calling them into a proper relationship with him. The post-Easter community proclaimed essentially the same message, but with a significant difference in that it was proclaimed in the light of the death and resurrection of Jesus which it saw as the climactic event which had ushered in the 'last days'. Thus, alongside the forgiveness of sins, it also proclaimed the gift of the Holy Spirit as the ongoing presence of the risen Christ with his people and the evidence that the Messianic age had dawned.

The gentile mission introduced a change of emphasis, but did not change the essential nature of the message. Concepts such as the 'kingdom of God', which were part of Jewish eschatological thinking, were not part of the common coinage of the Graeco-Roman world and tended to be dropped in favour of other concepts which expressed similar ideas. Paul, in particular, used the idea of God's righteousness (*dikaiosyn*) in the sense of what God requires. This was an essential element of Jewish prophetic religion, but he shifted the boundaries to make it an all embracing concept and underlined the basic principle that the necessity of fulfilling God's requirements was an essential human need. The human predicament lay in the fact that people failed to meet God's requirements in conduct and relationships and were alienated from God and from each other. The shift in terminology, however, does not mark a shift in the essence of the message, for righteousness lies at the heart of any understanding of the rule and sovereignty of God. The primary characteristic of God's activity is to establish righteousness, that is to set things right. This emphasis is reflected in Luke's account of the beginning of the ministry of Jesus as set out in [Luke 4:17-22](#), using the quotation from [Isa. 61:1-3](#). The programme for the ministry was to proclaim good news to the poor, freedom for the prisoners, recovery of sight for the blind, deliverance for the oppressed and the announcement of the eschatological day of judgment which had arrived in his own person. The response that people made to Jesus was the effecting of the verdict of the final judgment, but a verdict made in the here and now. The coming of Jesus was seen as the beginning of the Messianic age when things were to be set right and what God required would be accomplished.

What had been essentially a limited and 'political' agenda for the people of God, was transformed by Paul who built on this foundation but extended it into a universal message of good news for all people. All nations might become part of the 'chosen race' as they were 'set right' by the work of Christ through whom people were given a new status and restored to a right relation with God, being reconciled and forgiven. On the basis of an obedient response, life was transformed and righteousness became the attribute of the Christian life, lived under the sovereignty of God and in accordance with his law. Paul's emphasis on 'justification' or 'setting right' may be seen as closely parallel to the original Palestinian gospel which had been centred in the rule of God.

The rule of God, however, is revealed in Jesus and the message of the rule of God, the message of the gospel, is centred in Christ—indeed, it is Christ. It is worth quoting T.F. Torrance at length in this regard. He wrote,

Jesus Christ is himself the content of God's unique self-revelation to mankind. It is on the ground of what God has actually revealed of his own nature in him as his only begotten Son that everything else to be known of God and of his relation to the world and human

beings is to be understood. It is only when we know God the Father in and through his Son who belongs to his own being as God that we may know him in any true and accurate way ... In order to know him in that way, however, we must enter into an intimate and saving relationship with him in Jesus Christ his incarnate Son, for it is only through reconciliation to God by the blood of Christ that we may draw near to him and have access to him. The Lord Jesus Christ, the crucified and risen Son of God, is the Way, the Truth and the Life, apart from whom no one has access to the Father.³

The gospel is thus set out in the form of propositional truth about Jesus as the mediator of the divine forgiveness through his life, death and resurrection. But it is also about personal truth and existential encounter for, being centred in Christ, it reveals God as himself and underlines the nature of the proper human response to this personal revelation in Jesus Christ and allows the establishment of genuine relationships. Such relationships are not built from the ground up, but are brought about only through the operation of the Holy Spirit who actualises in human experience the historic reality of the atoning life, death and resurrection of Christ. The subjective appropriation of the gospel thus rests solely on the continuing objective action of God and is not merely experience.

The essential parameters of the gospel are unchanging for they rest in God. Any attempt to 'contextualise' the good news must always bear this in mind and not abandon the bits that do not seem to fit. The New Testament provides evidence of shifts in emphasis and reinterpretation of the original gospel proclamation so that it might meet the needs, in particular, of the non-Jewish communities whose minds were not conditioned by Jewish apocalyptic, eschatological thought forms. Undoubtedly the same task has to be performed today so that the good news is reinterpreted in a way which continues to meet universal human need. This requires to be without losing the core essentials of the gospel on the one hand, yet, on the other, using terms which allow for a genuine communication of the truth. There are real dangers here which are not always appreciated. Bruce Nicholls has remarked, 'Throughout the history of the church accommodation to cultural accretions and provincialism have destroyed the life of many churches. The local or national church must never become captive to its own culture'⁴. It might be added that this is exactly what seems to be happening in New Zealand where 'cultural credibility' for the gospel is little more than conformity to the trends of the moment. Any statement of the gospel must be true to the gospel's first intentions. Furthermore, it also has to be recognised that there is no single sociological situation to which any one communication may be 'relevant'—what may be relevant in one situation may be totally irrelevant in another⁵.

THE COMMUNICATION OF THE GOOD NEWS

The consistent New Testament emphasis is on verbal communication. The vocabulary that was noted earlier centres on words that describe intent, for the function of verbal communication is not merely to pass on information, but to initiate a response. Language is not neutral, its purpose is both to affect and to change. In relation to the gospel, the

³ 3. T.F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith: The Evangelical Theology of the Ancient Catholic Church* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988), p. 3.

⁴ 4. B.J. Nicholls, *Contextualization: A Theology of Gospel and Culture* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1979), p. 66.

⁵ 5. The percipient comments of Alistair McGrath on 'liberalism' are worth noting in this context (*The Renewal of Anglicanism* London: SPCK, 1993, pp. 111–125). It would be this writer's conviction that to some extent they are equally applicable to some forms of 'evangelicalism'.

purpose of communication is to affect the hearer in such a way as to determine the response. Communicating the gospel is about persuasion and attempting to induce a positive response to its claims. Paul could say that, 'knowing the fear of the Lord, we try to persuade others' ([2 Cor. 5:11](#) and note the consistent use of 'persuade' in Acts). Hence there must be understanding on the part of the hearer if it is to be effective in influencing behaviour and if responses are not to be totally subjective and meaningless. The gospel cannot be proclaimed in a vacuum. At the same time there needs to be consistency in the message being communicated, otherwise there will be confusion. This is undoubtedly a major issue to be addressed, although the likelihood of universal consensus seems rather remote. This inevitably undermines the mission of the church. The communication of the gospel should be undertaken with authority, but this is difficult to achieve when there is a lack of consistency or even fundamental disagreements on the nature of the message that is to be communicated.

Where there is a lack of understanding of the nature of the propositions on which the gospel is based, there will always be a tendency for the message to degenerate into nothing more than a subjective experience based on what the hearer chooses to consider 'is true for me'. The problem with such a subjective approach is that it produces 'believers' who have no foundation or content to their faith. It is ultimately little different from believing in fairies. This tendency may be seen at both the 'evangelical' and 'liberal' extremes of the Christian spectrum. On the other hand an over-emphasis on propositional truth at the expense of a genuine 'existential encounter' with the living God tends to lead to people becoming no more than 'assenters', rather than 'believers' having a life commitment. It could be argued that the production of 'assenters' is one of the primary problems in the Church today.

Communication of the gospel, however, is not complete unless the message is reinforced behaviourally. If the good news is about righteousness, then axiomatically, those who proclaim the message should demonstrate this righteousness in their lives, in relationships and in behaviour, both in terms of the community as well as individuals. It is for this reason that ethical principles are given such a high profile, both in the gospels and epistles. The lives of the 'righteous', living under the sovereignty of God, are to display a radical dissonance in respect to the standards of behaviour and relationships in the society about them. The ethical norms of the kingdom of God are not those of the world, yet all too often the church seems to take its agenda from the world rather than pronouncing its inherent difference. It may be argued with some reason that part of the weakness of the church's evangelistic proclamation derives from its too great conformity to the patterns of life around it, rather than maintaining patterns of life that radically (and unpopularly) differ from those of secular society. To live under the rule of God requires conformity to the will of God which is summed up in the two great commandments, 'you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind ... You shall love your neighbour as yourself' ([Mt. 22:37-39](#)).

EVANGELISM AND A PLURALIST SOCIETY

Pluralist societies are essentially syncretistic. The essential philosophy is that no one religion has a monopoly of the truth and that all are fundamentally of equal value in gaining insights into reality and as ways to God. Some would argue that as there are many ways to God and all formulations of religious concepts are no more than approximations to the truth, there is in consequence a need to harmonise all religious experience and create a single human religion. Radical feminist theologians have been very much to the

fore in pursuing this road in recent years⁶. Such concepts, however, are not new and are no different in essence from the syncretistic ideas which flourished in Graeco-Roman society as well as the Roman strategy to unite all religions (and hence all peoples) under the unified worship of the emperor.

The Christian church, however, is founded upon the conviction that in Jesus of Nazareth it has received the ultimate and final revelation of God, the proclamation of which is a matter of life and death for all humanity. The gospel is not a proclamation about religious conviction or spiritual experience, it is the proclamation of the news that in the particular and historic man Jesus, the rule of God has come and people must respond in one way or another to its critical and absolute demands. The credal affirmations of the church are of necessity exclusive in nature and they bear witness to the central biblical conviction summed up in the *Shema* that faith in the one true God rules out the possibility of acknowledging any other gods. Furthermore, by definition the Christian faith and the Christian confession rule out any alternative approach to God or any alternative statement of truth other than that which is rooted and grounded in Christ. 'No one can know God except God, and so no one can know God except through God—that is, only through sharing in some way in the knowledge which God has of himself. This is what has been made possible for us through the incarnation of God's Son and his mediation to us of the Spirit of the Father and of the Son, through whom we may enter into communion with God and learn to know him through himself in accordance with his own eternal nature as Father, Son and Holy Spirit'⁷.

