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Jesus' Teaching on Salvation and Suffering

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According to the New Testament, Jesus proclaimed the 'gospel' (good news) of salvation in the kingdom of God to suffering people. He proclaimed that the kingdom of God was not only imminent (e.g. [Mk. 1:15](#); [9:1](#); [Matt. 10:7](#); [Lk. 21:3](#)) but had already come in his ministry (e.g. [Matt. 11:12f](#); [Lk. 16:16](#); [Matt. 12:28](#); [Lk. 11:20](#); [Lk. 17:21](#)). His apostles were convinced that in the ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus the eschatological salvation of God had taken place, so that in an even more definite language they proclaimed the 'gospel' of that salvation in Christ to the world. God has wrought salvation for the whole world; so the eschatological salvation is already here!

Yet the New Testament knows well that with salvation in Christ suffering has not ceased in the world and that even Christians, those who have entered the kingdom of God or received salvation in Christ, suffer. Indeed, the various writers in the New Testament agreed that Christians *are bound to* suffer.

Then, how are we to explain the discrepancy between the NT's affirmation of salvation and the reality of suffering in the world, especially between the NT's assurance of the believer's salvation and its affirmation of the necessity of his/her suffering? This question naturally leads us to consider questions like: what is the salvation proclaimed by Jesus and his apostles? Is there a possibility of the believer's enjoying the blessings of salvation without suffering?¹

THE KINGDOM OF GOD AND THE KINGDOM OF SATAN

The two most fundamental pre-suppositions of Jesus' preaching of the kingdom of God are 1) that the world was created by God, and [P. 50](#) therefore God is its rightful lord and the world has (or can have) life only in him, its creator; and 2) that the world has however, fallen under the lordship of Satan.² Satan, the usurper of God's rightful lordship, rules the world in sin and death, i.e. forces us to sin and rewards us with death for the obedience rendered, that is, for sinning ([Rom. 6:23](#)). He 'tempts' human beings to be gods unto themselves ([Gen. 3:5](#)), to assert themselves against God, to be self-sufficient and self-seeking, or, in the language of Jesus' parable of the prodigal son ([Lk. 15:11-24](#)), to claim their 'share of the property' and leave the father for a self-sufficient life in a distant country. Sin, i.e. their self-assertion, thus results, on the one hand, in their separation from God, the creator and source of life, and, on the other hand, in their transference into the sphere of Satan's lordship and in their imprisonment in their finitude that manifests itself in their deprivation. So, conditioned to time and space they get old, weak, sick and dead, never being able to enjoy the freedom of the omnipresent; lacking in wisdom and power,

¹ Originally I planned to write this essay in two parts, with the second part dealing with the apostle Paul's teaching on Christian salvation and suffering. Space and other factors have made me postpone the second part to another opportunity. On this dialectic of salvation and suffering as on other issues (cf. S. Kim, 'Jesus, Sayings of, *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, ed. G. F. Hawthorne, R. P. Martin & D. G. Reid (Downers Grove, 1993), 474-492), I have found Paul a really faithful follower and profound interpreter of Jesus.

² For further presuppositions, see G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Jesus and the Kingdom of God* (Grand Rapids, 1986), 3-68.

they always suffer from anxiety and problems; and lacking in love, they constantly suffer from conflicts with others. All the forms of suffering—physical, psychological, social, spiritual; this-worldly or other-worldly; or however we may identify them—are symptoms of death that Satan has inflicted upon human beings by ‘tempting’ them to rebel against God and to be separated from the source of life. In the imagery of the parable of the prodigal son, having been separated from the rich father, they suffer in their destitution and the suffering is the concrete form in which death manifests itself ([Lk. 15:24, 32](#)).³ For the prodigal son, his only chance of salvation is to return to the father and get restored to sonship for abundant inheritance and for participation in the father’s feast. So for human beings the only chance of salvation is for them to be transferred from the kingdom of Satan back to the kingdom of God, their creator, and participate in his infinite wealth.