Nothing, therefore, can displace the concrete historical figure of Jesus Christ from the central place. The ideology of pluralism is to be rejected outright. As Lesslie Newbigin has put it, 'we must reject the invitation to live in a society where everything is subjective and relative, a society which has abandoned the belief that truth can be known and has settled for a purely subjective view of truth —“truth for you” but not truth for all'⁸. There can be no excuse for arrogance or discourtesy, but at the same time the church does not apologise for its claims about the uniqueness of Jesus and the fullness of God's revelation in him. In the syncretistic and pluralist world of the Roman empire, the apostles declared that there is one God and one Lord, Jesus Christ, who is the sole mediator and saviour. In doing so they used the thought forms of the cultures in which they operated, but they did not change the nature of the truth they proclaimed. The church needs to recapture that confidence and reflect on its implications, for it is the basis of a theology of evangelism. Without it, the church will become lost in a maze of socio-cultural secularisation and relativism in which there are no signposts to guide the lost for the meaning of biblical truth will have been changed in its substance and the revelation of God in the gospel will have been transmuted into something other than it is.

The Rev Dr J. Keir Howard is both an Anglican priest and specialist consultant physician. He undertook his initial studies in Edinburgh and London and later completed doctorates

⁶ 6. See further on this subject, Elizabeth Achtemeier, 'Exchanging God for "no Gods": discussion of female language for God' in A.F. Kimel (ed), *Speaking the Christian God*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), pp. 1–16.

⁷ 7. T.F. Torrance, 'The Christian apprehension of God the Father' in A.F. Kimel (ed), *Speaking the Christian God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), p. 120.

⁸ 8. L. Newbigin *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids/Geneva: Eerdmans/ World Council of Churches, 1989), p. 240.

in both medicine and theology. He lives with his family in Lower Hutt, New Zealand where he is assistant priest at St Alban's Church, Eastbourne.

The Lord's Firestorms: God the Holy Trinity and the Experience of Religious Revival in Australia

Stuart Piggin

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Keywords: Holy Trinity, revival, prayerfulness, church, doctrine, experience, Bible

I. WHY FOCUS ON THE HOLY TRINITY?

Let me explain why I want to focus on the Holy Trinity in this address on Australia's revival experience. In 1995 I gave a course on revival at Regent College, Vancouver. It was at the height of excitement caused by the Toronto Blessing and the completely independent American college revivals. At the end of the course I asked the students to discern the times. Tell me, I said, what will be the characteristics of the next great awakening which the Lord will send to bless his church? It would be characterized, some thought, by a revived confidence in God's Word; an interesting view—and timely—given the undermining of that confidence due to postmodernism. Others suggested that the next great awakening would see Christians more involved with the needy in their communities, while the underprivileged themselves, the poor and the hungry, the underclass and the underdogs, the marginalized and the relegated, the unnoticed, the unseen, and the ignored, would be empowered to help themselves. That, too, is interesting considering the current moves towards reconciliation in South Africa and in Australia which I am sure have much to do with the Spirit of God. Others thought that the next great awakening would be characterized by a revived concentration by the church on the centrality of Christ and his gospel. Revival will be seen again, as it was in the days of Wesley, Whitefield and Edwards, as the fullest flowering of the gospel plant, as the most abundant harvest of the doctrines of grace, as the most gracious manifestation of biblical Christianity. This revival would restore to the church vital orthodoxy, healing the current division between rational orthodoxy and irrational vitality. This too is interesting given the tragic stand-off between the Reformed and the Charismatic branches of Christianity.

But the most persistent feeling among my Regent students was that the next great revival would awaken Christians to the glory of the Holy Trinity. While Christ and salvation would be seen as central, the place of the work of Christ within the Father's cosmic purpose for the recreation of the universe and the Spirit's ministry to broken-hearted individuals would become luminous. This I found the most intriguing of the four suggestions about the characteristics of the next great awakening. I believe that it is an awakening which will not pass Australia by. I say this for two reasons. Some of the most

important literature bearing on the subject of the Holy Trinity and revival has been written recently in Australia. I refer to Allan Norling's, *Jesus the Baptiser with the Holy Spirit* (published by the author, 1994¹), which I regard as a very remarkable study of the role of Jesus in movements of the Spirit, and also the many studies of patrology, the theology of the Father, in the writings of Geoffrey Bingham, who has been blessed by God in being the instrument of revival in parts of Australia and overseas.² My second reason for getting excited about the next revival, and Australia delighting in the glory of the Holy Trinity, is that in a decade-long refinement of my definition of revival, I had already concluded before I went to Vancouver that it must focus on the Trinity. Far from being simply the extraordinary activities of the Spirit, or a time of refreshing from Jesus, revival is a Trinitarian gift, and it is a gift not only to the church, but to the community in which the churches have their being. This would involve a recovery of an understanding of the work of God the Father in salvation and revival.

II. DEFINING REVIVAL

Currently, I define revival in the following way.

Revival is a sovereign work of God the heavenly Father, manifesting his glory on the earth. It consists of a powerful intensification by Jesus of the Holy Spirit's normal activity of testifying to the Saviour, accentuating the doctrines of grace, and convicting, converting, regenerating, and sanctifying large numbers of people at the same time. It is therefore a community experience. It is occasionally preceded by an expectation that God is about to do something exceptional; it is usually preceded by an extraordinary unity and prayerfulness among Christians; and it is always accompanied by the revitalization of the church, the conversion of large numbers of unbelievers, and the reduction of sinful practices in the community.

III. THE ROLES OF DOCTRINE AND EXPERIENCE IN REVIVAL

Another reason why I want to explore the role of the Holy Trinity in revival is that it will give us the opportunity to reflect on the role of religious experience in arriving at our theological convictions. This is a critical issue for Christians in a postmodernist age. We evangelical Christians say that we base our theology solely on the Bible. That is why we build bible colleges. We do not want to see the foundation of the Christian Tradition College of Victoria or the Christian Experience College of Victoria. I doubt if the BCV will ever be challenged by the CTCV or the CECV. The Bible, however, is a record of the religious experience of a people. While allowing it to be solely determinative of our theology, it is incomprehensible that we can interpret it in any way except by reference to the experience of the church or our own experiences.

Theologian Donald Bloesch contends that the distinctive genius of evangelicalism lies in doctrine plus experience: 'My contention is that to be evangelical means to hold to a

¹ 1. . Allan Norling, PO Box 219, Beecroft, NSW 2119.

² 2. . See especially *I Love the Father* (Blackwood: New Creation Publications, 1974, 1990); *Oh, Father! Our Father* (Blackwood: New Creation Publications, 1983); *The Day of the Spirit* (Blackwood: New Creation Publications, 1985).

definite doctrine as well as to participate in a special kind of experience'.³ In commenting on this Stanley Grenz suggests that the order should be reversed: experience is primary and doctrine secondary.⁴ I am not yet ready to concede that without further explanation, but I do like very much Albert Outler's statement of John Wesley's understanding of the foundations of our theology. For Wesley, all theology 'is the interpretation of spiritual and moral insights sparked by the prevenient action of the Holy Spirit, deposited in Holy Scripture, interpreted by the Christian tradition, reviewed by reason, and appropriated by personal experience.'⁵ We might be even more comfortable with this when we learn that, when Wesley talked about experience as a guide to theological truth, he meant the inner witness of the Spirit. So, when we seek to understand the work of the Holy Trinity in Australian revivals, we will take *scriptural data* as the main signpost to the direction in which we must travel, the *tradition* of revivals since the New Testament era as helping us to understand what we are looking at as we proceed in that direction, the *history* of Australian revivals as giving us the data to which to apply the understanding we derive from history and tradition, and our own *experiences* to appropriate the truth about God the Holy Trinity which Australian revivals have manifested.

IV. THE BIBLE

The Bible tells us that, whatever else revival is, it is a sovereign work of God the heavenly Father, manifesting his glory on the earth. It is 'a visitation from on high' ([Isa. 32:15](#); [Lk. 1:78](#)); it is a *heavenly* light; a *divine* fire; a river of water *from God's sanctuary*; a dayspring from *on high*. Genuine revival cannot be worked up from below. It must come down from above. So the authentic prayer for revival is 'Come down, Lord. Come down from where your glory fills the heavens and let your glory fill the earth.' We learn to pray this way not only from the prophet Isaiah, but also from the Lord Jesus himself. ([Matt. 6:9, 10](#)): "This, then, is how you should pray: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." ' The apostle James reminds us ([Jam. 1:17](#)) that 'Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.' If we understand Pentecost as a prototype of revival, then we need to remember that the Spirit comes, not only as Jesus promised, but also as the Father promised ([Lk. 24:19](#); [Acts 1:4](#)) and that the Spirit proceeds, as the creed says, not only from the Son, but also from the Father ([Jn. 14:26](#); [15, 26](#); [Acts 2:33](#)). If we understand revival as an anticipation of the second coming, then we need to note that when Jesus comes again, he will come again 'in the Father's glory' ([Mk. 8:38](#); [Rom. 6:4](#)); revivals are always manifestations of the Father's glory. If revivals are understood as times when the dead are raised, then the Bible tells us that it is the Father who raises the dead ([Jn. 5:21](#)). If revivals are understood as times when people come to the Saviour in significant numbers, then we need to remember that it is by the Father's will that they come and by the Father's will that, in coming, they will receive eternal life ([Jn. 6:40, 44](#)). And if revivals are understood as the energy by which the church expresses its love by caring for the poor and needy, then we must remember that this desire originates in the Father's care ([Matt. 6:26](#); [6:32](#); [7:11](#); [10:29](#)). And if you are habituated to

³ 3. . Donald Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 2 vols, 1978, 1979), p. 1 ix.

⁴ 4. . Stanley J. Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology: A Fresh Agenda for the 21st Century* (Downers Grove, III: InterVarsity Press, 1993), p. 30.

⁵ 5. . Albert C. Outler, *The Works of John Wesley, I, Sermons I, 1-33* (Nashville: Abington Press, 1984), p. 60f.

thinking of revivals as the Spirit's work, you should never forget that the Spirit is the 'Spirit of your Father' ([Matt. 10:20](#)). Revival, we must conclude from the Scriptures, is the work of the omnipotent sovereignty of God, of God the Father, who sends the Son, who pours out the Spirit, whose almighty energies convert the soul.