JESUS’ PREACHING OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD AND ACTUALIZATION OF ITS SALVATION

Jesus proclaimed the imminence of the kingdom of God and indeed its arrival in his ministry. It was his ‘gospel’—good news—to the suffering: the poor, the imprisoned, the blind, the hungry, the weeping, and the persecuted ([Lk. 4, 18](#); [6:20–22](#); [Matt. 5:3–11](#)). It spelled to them God’s eschatological salvation or deliverance from suffering. He described the kingdom of God chiefly in terms of feast ([Matt. 8:11](#); [Lk. 7:29](#); [Matt. 22:1–4](#); [Matt. 25:1–12](#); [Lk. 14:15–24](#); [Mk. 15:25](#); etc) and inheritance ([Matt. 5:5](#); [19:29](#); [25:34](#); [P. 51 Mk. 10:17](#); cf. also [Lk. 12:32](#))⁴ and demonstrated its present saving power by making people whole: by releasing sinners from the sufferings brought by their sins and restoring them *shalom* with God and with their neighbours ([Mk. 2:1–12](#); [Lk. 19:9](#); [7:36–50](#); [Lk. 15:2](#); [Mk. 2:15f](#); [Matt. 11:19](#); [Lk. 7:34](#)),⁵ by driving out demons ([Mk. 1:23–28](#); [Lk. 4:33–37](#); [Mk. 5:1–20](#); etc), and by healing the sick ([Mk. 1:40–45](#); [10:46–52](#); [Matt. 11:12–19](#); [Lk. 7:1823](#); etc).⁶ As ‘the “Son of Man” ’, the eschatological representative of God’s kingly reign or the eschatological agent of his saving work, Jesus exercised the divine authority to forgive sinners their sins and gave them the foretaste of the feast of the kingdom of God ([Mk. 2:10](#); [Matt. 11:19](#); [Lk. 7:34](#)). His proclamation of the kingdom of God and actualization of its

³ Cf. [Rm 8:36](#) (Ps 44.23); [1 Cor. 15:31](#); [2 Cor 4:10f](#); [Phil 3:10](#); etc. in which Paul also reflects the common Jewish idea of all suffering as manifestation of death; S. J. Hafemann, ‘Suffering’, *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Downers Grove, 1993), 919; J. Jeremias, *Neutestamentlich Theologie* (Gütersloh, 1979), 107.

⁴ See S. Kim ‘Jesus’ Preaching of the Kingdom of God and the Christian Political Existence’, *Essays on Jesus and Paul* (Seoul, 1993), 48f.

⁵ Cf. J. Jeremias, *Theologie*, 116ff., 155f.; B. F. Meyer, *The Aim of Jesus* (London, 1979), 158–162) Note how Jesus identified forgiveness of sins and ‘healing’, physical as well as spiritual and social (e.g. [Mk. 2:1–12](#); [2:15–17](#); [Jn. 5:1–15](#); cf. [Ps. 103:3](#)). For this, cf. O. Betz, ‘Jesu Lieblingspsalm’, *Jesus der Messias Israels* (Tübingen, 1987), 198f. It is quite clear that Jesus saw sufferings, physical, spiritual, social or whatever, as consequences of sin in a general way, as we describe here, but he cautioned his disciples not to accept the contemporary folk belief uncritically, that every concrete form of suffering was the result of God’s specific judgment upon a concrete sin of the one who suffered (e.g. [Lk. 13:1–5](#); [Jn. 9:11ff](#)). Especially in interpreting Christians’ sufferings, this scheme of sin and punishment is not applied elsewhere in the NT, either (perhaps the only exception being 1 Cor. 11.30). Cf. Michael Wolter, ‘Leiden’, *TRZ* 20 (1990), 686.

⁶ For Jesus’ exorcism and healings as his demonstration and actualization of the salvation of the kingdom of God and his healings on the sabbath as the eschatological restoration of the sabbath blessings, see Kim, ‘Jesus’ Preaching of the Kingdom of God’, 50f.; J. Roloff, *Das Kerygma und der irdische Jesus* (Göttingen, 1970), 52–88; B. F. Meyer, *Aims*, 154–162; C. Dietzfelbinger, ‘Vom Sinn der Sabbatheilungen Jesu’, *EvTh* 38 (1978), 281–297; W. Grimm, *Der Ruhetag* (Frankfurt, 1980), 45–84.

saving power was the work of overthrowing Satan and liberating people from his reign of evil and death, which he could do because he had ‘bound’ Satan ([Matt. 12:22–30](#); [Mk. 3:22–27](#); [Lk. 14–23](#)). He also sent his disciples to proclaim the kingdom of God and actualize its saving power in healing the sick. In their successful ministry he rejoiced to see Satan falling from heaven ([Lk. 10:9, 17f.](#)).⁷

Thus, with this kingdom proclamation and actualization, Jesus ‘came to call sinners’ out of the (king)dom of Satan into the kingdom of God. He called them to come out, by repentance, of the sphere of Satan’s reign in sin and death, and to come, by faith, into the sphere of God’s reign in righteousness and life; he called them, like the prodigal son, to come out of the creaturely destitution into the creator’s wealth, out of the world of suffering caused by their finitude into the world of life—divine life—made of God’s infinite wealth. So Jesus aimed at creating the new people of God who, restored to the right relationship to their creator, as children to the father, could participate in his abundant ‘feast’ or [p. 52](#) ‘inherit’ his infinite wealth.⁸ Thus, his proclamation of the kingdom of God and his demonstration of its saving power, was essentially a *promise* of ‘life’—divine life or, in the biblical idiom, ‘eternal life’—and a *call* or *invitation*—to be the people of the kingdom of God in order to receive salvation. Those who responded to this invitation in repentance and by faith, Jesus made children of God who could call the creator ‘*abba*’ and ‘inherit’ his wealth.