V. THE HISTORY OF REVIVALS

The First Great Awakening (approximately 1734–44) produced the church's greatest theologian of revival, Jonathan Edwards. His mature reflections on that revival are foundational to the evangelical understanding of revival, and from this we learn that the second person of the Trinity, perhaps in contradistinction to the Holy Spirit, is the real hero of revivals. In his *Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God*, Edwards said that the first of the distinguishing marks was that, if a spiritual movement raised our esteem for Jesus as Saviour, then it was a genuine movement of the Spirit. But with reference to [Philippians 2:11](#), Edwards observes that when every tongue shall confess that Jesus is Lord, thereby shall the Father be glorified.⁶

The glory of God the Father was never far from Edwards' thought. The more the Son was esteemed and exalted, the more the Father was glorified. The first sermon Jonathan Edwards preached at Northampton, Massachusetts, in 1734 when revival broke out in that town, was on justification by faith alone. But the emphasis was not on justification understood in an abstract, forensic manner. It was on that faith which unites our heart with Christ's. In that famous new language, which was one with experience, which appealed to the senses, and which was addressed to the affections, Edwards explained that 'justifying faith ... is that by which the soul, which before was separate and alienated from Christ, unites itself to him. ... it is that by which the soul comes to Christ, and receives him'.⁷

That does not sound like a verdict in a law court, does it? It sounds more like a love story. It is the means by which lonely and broken hearts are brought into a relationship so intimate that it can be described only in marital terms. Edwards even went beyond orthodoxy in daring to suggest that the loving relationship which we describe as the Trinity would be squared by the inclusion of the elect. Father, Son and Holy Spirit would bring into itself holy church, the bride of the Son, whom the Son will present to the Father as the radiant beauty redeemed by his own blood. It is this prospect which, when allowed to sink into our psyche, gives us a powerful motivation to work for reconciliation and community to reflect the loving relationship of the Trinity and the purpose of God's whole scheme of redemption, which is to bring us into that holy triangle.

The future prospect that we shall one day be the holy bride of the Lord Jesus, and thus share in the love which the Father bestows on his Son—indeed in our perfected state we will be part of the love gift which the Father gives to the Son—is supplemented by a present prospect of equal delight, namely that we are the beloved children of an infinitely, caring Father, not just the humble subjects of an omnipotent king. This fact, too, is well illustrated by the first great awakening.

On 25th May 1735, in Talgarth Parish Church, Wales, Howell Harris was converted. If it had ended there we would never have heard of him. But three weeks later, on 18th June 1735 he had a second experience which was critical in making him the flaming evangelist

⁶ 6. . Yale edition of Edwards Works, vol 4, p. 249.

⁷ 7. . Banner of Truth edition of Edwards, Works (Edinburgh, 1974), 1, p. 625f.

of the Welsh Revival. He was reading and praying in the tower of the church at Llangasty when, to quote him:

Suddenly I felt my heart melting within me like wax before a fire, and love to God for my Saviour. I felt also not only love and peace, but a longing to die and be with Christ. Then there came a cry into my soul within that I had never known before—Abba, Father! I could do nothing but call God my Father. I knew that I was his child, and He loved me and was listening to me. My mind was satisfied and I cried out, Now I am satisfied! Give me strength and I will follow Thee through water and fire.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones does not hesitate to label this a baptism of fire or of power subsequent to conversion which gave Harris an indomitable compassion for the lost. When he preached, Harris always looked for this unction of the Holy Spirit. He would write in his diaries of ‘the authority’ when preaching or the coming down of ‘a strong gale’. Such anointed preaching also empowered him to withstand extraordinary persecution with that supreme disregard which stamped him as an aristocrat of the Spirit. Such anointed preaching, which Martyn Lloyd-Jones describes as ‘prophesying’, is a sign that the Lord purposes revival.⁸

We do not have time to speak of other revivals, but let me just make this observation about the so-called ‘Toronto Blessing’. I have read scores of testimonies from people who claim to have been helped by that movement. What is so striking about those testimonies is how much pain people are in today. They testify to anxiety in the work place, unhappiness at home, the limitations of human rationality, the deprivation of love, and exhaustion from working too hard. They confess to stressed, joyless lives, and a lack of self-esteem. The so-called ‘manifestations’ appear to have addressed needs such as those. Now we may be confident that a loving heavenly Father would be interested in giving his family the resources to address such needs, and critics of the Toronto Blessing need to be concerned that the church has not helped people to cope better with these genuine human problems. They need not only a Saviour to save them from their sins, but also a present, accepting, loving Father to give them a family and a Holy Spirit to warm their cold hearts and revive them from the death of despair.

VI. REVIVALS IN AUSTRALIA

When it comes to Australia, how in need we are of revival, and how we need to have a revived delight in the Holy Trinity. Perhaps the majority of Australian Christians attend liturgical churches which have had little experience of revival in their heritage, and they need to discover the joys of finding Jesus as their personal Saviour as well as appropriating the benefits of his passion in the sacraments. Then there are many evangelicals who have the doctrine straight, but whose hearts are as cool as their heads, and who do not have either a passion for souls or compassion for the needy. Our aboriginal brothers and sisters are at this very moment deeply distressed by the fact that it is the evangelical churches who are so little committed to identifying with them in their hour of need, and who look like allowing the present opportunity for reconciliation to slip through our fingers through sheer apathy; or worse, the conviction that we are not called to have such a concern. How can we expect the Lord’s blessing while the gross sin which we have committed against our aboriginal brothers and sisters through the dispossession of their land goes undealt with? This is the original sin of all non-aboriginal Australians,

⁸ 8. . D.M. Lloyd-Jones, ‘Howell Harris and Revival’, in his *The Puritans: Their Origins and Successors* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987), pp. 282–302.

and no-one else will solve the problem if we do not. We evangelicals might need to recover a revived understanding of the Father as a God who demands justice and truth and a revived appreciation of the Spirit of God who longs for us to appropriate in warm hearts the fruit of grace. And then there are many charismatics in Australia today who, perhaps hurt by their experience in evangelical churches and starved to spiritual death by the poor diet they have received there, have developed an appetite for words which will not bring eternal life, who ignore the cross of Christ, and the call of the Father to holiness of life. We need to have our faith in the Holy Trinity revived.

Well, the Holy Trinity knows all that. God has not given up on any of us who profess to be called Christians. The Anglican Bishop Hamish Jamieson testifies that in his Diocese of Bunbury, as a result of the movement of the Spirit, people have become more sharply focused on Jesus as Lord, rather than on the church. In traditionally high church dioceses, he observes, that is a very significant development. He has witnessed particular blessing in the town of Manjimup, with a population of about 5,000, which held the first Anglican Renewal Ministries of Australia (ARMA) conferences in Australia and has sent five men into the ordained ministry since 1983.⁹

Bishop Ralph Wicks' testimony is similar. I remember one evangelical Anglican from Brisbane telling me of the change brought to the cathedral ministry in Brisbane because of Bishop Wicks' experience of the Spirit of God. And in his autobiography he wrote after his experience of renewal; 'Some clergy regarded me as a "weirdo" but one thing they could not deny: The proclamation of Jesus and God's gift of salvation by grace through faith became key features of my preaching. I was reminded by Scripture that the work of the Holy Spirit is to glorify Jesus.'¹⁰ Bishop Wicks took many missions. He particularly remembers one at Stratford, a small town between Sale and Bairnsdale in Gippsland, which was a total failure on the first night, but by the fourth night scores of people who had never heard of the charismatic movement were 'hungry for the Spirit, begging for the anointing'.¹¹ So strong has been the testimony of Bishop Wicks to the lordship of Christ that he has been a blessing to many evangelicals who have come to realize that they have been more in love with the Bible than with Jesus. He reports that he was invited to address a conference of evangelicals in Melbourne, but they were no doubt nervous of this weirdo charismatic, so they limited him to six minutes. Bishop Wicks wrote:

Then the Archbishop of Melbourne, Bob Dann, kept reminding me about the 'six minutes'. I put away my prepared text and simply shared with the conference what spiritual renewal meant to me: how my ministry was enriched, how I came to understand and love Jesus more. The response of the delegates was very moving to me. They rose in acclamation. I went backstage and wept. God has done something beautiful.¹²

God had indeed done something beautiful. He had brought those evangelicals close to one who was on fire, and, in his grace, he had made their hearts combustible. They had made the priceless discovery that it was not gospel preaching that is required, but anointed gospel preaching.

The best recent Australian example of revival is the aboriginal revival which began on Galiwin'ku (Elcho Island) on 28th March 1979. From the historian's point of view, it is a delight because we now have so much data on it. In two recent studies, John Blacket's *Fire*

⁹ 9. . Conversation with Bishop Jamieson, 1st April 1997.

¹⁰ 10. . Ralph Wicks, 'Reflections on Renewal', *Renewal Journal*, No 2, p. 32.

¹¹ 11. . Conversation with Bishop Wicks, 1st April 1997.

¹² 12. . Ralph Wicks, 'Reflections on Renewal', *Renewal Journal*, No 2, p. 33.

in the Outback (Sutherland: Albatross, 1997) and Max Hart's *A Story of Fire, Continued* (Blackwood: New Creation Publications, 1997), the aboriginal people have been allowed to speak for themselves. John Blacket participated in the revival and interviewed many of the aboriginal people who led and benefited from it, and Max Hart, another participant, who though himself incapacitated by Parkinson's disease, was assisted by Bryce Clark who interviewed many of the leaders.

Our aboriginal brothers and sisters certainly experienced the coming of the Spirit at this time and had a lot to say about the evidence that he had come. Nyiwula Dhurrkay at Galiwin'ku one week before the revival began reported that at an all night prayer meeting at 4 a.m. the Spirit came. How did they know? Because a cloud came from the east and rested upon them and they were in the mist of God's presence and they became cold, which in a hot climate is the way the Spirit graciously presents himself.¹³ But the reason why we must regard this aboriginal revival as the real thing and not just a bout of pentecostal delirium is that it is not the Holy Spirit, but Jesus who is its hero and its focus of attention. Visions of Jesus are the most reported of all the visions in a revival characterized by scores of visions. In 1983 a small aboriginal boy in kindergarten at Yarrabah, south of Cairns in Queensland, did a butterfly painting, putting paint on a piece of paper and folding it in half. When he opened it he gazed on a remarkable likeness of Christ with crown of thorns.¹⁴ Revival came to Yarrabah immediately.

When they experienced the phenomenon which has been labelled 'slaying in the Spirit', the aboriginal evangelists did not like the term, preferring to describe it as 'resting in Jesus'.¹⁵ The leaders had not witnessed anything like these revival experiences before, and white missionaries did not seem to be able to give any help, and therefore aboriginal pastors became extraordinarily dependent on stories of Jesus in the Bible to guide them to know what to do next. They read what Jesus did in the gospels and they believed that Jesus was doing it all over again in Australia. They interpreted the Bible literally and pictorially and they expected to witness miracles and to see visions as Jesus walked with them on Australian soil. Aboriginal Christians thus affirm that it is Christ himself, rather than a phenomenon called revival, who is helping them to transform a world which had been death to them into a life-giving synthesis of old culture and new challenges. Bob Williams, a tribal leader from Carnarvon, spoke of Jesus as 'the in-between one' or the one who stands between the races, discerning the truth in aboriginal law by interpreting it in the light of the law which the Lord Jesus came not to destroy, but to fulfil.¹⁶ Behind these generalisations lie the individuals whose pain the Lord healed. There was Willy, a timid aboriginal man who had spent a lot of time in gaol for drunkenness. The revival not only dried him out, but made a man of him as well. In his simple, moving testimony to his church, he gave the glory to Jesus: 'A lot of people think I'm rubbish. I'm not rubbish anymore; I've got Jesus Christ inside me.'¹⁷

One Solomon Islander who experienced revival in the endemic revival in the Solomon Islands, which began in 1970, said 'Revival is Jesus': it is what 'goes on in the soul when

¹³ 13. . John Blacket, *Fire in the Outback* (Sydney: Albatross, 1997), p. 90.

¹⁴ 14. . John Harris, *One Blood* (Sydney: Albatross, 1990), facing p. 783 and p. 850.

¹⁵ 15. . Blacket, *Fire in the Outback*, p. 211.

¹⁶ 16. . Blacket, *Fire in the Outback*, p. 188.

¹⁷ 17. . Blacket, *Fire in the Outback*, p. 200.

Jesus comes into right focus'.¹⁸ More precisely, revival is what goes on in the soul when the cross of Christ comes into right focus. *A revival is a manifestation in this world of a divine victory in the supernatural world.* A revival is an outbreak in the present world of the great victory over Satanic and demonic forces which took place in the past on the Cross and which will receive its most visible and permanent manifestation when Christ returns again to bring in a new heaven and a new earth. Revivals, then, are re-enactments, not of Calvary, but of the victory won at Calvary.¹⁹ Djiniyini Gondarra, the aboriginal theologian who was the pastor at Galiwin'ku when the revival began, had a remarkable vision of crows and flying foxes (which are totems of himself and his wife) and of a beautiful girl wearing lots of bangles, namely Queen Jezebel. Gondarra called out to his wife, 'Go to Jerusalem, get the blood and wash the cross'. She did so and, when she washed the cross with the blood, it turned into a flaming two-edged sword, and she thrust it through Jezebel who turned back into a flying fox and exploded. Then God said to Gondarra:

You lay down every totem and ceremony. In each of them there is good and bad. All of them must come under my Lordship, be washed by the blood of Jesus Christ, and then you will see a new Aboriginal culture. I don't want to destroy and leave you empty. I will restore and renew what is good.²⁰

Jesus is the hero of the aboriginal revival. But it is significant that the one who came to glorify the Father is still doing it today. The theme hymn of the aboriginal revival is the quiet worshipful hymn 'God Bapa'.

<i>God</i>		<i>Bapa,</i>		<i>God</i>		<i>Bapa,</i>
(God	the	Father,	God	the	Father),	
<i>Garray</i>	<i>Djesu,</i>	<i>Garray</i>	<i>Djesu</i>	[=Lord	Jesus]	
(God	the	Son,	God	the	Son)	
<i>Dhuyu</i>	<i>Birrimbir,</i>	<i>Dhuyu</i>	<i>Birrimbir</i>	[=	Holy	Spirit],
(God	the	Spirit,	God	the	Spirit)	
<i>Nhuma</i>		<i>lurrkun,</i>			<i>wanganyngur.</i>	
(You in all, three in one). ²¹						

One of the white missionaries, Herbert Howell, reports a conviction which recalls that of his namesake, Howell Harris: 'I used to address God as Lord God Almighty, quaking in my boots lest he might zap sinful me, but after the revival I found myself addressing him as *Father*.'²² At the annual Revival Thanksgiving weekend in 1990 Djiniyini led a victory march to 'Lift up Father God the Creator', thus affirming Christ's victory over Satan, which reveals a developed Trinitarian understanding.²³ And of all the many visions reported in the revival, at least one was about the Holy Trinity. At the 1991 Convention, the aboriginal people went out into a desert place and there set up a cross two metres high. One of them

¹⁸ 18. . George Strachan, *Revival—its Blessings and Battles: An Account of experiences in the Solomon Islands* (Laurieton: South Sea Evangelical Mission, 1984, revised, 1989), p. 2.

¹⁹ 19. . Blacket, *Fire in the Outback*, p. 98.

²⁰ 20. . Blacket, *Fire in the Outback*, p. 248.

²¹ 21. . Blacket, *Fire in the Outback*, p. 91.

²² 22. . Blacket, *Fire in the Outback*, p. 167.

²³ 23. . Blacket, *Fire in the Outback*, p. 249.

saw three lights, one on each point of the cross, and identified them as the light of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.²⁴

Dr. Stuart Piggin directs the Centre for the Study of Australian Christianity at Robert Menzies College, Macquarie University, Sydney, Australia.

The Mystery of Salvation: The Story of God's Gift

Trevor A. Hart

Reprinted with permission from Anvil, an Anglican Evangelical Journal for Theology and Mission Vol. 13 No. 3 (1996), pp. 260–66

It is recounted of the Scots Enlightenment philosopher David Hume that, upon hearing of a sermon by Jonathan Edwards on 'The Usefulness of Sin', he erupted with the indignant inquiry, 'But what the devil does the fellow make of hell and damnation?' I must confess that it was with a similar burden of curiosity that I initially approached and interrogated this book, a hermeneutical strategy shaped in large measure by media responses to the volume's publication. I ought to have known better. Those wishing to discover the answer to Hume's question may turn to paragraph one on page 199 where it is (I think) answered. But be warned; whatever the curious principles of selection employed by religious correspondents in their frenzied bid for air time and column inches may suggest, the key to this book certainly does not lie here.

This report is the third in a series (following *We Believe in God* [1987] and *We Believe in the Holy Spirit* [1991]), treating core doctrines of the Christian faith, and doing so in a particular way. Unlike some Doctrine Commission reports of the past there are no signed chapters; instead the entire report is owned and presented to the Church by the Commission as a whole (x). Its pages reflect a lengthy and constructive process of writing, discussion, reflection and reworking, out of which there emerges a remarkable degree of broad consensus in relation to the major themes treated. Of course there will have been many differences of understanding and expression among the Commission's members, and to some extent one may engage in a crude source-critical exercise, tracing particular distinctive emphases and concerns, and identifying the points at which one voice seems to have been modified and qualified by another. But such differences are enveloped and held together convincingly (rather than artificially) within what is apparently a clear shared commitment to the broad incarnational and trinitarian structure of catholic Christianity. Some may lament the absence of maverick voices and perspectives in the text, and think the final result oppressive or contrived. Such readers would doubtless have preferred the public jousting and open disagreements which characterized the format of some past reports. Others will find the consensual approach here altogether more

²⁴ 24. . Blasket, *Fire in the Outback*, p. 253.

appropriate and valuable in a document which, while it is certainly not intended to have prescriptive or binding force as an expression of what the Church of England believes, is nonetheless offered as a guide for those wanting to integrate their tradition-nurtured faith with the questions, concerns and challenges of contemporary life. The report engages head on with the concerns of the wider human community; yet it is primarily a church document, offered to the Church by the Church and for the sake of the life of the Church in its ministry to the world. It is not a collection of papers from a symposium testing the diverse and conflicting intellectual possibilities available on the shelves of the theological supermarket. Interesting and important as the latter genre may be, it has limited value in the task of directing Christian men and women who are seeking the contemporary meaning and significance of the tradition within which they stand.

The Mystery of Salvation begins by considering the particular challenges presented by our cultural context to the articulation of a Christian soteriology. The impact of scientific cosmologies upon human self-understanding, changing social attitudes (especially the emergence of feminism), and the increased awareness of religious diversity and detailed knowledge of other faith traditions are each singled out as particularly worthy of recognition and direct address in any attempt to reformulate the gospel tradition for today. Space is also given to a sensitive account (delightfully illustrated with references to contemporary literature) of the so-called secularity of modern life, characterized by loss of any obvious sense of the sacred or of transcendentals laying claim to moral and intellectual allegiance. The fragmentation resulting from this loss of bearings, it is suggested, undermines any attempt to articulate a shared diagnosis of the human condition and, subsequently, poses a significant problem for those seeking to bear witness to a salvific economy which addresses that condition. This opening chapter is helpful in drawing attention to some important features of contemporary western culture, but it sets out an agenda which the report as a whole does not subsequently keep clearly in its sights. To be sure, there is a lengthy chapter towards the end of the book on other faith traditions, and periodic glimpses of feminism (some of them in less than obvious contexts) and science interrupt the flow of argument elsewhere. For the most part, however, the discussion is pursued without being clearly orientated towards these concerns.