What Jesus had *promised* by his kingdom proclamation, he *wrought* through his death. For he interpreted his death in terms of the eschatological sacrifice of atonement and new covenant (esp. [Mk. 14:17–25](#)) that made the believers the eschatological, righteous people of God,⁹ and by raising him from the dead God vindicated him, confirming his death as the vicariously atoning and covenant-establishing sacrifice as well as his kingdom proclamation as his eschatological agent or ‘Son’. So, in the death (and resurrection) of Jesus, the kingdom of God which Jesus had proclaimed as imminent and indeed as already exerting its saving power in a proleptic way was decisively *realized*. The salvation *promised* by Jesus in his kingdom proclamation was *realized* in his death (and resurrection). So arose the apostolic preaching of the ‘gospel’—the good news—of Jesus’ death (and resurrection) as the eschatological saving event, as his work as the Messiah or the eschatological Saviour ([1 Cor. 15:3–5](#)).¹⁰

THE FUTURE CONSUMMATION OF THE KINGDOM AND CHRISTIANS’ PRESENT SUFFERING

Yet Jesus looked forward to the future consummation of the kingdom of God (e.g. [Mk. 14:25](#)) beyond its decisive coming or realization in his death (and resurrection). His death and resurrection would mark a decisive victory over Satan ([Jn. 14:30](#); [16:33](#)),¹¹ whom he had already ‘bound’ and whose ‘house’ he had already plundered ([Mk. 3:22–27](#); [Matt. 12:22–30](#); [Lk. 11:14–23](#)). So Jesus confidently expected the gradual ‘growth’ of the

⁷ Cf. Jeremias, *Theologie*, 98f.

⁸ Cf. *ibid.*, 164–196; B. F. Meyer, *Aims*, 129–222.

⁹ See S. Kim, ‘Interpretations of Jesus’ Death in the NT’, *Essays*, 223–241.

¹⁰ *ibid.*, 241–243; also S. Kim, ‘Jesus, Sayings of’, 483.

¹¹ See S. Kim, ‘Jesus’ Baptism and Trial’, *Essays*, 35–38. All four Gospels show Jesus struggling with and triumphing over Satan through his ministry, death and resurrection, but it is John who shows most clearly that precisely in the death inflicted on him by Satan Jesus triumphed or was ‘glorified’.

kingdom of God: though it began small like a mustard seed or leaven in his ministry, it would gradually and inconspicuously 'grow' eventually to bring all the nations under its shelter ([Mk. 4:30-32](#); cf. [Mk. 4:26-29](#)) or it would gradually penetrate into the whole world, enriching the world with its salvation ([Matt. 13:33](#); [Lk. 13:20f.](#)).¹² Yet he knew that Satan would not yield but put up his last desperate opposition to the kingdom of God, causing an even greater degree of suffering for the **p. 53** people of God ([Mk. 13](#)),¹³ until he is finally destroyed or their salvation is complete at his parousia as 'the "Son of Man" ' ([Mk. 8:38](#); [Lk. 12:8f.](#); [Mk. 13:26f.](#); [14:62](#); etc).¹⁴ So, as history moves toward the eschaton the day of the final consummation of the kingdom of God, there would be 'growth' both of the kingdom of God and of Satan's opposition, and therefore 'growth' both of salvation and suffering.

So, even before the parousia of 'the "Son of Man" ', the believers enjoy the salvation of the kingdom of God *already* wrought in Jesus' Christ-act, but, since it has *not yet* been consummated, until the parousia they enjoy it only in prolepsis. To that extent, even as the saved, they are exposed to suffering inflicted upon them by Satan at present. Hence the present dialectical situation of the people of the kingdom of God!