The opening chapter seems to share a common assumption that our context is in some way more resistant to the gospel, and thus presents a more profound challenge to the theologian than any prior to it. It is an assumption which is at least worth questioning: has there ever been a culture which was not at root antagonistic to the gospel except, perhaps, in appearances which proved ultimately to be dangerously deceptive? To suppose so would seem to risk historical misreading of earlier contexts (as if the cultural milieu of first-century Palestine or fourth-century Alexandria were somehow more naturally receptive to the gospel of a crucified Lord) and, more importantly, to foster the dangerous notion that the burden of theological responsibility lies in tracing and building upon available points of contact and continuity between the gospel and contemporary intellectual mores. Of course our context presents very particular and radical challenges to the Christian tradition; and of course these must be taken absolutely seriously and responded to. But they should not be allowed to call the sole tune to which theologians dance; and we ought not to forget that the relevance of the Christian gospel has often been its inherent scandalousness when judged by the standards of alternative traditions.

One of the most serious challenges to the church today in fact seems likely to be an overriding optimism concerning the human condition, its capacities and destiny. Such optimism is manifest in various forms and degrees in some types of humanism, evolutionary models of history as progress, and emergent 'New Age' spiritualities alike. The root supposition is that humanity is, if not 'divine', then fundamentally good and

noble, and suffering at most from behavioural difficulties which can and will be transcended through political, social, psycho-therapeutic and other forms of human self improvement. How should the Christian theologian respond to this sort of self understanding? While it is no doubt true that the western Christian tradition has underplayed the theme of the goodness of creation, and has too often overdosed on self-deprecating and unduly pessimistic portrayals of human depravity and darkness, the genuinely tragic side of human existence is surely no optional extra to a Christian anthropology. Its loss or effective obscuring in the interests of a correlation with 'what people these days find acceptable' could easily lead not just to the trivializing 'Disneyfication' of the gospel, but its ultimate betrayal and relegation to irrelevance. This report nowhere commends any such strategy, I hasten to add. I wonder, though, whether it might not have identified the problem more clearly, and indicated more forcefully the legitimacy of and need for (here and elsewhere) a response to culture rooted in resistance and the willing embrace of the scandalous.

Similar issues arise in connection with chapter 3, which focuses on the relationship between salvation and history. For the sake of clarity we are offered a threefold taxonomy of Christian views on this subject. Such schemes are always extremely vulnerable to the charge of inadequacy, of course, since they can never accommodate every variation and qualification. They must be adjudged on the basis of their broad brush account and their ability to locate the reader quickly and efficiently within the landscape of views available by drawing attention to landmarks. The first category of views listed here are those which are in one way or another 'world affirming', which locate salvation as a reality very much *within* history. Then there are described for us 'world renouncing' views which want to escape from history into eternity, and at best concede the anticipation of an essentially ahistorical redemption within the here and now.

Lastly, the report itself offers us a typically Anglican third way which combines strengths and eliminates weaknesses in the aforementioned alternatives. This Hegelian achievement would insist that the world is basically 'good' but nonetheless in deep and serious trouble. It needs God to act in order to redeem it and to restore order. This God does through entering the historical process as a creature and so restoring and completing his original creative project rather than abrogating it or starting from scratch. Redemption thus envelops the fleshly and historical, but transcends history through resurrection. I must confess that having read this and then re-read it I found myself asking how precisely it differed from what I had always taken to be the sort of thing believed by most basically orthodox Christians. As such it is an enormously helpful and balanced statement. I'm not clear, though, that it really serves as a progressive synthesis in which the conflicts between 'world affirming' and 'world renouncing' views are transcended.

The problem, I think, is that the original categories focus on the wrong issue. Any category which effectively thrusts Israel's prophetic tradition and Teilhard de Chardin together ('world affirming'), while the alternative makes bedfellows of Plato and Karl Barth ('world renouncing'), seems desirous of some careful recasting. The categories draw attention to things which these figures may have in common, but by doing so divert our attention from the far more significant things which nonetheless set them decisively apart. I wonder whether the location of 'salvation' within or beyond history is really the lodestone by which to set the course for such a discussion. More germane, perhaps, is the question of the relationship between 'nature' and 'grace', or of the inherent capacities and incapacities of nature or history to realise 'redemption' in one degree or another. One might cast the same issue differently in terms of agency: does salvation erupt or evolve from within the potential of the natural order and through the independent activity of humans? Is it 'historical', that is to say, in the sense of being able to be accounted for and

accommodated within the continuities and potentialities mapped by the 'laws' of historical science? Or is it contingent on an irruption of divine action which in some sense clearly interrupts and even conflicts with the natural sequence? The hope of Isaiah and Jeremiah was not rooted in an omega-point lying at the end of an evolutionary process, but in the faithfulness of Yahweh to retrieve an otherwise hopeless situation. If Barth refused to 'affirm' the inherent capacity of fallen nature for redemption, he certainly believed in the capacity of God to redeem it, and his 'world renouncing' emphasis did not dissuade him from a political commitment and involvement with poverty and injustice rooted firmly in a conviction that such a salvation *must* have an impact on history.

Chapter 2, 'The Giver and the Gift', explores the basic meanings of the term 'salvation' within Christian contexts. It suggests, helpfully, that the word bears numerous distinct and complementary senses reflecting the many different social and cultural contexts within which the idea was born and has developed and been interpreted. If we seek for some underlying continuity or unity among these distinct construals, then this can perhaps be found in the insistence that to be 'saved' invariably involves receiving some benefit or help from the hand of God as gift. Intrinsic within the concept of gift is that of a personal framework for giving and receiving:

In receiving the gift as a gift, I receive at the same time the giver's gift of himself or herself. In the same way God gives himself to us in all his gifts of salvation. If we have any of them without recognising them as gifts of God, we have something valuable. But to experience them as gifts, to recognise the giver in the gifts, is to know God. This is what Christians call salvation. (36)

This emphasis on the irreducible gift aspect of redemption serves to set Christian soteriologies decisively apart from various contemporary alternatives couched in terms of self-realization or self-fulfilment. But, the chapter affirms, more yet needs to be said, for the God who gives himself in giving these gifts is not known by Christians as an undifferentiated subject, but as the triune communion of Father, Son and Holy Spirit into the very dynamics of whose life we are adopted and elevated (we share together with the incarnate Son in the Spirit who, being poured out into our lives, prompts us to cry, 'Abba! Father!'). There is no lifting of us out of the sphere of the human or the historical in order to participate in this divine life; God has earthed it within history by the incarnation of his Son and the outpouring of his Spirit on all flesh. The exposition here is rich and insightful, and integrates trinitarian, incarnational and redemptive language in ways which have too often been held together in the western tradition (especially its Protestant end) only in the liturgy. The chapter continues with a brief discussion of God and gender, and of the importance of both differentiating and yet discerning continuity between creation and redemption.

Space compels a rather brief description of chapters 4 to 6, each of which, in its own way, surveys the variety of images or metaphors of salvation to be found in the biblical tradition and the interpretative heritage of the church. Chapter 4 concentrates on the apostolic material and contains some penetrating and helpful insights (e.g., the linking of crucifixion to slavery, 99). Chapter 5 explores 'modern restatements of some of the principal ways in which Christian people have understood the mystery of salvation' (101), including discussions of substitution, sacrifice, victory, representation, solidarity in suffering, and other central strands of Christian reflection on the nature of God's redemptive action. This chapter is perhaps the most obvious index of theological diversity among the commission's members. The unresolved tensions between differing models where they exist remain largely unresolved. Nonetheless the descriptive accounts offer a helpful overview. Chapter 6 attends to the distinction between what we are saved from

and what we are saved for. Its distinctive purpose is not entirely clear, inasmuch as in doing so it covers some of the same ground as chapter 5, but the framework is different and the treatment helpful.

What I found surprising in these chapters (and the appendix to the report which really belongs together with them) was the way in which the penal or forensic metaphors which have so dominated the tradition of atonement theology in the West were treated. It is fair to say that the language of Jesus' death as a judgement or punishment, and the imagery of the law court and execution chamber, have received too much exclusive attention in western Christianity. It is also true that they can be and sometimes have been crudely handled in such a way as to render them dubious and (in terms of the standards of the same scriptural inheritance from which they are derived) sub-Christian, particularly in terms of the doctrine of God latent within such accounts. The report says all this, and fair enough. But I looked in vain for any serious attempt to rehabilitate this particular cluster of images, or to identify the valuable insights which might be supposed to lie within or behind them, no matter how uncomfortable the metaphors themselves may be. An apparent attempt to do so (122f.) rapidly changes direction without addressing the key issues. The appendix to the report effectively affirms the tradition of Abelard, Socinus and Rashdall, and offers little hope of anything of genuine value being retrieved from the 'objective' tradition of Augustine, Anselm and Calvin for contemporary understanding. It concedes that the latter theology is essentially that of the Thirty-Nine Articles and the Prayer Book, but does little more than tacitly excuse these on the ground that their particular historical context made this virtually inevitable. I have no brief whatever for exalting the penal and forensic imagery at the effective expense of everything else in Christian soteriology, but it seems to me that a much more careful attempt ought to have been made to explore the resources of such language before effectively consigning it to the file marked 'historical interest'.

Chapter 7 concerns 'Christ and World Faiths'. The now commonly-accepted distinction between exclusivist, inclusivist and pluralist outlooks is presented, although the chapter itself attempts to modify and move beyond it. The heart of the chapter lies in the willing acknowledgement that 'the major faiths bring salvation ... to their followers in varying but significant degrees' (167). This is certainly not intended to detract from the uniqueness or non-substitutability of Christ as incarnate Son of God and universal Saviour. In this respect it shares ground with those inclusivists who wish to see God at work in other faiths drawing people (in one way or another) to a salvation rooted in Christ. The discussion is informative and accessible. For some it will concede far too much in the direction of the 'redemptive significance' of other faiths; for others far too little. On the whole that is not a bad place to be in theology. But I do wonder about the terms in which the discussion is couched. Why should other religious faiths be the channels through which God chooses to work redemptively (in either an inclusivist or a pluralist outlook)? Is religion really the most obvious context for God to make meaningful and redemptive contact with people? We should not suppose so too quickly and without further reflection. It might well be argued that the presence of religion raises barriers rather than provides opportunities for such contact, and that if we are seeking the activity of God's Spirit outside the church we might do well to look elsewhere than within the confines of organized religion.

Another question provoked by this chapter concerns the model of salvation which is supposedly being identified as present, or partly present, or potentially present in and through the ministries of world faiths. A partial account points us to such generalities as being enabled to escape from what destroys life, and to embrace health, peace, prosperity and blessing. No doubt these are indeed things associated with salvation, and are to be

discovered empirically among the adherents of other faiths. But are these not merely the gifts rather than the Giver? How does the 'salvation' being pursued here in the world faiths, that is to say, relate to that described for us in chapter 2 in terms of essential relatedness to God, and recognition of the Giver in the gift? These are questions which could helpfully have been picked up to give this chapter more of a sense of integration with the report as a whole.

Finally, we end where we began in chapter 8 with a discussion of the character of the Christian hope: resurrection, parousia, purgatory, praying with the saints, and hell all treated in fourteen pages! Whether 'Hell is not eternal torment' is actually the most interesting or the most contentious statement in the chapter readers must decide for themselves.

The Doctrine Commission is to be congratulated on the production of a report which informs the reader and stimulates responses and questions about issues at the very heart of the Christian tradition. It is clearly written and accessible to a wide range of readers. As such it ought to serve as a resource for study and discussion in many different contexts within the life of the church. Let us hope that the consensual nature of the document and the commitment to serious engagement with core doctrines will continue to characterize reports from future Commissions.

This is a review of the Doctrine Commission of the Church of England's report, *The Mystery of Salvation: The Story of God's Gift* (Church House Publishing, 1995: ISBN 0-7151-3778-6). The Revd. Professor Trevor A. Hart is Professor of Divinity at the University of St Andrews, Scotland, and Convenor of the Doctrine Commission of the Scottish Episcopal Church.

Book and Journal Information

Anvil: an Anglican Evangelical Journal for Theology and Mission; further details available from Mrs Jenny Smith, Anvil Subscriptions Secretary, The Vicarage, Belle Vue Road, Ashbourne, Derbyshire, DE6 1AT, United Kingdom.

Review and Expositor PO Box 6681, Louisville, Kentucky 40206-0681. Subscriptions: US \$24 p.a.: Foreign and Canada: \$30 p.a.: Institutions \$40 p.a.

Southwestern Journal of Theology Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary PO Box 22000 2E Fort Worth TX 76122-0890 Subscriptions US \$19 (domestic) US\$21 (foreign)

Stimulus

PO Box 306 Masterton New Zealand Subscription (4 issues per year) NZ\$46.00, airmail NZ\$52.00.

The Lord's Firestorms: God the Holy Trinity and the Experience of Religious Revival in Australia was originally published by Bible College of Victoria Centre for World Mission, PO Box 380 Lilydale Vic 3140 Australia as the 1997 Leonard Buck Lecture in Missiology.

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Reviewed by Dr Patrick Godman

John Piper

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[*Answering Islam: the Crescent in the Light of the Cross*](#)

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Book Reviews

BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION: AN INTEGRATED APPROACH

(revised edition)

by W. Randolph Tate

Massachusetts: Hendrikson Pub, 1997, 276pp, hardback Bibliography; Author and Scripture indices, some illustrations, ISBN: 1-56563-252-4

Reviewed by Stephen Raison, PhD, Bible College of South Australia, Adelaide

Tate's book is designed to introduce approaches to biblical interpretation and as the subtitle indicates, promotes an integrated approach. This is an introductory text which covers author-, text- and reader-centred approaches to the Bible. In addition, Tate argues that 'meaning resides in the conversation between the text and reader with the world behind the text informing that conversation. Interpretation is impaired when any world is given preeminence at the expense of neglecting the other two'.

The chapters are grouped into three units with each unit focused on approaches characterized by an overriding interest in the author's world, the world of the text or the world of the reader. Discussion in the first unit centres on the importance of the study of language and of the 'ideological world' of the Old and New Testaments. The beginner will need some assistance because the concepts and terms are presented 'thick and fast'. The second unit -(text-centred approaches) is an eminently readable discussion of the varying

literary types within each of the Testaments. Tate maintains a balance of sufficient detail to avoid superficiality and sufficient generalisation to avoid unnecessary complexity. He rightly emphasizes, 'Not only was the world which produced the works of the Hebrew Bible different from ours, but the world within the texts differs from our real world. To impose modern expectations ... upon these texts while neglecting their generic worlds and literary qualities is to treat them irresponsibly'. A similar point is made in respect of the New Testament. Important to some readers will be Tate's brief consideration of the historicity of biblical narratives.

For a beginner, the third unit on reader-centred approaches will be the most challenging in the book. Tate's overriding theme is that 'readers are not simply innocent bystanders, sponges who soak up a text' but are contributors to the creation of meaning. The first edition's reliance on W. Iser's model of how readers interact with texts to create meaning has been augmented with additional details from Iser's theory on social norms, literary allusions and strategies (a total of fourteen pages is devoted to Iser's model). An important point for Tate is that although readers might legitimately construe a text's meaning variously, they are always constrained by parameters set by the text. This section differs from others in the book in its proportion of theoretical detail to illustration. The density of terms and concepts makes for difficult reading and will require, in my judgement, a lecturer to have sound familiarity with Iser's model if student questions are to be handled comfortably. The subsequent illustrations from studies by McKnight and Sternberg (also present in the first edition) do show the value of some of the points in Iser's theory but they do not bring to life the detailed discussion of the model which Tate provides.

The subsequent two chapters elucidate the role of presuppositions in interpretation and how methods arising from the three types of approaches to reading affect interpretation. These are stimulating chapters and finish with the significant point that 'The best hermeneutic will be the one that pulls from "something old and something new," the one that gives audience to a variety of interpretive approaches'.

Chapter Ten, 'Mark's Gospel and the Merging of Three Worlds', is an addition to the first edition's text. Mark's Gospel is used as the arena for displaying the need for an integrated approach to interpretation. He focuses upon the author's use of plot to intimate the goal of Jesus' ministry. Three narrative strategies are examined: literary allusions, the intercalation of stories and the portrayal of 'Jesus's relationship to his contemporary world-view'. This is an interesting chapter which not only presents a modern literary analysis but also points out its limitations. One of the strengths of this chapter is the underscoring of the reader's role in construing meaning. A minor weakness is that Tate does not elucidate his own biases. This is surprising, given that he has stressed the role of cultural and personal influences which act upon the reader in the process of interpretation.

There are features of the book which enhance its usefulness to the student and teacher. Key terms are in bold type. There is a helpful summary at the end of the chapter along with a 'Review and Study' section which lists key terms, concepts and contains study questions. Finally, there are suggestions for further reading. I commend this book as a text which teachers of hermeneutics will find useful.

ANSWERING ISLAM: THE CRESCENT IN THE LIGHT OF THE CROSS

by Norman L. Geisler and Abdulf Saleeb

Grand Rapids Michigan, Baker Books, 1993, 336pp, paperback, including Glossary of Islamic terms, Bibliography, Suggested Reading List and Indices for Quranic Surahs, Persons and subjects, ISBN 0-8010-3859-6

Answering Islam was written by Norman C. Geisler, the Dean of Southern Evangelical Seminary, and Abdul Saleeb. Geisler has written many books in the area of Christian apologetics. Saleeb is a pseudonym for a person who grew up as a Muslim in a Muslim country.

As Islam is the second largest religion in the world and claims to be a universal religion surpassing and fulfilling all other religions, the authors seek to scrutinize the claims of Islam. They set out 'to understand and evaluate the claims of orthodox Islam from a Christian point of view'. With their combined experience of Christian theology and an insider's view of Islam, they claim an advantage in setting forward both the Muslim's and the Christian's belief.

The book is divided into three main sections:

Part One: The basic doctrines of Orthodox Islam, in particular Islamic monotheism, creation and man, prophets, Muhammad, the Quran, end-times and salvation.

In discussing Islamic monotheism, the authors give a helpful summary of the etymology of Allah and the pre-islamic use of the word with some scholars' suggestions as to Muhammad's adaptation of the word. In a section on the nature of Allah, the fundamental message of Islam, namely Allah's existence and unity, is summarized from the Quranic witness. This is stated most clearly in Surah 112: 'in the name of God, Most Gracious, Most Merciful. Say: He is God, The One and Only; God, the Eternal, Absolute; He begetteth not, Nor Is He begotten; And there is none Like unto Him'. The *tawhid* or oneness of God in the Quran is so strongly emphasized that any seeming compromising of that oneness brings the strongest of condemnations.

Other characteristics of Allah, such as mercy, justice, omniscience, self existence, are summarized. These and many other characteristics are highlighted in the ninety-nine names of God. Geisler and Saleeb point out that the names are understood as characteristics of the Divine will rather than laws of his nature. He may also be recognized by the descriptions given him but he does not essentially conform to any. Antithesis or contradiction within the characteristics of God resides in the area of God's will; for example, God is not good because he is good but because he wills to be good. Conversely he could will to be evil.

The authors correctly observe that alongside the central belief about God, beliefs about the Quran and Muhammad are held equally as tenaciously.

Part Two: A Christian response to basic Muslim beliefs with an evaluation of Islamic monotheism, Muhammad and the Quran.

The authors highlight some of the unresolved philosophic, theological and moral tensions which arise because of the emphases within Islamic belief; for example, the inflexibility of absolute unity; unknowability of a totally transcendent being; moral determinism. One of the results of the theological emphases has been, certainly at the popular level, to 'promote' Muhammad to the place of mediator, a role which has no Quranic support. (Popular Islam in many Muslim countries often fills this 'mediatorial' void with 'saints' or *pirs*. The authors did not address in any detail 'popular' or 'folk' Islam, restricting the discussion to 'orthodox' Islam.) The uncritical approach of Muslim scholars to the Quran and to the life of Muhammad as contrasted with the willingness of some to use such methods with the Bible and Jesus is highlighted in the book.