THE DOUBLE COMMAND OF LOVE FOR LIFE IN THE KINGDOM

For those who responded to Jesus' call and entered into the kingdom of God, he set forth as the principle of life for the people of God or the kingdom ethic the two commandments: to love God with their whole being and to love their neighbour as themselves, which were in fact the summary of the whole law of the OT ([Mk. 12:29-31](#)).¹⁵ The former, demanding their total trust in and obedience to God, the creator, was contrasted with idolatry, in which human beings' sinful attempts to secure their life, their security and happiness, by themselves or apart from the creator manifests itself (cf. [Matt. 6:25-34](#); [Lk. 12:22-31](#)). Jesus warned them especially of mammonism as the most real form of idolatry ([Matt. 6:24](#); [Lk. 16:13](#)).¹⁶ The second commandment, to love one's neighbour as oneself, was a natural corollary of the first commandment. One's self-assertion against God inevitably leads to (or expresses itself in) self-assertion against one's neighbour; or, to put it in another way, one's attempt to secure one's security and happiness by oneself inevitably involves the principle of exploitation of others. Likewise or contrariwise, one's total devotion to God or one's living out of the creator's *pleroma* enables one to give oneself to others. Jesus spelled out this kingdom ethic of the double command in various concrete ways in various situations (see esp. the Sermon on the Mount/Plain), and made the self-denial and servanthood as the fundamental principle of his discipleship, setting himself forth as the example ([Mk. 8:34f.](#); [10:42-45](#)).

Confronted by Jesus' call, Zacchaeus abandoned his idolatry of mammon and his exploitation of his neighbours, deciding for the double command of the kingdom of God, **p. 54** and Jesus declared, "Today *salvation* has come to this house ...!" ([Lk. 19:1-10](#)). But

¹² Cf. Beasley-Murray, *Jesus and the Kingdom of God*, 194-201.

¹³ Cf. Jeremias, *Theologie*, 231-234.

¹⁴ On the question of Jesus' self-designation 'the "Son of Man" ', see S. Kim, *'The "Son of Man" ' as the Son of God* (Tübingen, 1983; Grand Rapids, 1985).

¹⁵ Cf. Jeremias, *Theologie*, 204-211 ('Das Liebesgebot als Lebensgesetz der Königsherrschaft'); W. Schrage, *Ethik des Neuen Testaments* (Göttingen, 1982), 69-88.

¹⁶ Cf. L. Goppelt, *Theologie des Neuen Testaments* (Göttingen, 1975), 130-135.

confronted by the same call of Jesus, the devout rich man who ostensibly had kept all the commandments since his youth, chose his mammon instead of God as the provider of his life, of his security and happiness. So instead of the *salvation* that God, the infinite, would give, he turned to the salvation that mammon seemingly promised to give ([Mk. 10:17–31](#)). The former is the fulness of life, without any shadow of death, that God the creator gives. But the latter is only that which is conditioned by creaturely limitation and therefore by the sufferings arising out of the limitation. Hence it is only an *illusion* of salvation.

Yet Satan always tempts human beings with the illusion that they can be ‘gods’ unto themselves, to secure their life by their own strength. In the kingdom of Satan, self-assertion, against God and one’s neighbour, is the principle of living. Insofar as the kingdom of God has not yet fully come, the Christians, those who have already entered into it, are still exposed to Satan’s lordship. So they are constantly confronted by the rival claims of lordship, on the one hand, of Jesus on behalf of God his Father, and, on the other hand, of Satan. Obedience to Jesus’ lordship and observance of his double command concretely brings salvation already now, albeit in prolepsis of the full salvation at the eschaton, in the form of greater individual wholeness, of social freedom, justice and peace, and of ecological health. Obedience to Satan’s lordship in self-assertion concretely leads to all forms of alienation and conflict, to sufferings. However, it is difficult for Christians to resist Satan’s temptation and to live as the people of the kingdom of God wholeheartedly, because in the world which, still dominated by Satan, has self-assertion as the very principle of existence, forsaking self-assertion and giving one-self in love of God and neighbour inevitably involves sacrifice and loss. Jesus demanded: ‘Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also; and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well; and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile. Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you’ ([Matt. 5:39–42](#); [Lk. 6:29–31](#)). He demanded that the people of the kingdom of God turn away from this world’s ethos of lording it over others, and become slaves of all ([Mk. 10:42–45](#)). To live like this in obedience to Jesus’ lordship as the ‘children of the Most High’ ([Lk. 6:35](#)) in this world in practice means poverty, ridicule and oppression, while to live in a ‘normal’ way (i.e. in obedience to ‘the ruler of this world’—[Jn. 14:30](#) cf. also [1 Cor. 2:8](#); [2 Cor. 4:5](#)), asserting oneself and exploiting others, often means wealth, power and honour.