Part Three: A positive defence of the Christian perspective by a defence of the Bible, the deity of Christ, the Trinity and of Salvation by the Cross.

In this section, the authors seek to provide an answer to the criticisms of Christianity by Muslims.

There are also four short appendices devoted respectively to Muslim sects and movements; Muslim religious practices; the Gospel of Barnabas and popular Muslim accusations against the New Testament.

The book is an unashamed apologetic for the Christian position. Geisler writes in the Introduction that it 'is incumbent upon thinking persons to examine carefully the evidence offered by both (Islam and Christianity) and to make their own decision in view of the evidence'. Though the authors are from a Christian and Muslim background and seek to have a positive impact on Muslims, the reviewer feels that because of its polemic style the book will not be useful in persuading a Muslim. It would probably have the opposite effect.

It does serve a purpose in educating Christians about differences between Islam and Christianity. However, the book is not an introductory book on Islam for the lay Christian reader. A book such as *Ishmael My Brother* is better for that purpose.

The readers most likely to benefit are those wanting to analyse arguments and theological positions, namely theological students, pastors and Christians who are working amongst Muslims. This book is not helpful for the 'how to' of relating to Muslim people.

REVISIONING EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY: A FRESH AGENDA FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

by Stanley J. Grenz

Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993, Pb 208pp, ISBN 0-8308-1772-7

Reviewed by David Parker

As the title suggests, in this volume Stanley J. Grenz, professor of theology and ethics at Carey/Regent College, Vancouver Canada, does not merely imitate the many authors who are currently engaged in describing the trends in evangelicalism or analysing its history. He goes further and attempts to re-fashion its theological programme so that it can be more true to itself and Scripture in the era of post-modernity. In the process, two strong points emerge—an assessment of evangelical historiography which takes full account of the most recent developments, and more importantly, a surprisingly authentic depiction of the actual character and dynamics of evangelical life and faith.

This sensitive portrayal is important for his thesis because by using it he finds that the uniqueness of evangelicalism lies not in its system of doctrinal beliefs but in its 'specific vision of what it means to be a Christian'. Grenz correctly states that 'As evangelicals we are persons who sense that we have encountered the living God through the gospel message of Jesus Christ. We describe this encounter by means of a set of theological categories derived from the Bible. These categories which form the cradle for this experience, in turn, constitute the grid by which we now interpret all of life'. This 'shared experience' does involve doctrinal beliefs which gives evangelicalism a 'distinctive theology', but 'the evangelical ethos is more than mere theology'.

So the 'heart of evangelicalism ... lies in its vision of the Christian life' and it can be described as 'a religious experience couched in theological categories'. This means that theology is 'the faith community's reflecting on the faith experience of those who have encountered God through the divine activity in history and therefore now seek to live as the people of God in the contemporary world'. Thus theology (as an intellectual discipline) is 'a second order discipline pursued "from within"; it reflects on religious experience to provide a model of reality or a conceptual framework for faith. Thus it serves the believing

community by enabling it to enhance its devotion, service and practical Christian living in the world.

This image of theology as faith seeking understanding is the essence of Grenz' proposal for the re-fashioning of evangelical theology to suit the new order. He claims the exclusively propositional and individualist approach of the post-fundamentalist 'card-carrying' evangelical of the post-War period is not adequate to cope with the post-modern era with its emphasis on non-cognitive truth and societal inter-relations as a necessary element in determining self-identity. He also argues that this new form of theology involves a more realistic approach to the sources or norms of theology. He is referring to its recognition of the theological heritage of the church and the cultural context in which theology is done as well the biblical message itself.

The confessional and cultural elements in theological work are, of course, inescapable, but as Grenz points out, they are hardly ever acknowledged in discussions of evangelical theological methodology for fear of appearing non-biblical. By reinstating them as a conscious part of theological method, Grenz is not departing from the insights of the Reformers who did not seek to make the Bible the exclusive authority but simply the ultimate one. However, as an evangelical, Grenz struggles with the precise nature of biblical authority in his scheme of revisioned theology, devoting his longest chapter (ch. 5) to it.

He emphasizes the need for evangelicals to pay more attention to the human nature of Scripture, but more importantly, he points out that at the heart of evangelical spirituality is the confidence that Scripture is 'the place—ultimately the only place—to go to find the words of everlasting life'. This, he urges, is precisely the significance of the '*locus classicus* for the evangelical doctrine of inspiration, [2 Timothy 3:16–17](#)', rather than the popular interpretation of this passage in terms of inerrancy. Thus, following in the Pietist heritage, Grenz argues that the Bible can be studied both critically and devotionally, but its essential function is to communicate 'spiritual knowledge of God'.

Grenz links together revelation, inspiration, canonisation, illumination and the theological task, and then relates them to the work of the Spirit in the community of believers. He shows that Scripture fits within a pattern of authority (to use Bernard Ramm's term), as it witnesses to the historical revelation of God in history, points the reader to God and informs us about God's nature and will. So the Bible is not to be idolised but is to be used as a channel of revelation, for it is 'the Spirit speaking through its pages [that] is our sole authority'. The Bible is also the source of the narrative, symbols and theological language which create the believing community and provide its self-identity—the 'informing and forming canon for the community'.

But as fruitful as this functional approach to biblical authority may be, it does not altogether solve the problem of how to deal with the facts of salvation history. In earlier evangelical thinking, these were the subjects of theological work and the object of faith, but under Grenz's idea of theology as reflection on faith, they have been de-emphasized. Although he does not stress the point, there must be a place in his scheme for definitive 'doctrines' (such as the incarnation and the atonement) as distinct from the theological constructs of the church which are built upon them by using the norms of history and culture. However, Grenz does not discuss them in terms of doctrine as is customary in popular evangelical teaching, but refers to them as 'the biblical message' or 'narrative' which contributes to the formation and self-identity of the believing community.

By discussing the nature of theology and evangelical spirituality in these terms, Grenz lays the foundation for a revisioned theology, but when he moves on from methodology to explore the integrating theme of this theology in Chapter 6, his argument loses its direction. He suggests that the central theme should be the kingdom of God interpreted in

terms of community. But he seems to have made this selection primarily on the basis of the importance of the kingdom in theological discussion over recent generations. Then, taking account of biblical teaching, he has introduced the community aspects (which are expanded in the final chapter), bearing in mind some limitations of kingdom theology and the re-emphasis upon the interaction of individual and society which is typical of post-modernity.

However, it would have been more consistent with the definitive character of evangelicalism that he has already identified and laid down as the basis of his argument to find the integrative motif of evangelical theology in its distinctive experience of salvation in Christ as mediated through Scripture and the believing community. Instead he has confused this with the broader issue of the Kingdom of God, thereby contradicting some of the warnings he gives later about misinterpreting kingdom theology.

The advantage of following the salvation motif would be that Grenz could expand his authentic depiction of the actual nature of evangelicalism. He could show, for example, that so much evangelical rationalizing and activity, which is often misread by others, can be understood if the gaining and fostering of salvation (in its many differing aspects) is recognized as the basic motif. It could also serve to strengthen his view of Scripture and the church.

Ultimately, however, the key tests of a book with a title like this can be summed up in two questions—it is really a fresh view? is it still evangelical? For the first, it must be acknowledged that many of the individual elements of Grenz' scheme are in line with the work of other post-fundamentalist evangelicals, including Donald Bloesch, who have recognized the complex relations between revelation, faith and Scripture and have stressed the principle of 'faith seeking understanding'.

But if the details are hardly innovative, the overall scheme and its energetic articulation as a serious proposal for evangelical theology is welcome. Furthermore, Grenz' ability to correlate aspects of his overall scheme and its dynamics with insights gained by contemporary studies in the human sciences, literature, philosophy and the like strengthens his presentation significantly.

There is no doubt that Grenz' attention to the functions of Scripture and theology produces a dynamic scheme which avoids the dangers of dogmatism and even bibliolatry that can stem from the propositionalist view of Scripture and theology. Furthermore, it promises more than the older evangelical schemes because it has a realistic basis in evangelical practice and takes account of the way theology actually works in the church. It also shows proper regard for the life of believing community and the practical object of theology as a means of enhancing faith and practice. However, the danger is, as David Wells pointed out in *No Place for Truth* (Zondervan, 1993), that in the modern era, utilitarian forces can easily take control of a theology that is uncritically angled towards serving the needs of the church and destroy its power as a witness to the Word of God.

Regarding the second test, it is quite clear that Grenz believes the older evangelical theology needs radical, fundamental change; so to the extent that he succeeds in effecting such a change, his scheme will be rejected as evangelical by those affected by the changes, even though it still centred in the biblical revelation of the gospel.

But even in his own terms of shared theological language, what he is proposing is different at a fundamental level; what he posits is discontinuous with earlier evangelical thinking, which destroys the identity that would otherwise link earlier and later generations.

In other words, Grenz defines evangelicalism in terms of 'a common vision of the faith that arises out of a common religious experience couched within a common interpretative framework consisting in theology beliefs we gain from the Scriptures'. However,

according to this, to change the concepts which interpret the experience is to produce a change in the identity of the community adopting those beliefs.

If this is so, then his proposal may not be called evangelical at all. Of course, it might be argued that it is the shared experience itself which is definitive (not its theological interpretation), but if taken to the extreme, this leads to an impossible solipsism and leaves the authority of Scripture undefined.

DARWIN ON TRIAL

by Phillip E. Johnson

Monarch Books, 1994, Pb 195pp, ISBN 1-854-242-656

Reviewed by Gregory A. Restall, PhD, Macquarie University, Sydney

This is a clearly written, interesting and valuable, yet infuriating book. Phillip Johnson, a legal academic from Berkeley, has nothing less than the entire scientific enterprise of Darwinism in his sights. This is nothing new; Christians of many stripes have criticized evolutionary theories for many years. However, what is new and interesting in Johnson's approach is the terms in which he takes up the debate, and the position he holds himself. Before I consider what this means for his approach, I will consider the general structure of the book.

He starts by addressing the legal questions surrounding the teaching of evolution in the United States. This shows an unavoidable American background, but it is useful for those of us from elsewhere nonetheless. In Chapters 2 to 9 he looks at the scientific claims made by evolutionary theories. In the next two chapters he examines the social influences of Darwinism, in the realms of Darwinist 'religion' and education. The closing chapter deals with the problem of distinguishing science and pseudo-science. Johnson thinks that in general, Darwinistic theories come under the second of these terms. At the end there is a section of 'Research Notes' containing references and comments on the references, and the book rounds off with a short index.

Johnson's programme both succeeds and fails. His major argument, that evolutionary theories are so contradictory and their fundamental concepts are so tangled as to render it non-scientific, does not particularly succeed. Anyone who has a passing knowledge of quantum mechanics will know that contradictory conceptions and unclear concepts are rife in other areas of science as well.

Unfortunately, his argument is weakened further when the reader notices inconsistencies in Johnson's text. For example, on page 51 he says 'species that were once thought to have turned into others turn out to overlap in time with their alleged descendants' and yet two pages later we hear that ' "few if any" examples have been documented of an ancestral form persisting in the same region with a modified descendant'. There is at least a strong tension here. If we are looking for ancestral forms persisting with their descendants, as the second quote would have us believe, then there is no problem if species which were thought to have 'turned into others' overlap in time with their descendants. This is no more problematic than the fact that we still see older cars on the road, even when the manufacturers are now making new ones.

The debate about evolution is a difficult one. Not only because the terms are slippery (species don't really 'turn into' anything as natural selection takes place) but there are fundamental beliefs involved. And this is where Johnson really shines. He drives home the fact that there are passions and world-views involved in the drive to find theories of origins. He is surely right that the issue of finding a naturalistic account of origins has a different quality for an atheist than for a theist. A theist can hold that there is no natural explanation for the existence of life —it is much harder for the atheist to believe this.

Johnson's book is valuable in so far as it drives this point home. There are world-views at stake in the success or failure of scientific theories. However, Johnson's book is not so worthwhile for the picture it has of science and its relationship to Christian faith. Johnson writes, in his introductory chapter, 'When the National Academy of Sciences tells us that reliance upon naturalistic explanations is the most basic characteristic of science, is it implying that scientists somehow know that a Creator played no part in the creation of the world and its forms of life?' In asking this question (and in implicitly answering it with an emphatic 'yes' in the course of the book) Johnson reveals a warped understanding of science and its relationship with the activity of God. Presumably we all believe there is some naturalistic explanation of why it rains, and why plants grow given water and nutrients. Does this mean that God plays no part in these processes? Of course not! The same is true of the creation of the cosmos. Whether or not there are naturalistic explanations (or better, descriptions) of these phenomena is independent of whether God is involved in them or not. Implying that providing a naturalistic explanation excludes God's activity is a recipe for deism. This is the most unhelpful, and dangerous, aspect of the book.

This error is all the more surprising for Johnson's explicit disavowal of the creationist position. He explicitly states that he is not concerned to defend the traditional creationist positions, nor to discuss perceived conflicts between science and the Bible. So, for what it is, this is a worthwhile addition to Christian thought about evolution. Johnson reminds us of the issues at stake for non-believers in these matters. However, his broader aims, to show evolution to be unscientific and incoherent, fail.

LET THE NATIONS BE GLAD! THE SUPREMACY OF GOD IN MISSIONS

by John Piper

(Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1993, ISBN 0-8010-7124-0 Pb, 230 pp.), Indices:
Scripture references, Persons, Subjects

Reviewed by Dr Patrick Godman, Canberra, Australia

There is one primary motive and goal for missions—and everything else—and that is the glory of God. This is the theme the senior pastor of Bethlehem Baptist Church, Minneapolis, Minnesota wants to press home. As such, it is a valuable corrective to the paradigms of missions as compassion and missions as the characteristic work of the church on which most missiological books are based. This is one of a number of books by Piper on God's centrality.

The two parts of the book develop the theme that each legitimate aspect of missions (examined under worship, prayer, suffering, salvation and 'the nations') rightly exercised, directs attention away from the theory and mechanics of the task and towards God and his glory. In Part I, Piper frequently contrasts the human wisdom of diligent and dedicated Christians with what he sees as the Bible's revelation of God's reasons and methods, which are always directed towards his own majestic glory.

Worship, he says, ensures that Christians do not underestimate the invincible power of God in missions. Missionaries must themselves be in worshipful awe of God before they can commend the same to the lost. As worship is what God wants as the ultimate end product—a choir singing of his glory—it is both an authenticating feature and the goal of missions.

Piper's discussion of prayer probes several loosely connected aspects of spiritual warfare. His insistence that spiritual warfare in missions is the only legitimate use for prayer might stimulate some discussion. Next, Piper shows that suffering accompanied the missionary task from the very beginning, and claims that God intended it to be so to

benefit the work. However, this chapter is not well integrated into the theme of the book, leaving a question mark over whether suffering is a necessary ingredient in the missionary task or a by-product.

In Part 2, Piper moves into the biblical foundations of the missionary task. In relation to Christ's atoning death he explores four questions: Will anyone be consigned to hell? Was the death of Christ necessary for all people globally? Is it necessary to have faith in Christ specifically? Is it necessary to hear of Christ to enjoy the benefits? Piper divides salvation history at the cross, so that answers to these questions do not have to be the same before and after that date.

The final chapter returns to the theme of the glory of God set out in the first two chapters and focuses on the task of missions. Piper concludes that when the key term *ethne* appears in missiological passages of Scripture, it always indicates a unit somewhere between the household and the tribe—a clan. He then takes the missionary goal as identifying ever smaller groups and ensuring that at least some are converted. Church growth or territory covered is the task of the local church, not missions. He argues that the resultant glory accruing to God comes through unity in diversity, praise from many perspectives, the diversity of his following, and ethnic equality, all of which focus praise on God himself. Thus the book starts and ends with the glory of God.

Because this book abruptly changes exegetical quality and style halfway through, it could almost be concluded that the two parts were by different authors. Part 1 is the weaker, with its didactic style, use of repetition and lack of unity, suggesting it might have been derived from a series of sermons.

At times Piper's conclusions, although unlikely to cause any disagreement from an evangelical, are dubious, as his method borders on exegesis by word association and proof by juxtaposition. Therefore the important links he sees between key themes, such as God, glory, worship, war, prayer, missions, power and grace seem contrived or poorly argued.

The greatest value of *Let the Nations be Glad* is its major theme—that the missionary task has no intrinsic value: it is a means to the glory of God. Because this is exegetically 'foggy' in Part 1, it may not be wise to put the book into the hands of students without guidance. But because the theme has been so often neglected, Part 2 would make a useful semester text for a certificate or undergraduate course in missions. Missions lecturers, however, should be able to use the ideas in this volume to develop a case, more rigorously argued from Scripture, to present to their students.

IS JESUS THE ONLY SAVIOR?

by Ronald H. Nash

Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1994, Pb 188pp, ISBN 0-310-44391-1

Reviewed by David Parker

Ronald Nash's latest book is a personal statement on the doctrine of salvation, although it does not contain a detailed exposition of his beliefs. Instead, the author who is professor of philosophy at Reformed Seminary, Orlando, Florida, analyses the logic of contemporary arguments levelled against the traditional belief that explicit knowledge of and faith in Jesus Christ is the only means of salvation. He finds these arguments lacking in cogency, which in his view leaves the traditional belief unassailed.

The book is divided into two parts, corresponding to the two main alternatives to the traditional view. The first deals with pluralism (the view that all religions are potentially ways of salvation), and uses John Hick as the main spokesman, although it does not give much detail of his actual argument and offers less than it promises on Hick's personal pilgrimage and spirituality.

The second part deals with inclusivism (the belief that while Jesus Christ is the means of salvation for all who are saved, conscious knowledge of Jesus or faith in him is not necessary for salvation). This section is directed against evangelicals Clark Pinnock and John Sanders in particular, with somewhat less emphasis on Roman Catholic examples of this belief. Other related issues such as universalism and post-mortem evangelism are also discussed.

Perhaps because the second topic is closer to the traditional evangelical position and is portrayed by Nash as a defection by evangelicals from the orthodox position, there is slightly more space given to exposition of the biblical material. But even so, this section mainly follows the pattern set in the statement of exclusivism in the first chapter where the biblical texts are quoted or referred to as if the case for exclusivism were thereby self-evident. Indeed, the main argument in the closing section seems to be that Acts and the rest of the New Testament can be read only in an exclusivist fashion.

Nash has published this book at this time because he regards pluralism as 'one of the three or four most serious threats to the integrity of the Christian faith' (others are liberation theology, process theology and feminist theology, which he has already dealt with in previous books). Similarly, he fears 'inclusivism has become an enormously influential position among evangelicals' (he refers especially to his own Southern Baptist denomination as a prime example of the inroads of these erroneous teachings). He warns that although inclusivism appears to be 'a relatively painless way to resolve difficulties about the fate of the unevangelised', nevertheless 'the acceptance of this biblically unsupportable opinion carries an enormously high theological cost'. He therefore hopes that through reading his book 'large numbers of evangelicals already committed to inclusivism will see these dangers and recognize the weaknesses of the position they have accepted in such a careless and unthinking way'.

Unfortunately, to show the weakness in another's position does not necessarily establish one's own position, nor does it help to unfold its finer points, much less make it more relevant and meaningful to those who may have doubts about it. Furthermore, since Nash writes so briefly, he has to make frequent reference to his other books for material which is often crucial to his argument; this does not make it any easier for the non-specialist reader for whom the book is specifically targeted. But more seriously, Nash's popular style means that he appears to assume the truth of his basic philosophical position (highly rationalistic and literal view of Scripture) and faults others such as Hick and Pinnock for not agreeing to it.

Therefore it must be said that as useful as this work is in examining the arguments used in support of inclusivism and pluralism, we need a more finely nuanced defence of exclusivism—one that takes full account of the literary form of Scripture, the nature of religious language and faith and above all, one that embraces a powerful and life-transforming Christology.