THE NATURE OF SALVATION IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD

The wealth, power and honour, the fruits of successful self-assertion, which are so much valued and desired in this world, produce as much suffering as happiness, if not more suffering **P. 55** than happiness, for those who have them as well as for others, as the dehumanizing, miserable culture of drugs and violence in the affluent west today demonstrates. So they are no way of securing one’s life, as Jesus taught ([Mk. 8:35f.](#); [Lk. 12:16–20](#)). Yet poverty and oppression are also real sufferings, only too real to millions of people in the world! Then, has salvation in the kingdom of God that Jesus Christ has already brought into this world nothing to do with deliverance from these forms of suffering? Has it only to do with the ‘soul in the next world’, as some forms of Christian theology have taught on the basis of a mixture of Jewish eschatological dualism and Hellenistic ontological dualism? Certainly Jesus was opposed to reducing salvation to the physical, psychological and social well-being in this world, as his parables of the rich fool ([Lk. 12:16–20](#)) and of the rich man and Lazarus ([Lk. 16:19–31](#)) as well as his refusal to

comply with the demands of the contemporary Davidic messianism clearly indicate.¹⁷ At the same time, he does not support an understanding of salvation only in terms of the well-being of the 'soul' in the next world. For, as we have seen, his central claim was that the kingdom of God with its saving power was being manifested concretely in his ministry of 'healing', in delivering people from their physical, psychological and social sufferings. His 'healings' of sinners and the physically ill were not just 'signs' for his eventual salvation of their souls in the world to come.¹⁸ If they had been, what was the meaning of the central affirmation of Jesus and his apostles that the kingdom of God or its salvation '*has already come*'? They were rather the anticipatory (yet real) manifestations of the salvation of their whole beings which was to be consummated at his parousia. For Jesus, salvation was the all-comprehensive concept of making human beings whole in all dimensions of their existence, which of course would be consummated only as they participate in God's infinite wealth at his parousia. So his teaching on salvation allows no form of reductionism, neither the liberation theologians' this-worldly reductionism (salvation only in terms of liberation from poverty and oppression here [P. 56](#) and now) nor the pietists' otherworldly reductionism (salvation only in terms of the well-being of 'the soul in the next world').¹⁹ Neither does it allow an essential separation of (the present/this-worldly) 'blessing' from (the eschatological/otherworldly) salvation. The 'blessings' that Christians experience are really the concrete manifestations here and now of the salvation of God's kingdom that has already been realized and has yet to be consummated.

We have already said that the saving power of the kingdom of God which Jesus has brought, manifests itself concretely in the restoration of individual wholeness, social *shalom* and ecological health, as the people of God live by the kingdom ethic. It is easy to see how the lives of God's people lived in obedience to Jesus' double command of love for God and neighbour would promote a fair distribution of wealth, preventing the suffering of the materialistic dehumanization on the part of the wealthy as well as the suffering of hunger on the part of the poor, how it would also lead to social justice, freedom and peace, and how it would also lead to appropriate use of the ecological resources with care. All these would, of course, promote our physical health as well! So, the salvation of the

¹⁷ Cf. S. Kim, 'What Kind of Messiah Was Jesus?', *Salvation in Christ*, 10th revised ed. (Seoul, 1993), 111–148.

¹⁸ See the note 5 above. Gappelt, *Theologie*, 203f., correctly affirms: 'Jesus claims that his healings signify the events of the fulfilment (Mt. 11.3f.par) or the coming of the Kingdom ([Mt 12:28](#) par). This is understandable if people become believers, because thereby *their relationship to God and with it all (the rest) become whole* ... if faith means deliverance, then the bodily healing also belongs to it unquestionably according to the (OT) prophecy. If we were to leave the bodily life to the laws of nature and reduce the religious (life) to the internal dimension as in Liberalism, then God would be no longer God, the creator.' Then, he goes on to say: 'The bodily healing during Jesus' earthly ministry is nevertheless only a *hidden sign of the new*: the new, the Kingdom of God ... The miracles of his earthly ministry were hidden signs of the new; the new breaks in at Easter, no longer as sign, but as reality of resurrection but still as hidden reality' (his emphasis). But his designation, in the second paragraph, of 'hidden sign of the new' for the concrete manifestations of the saving power of the kingdom of God in Jesus' earthly ministry is inadequate for, if not inconsistent with, Jesus' claim which he correctly interprets in the first paragraph.

¹⁹ Cf. R. T. France, 'Liberation in the NT', *EQ* 58 (1986), 3–23. In this balanced exposition of Jesus' teaching, he emphasizes, in a manner similar to the present essay, both that contrary to the wishes of the zealots and their modern followers (liberationists) Jesus had no socio-economico-political programme in his kingdom preaching, and that contrary to the pietistic spiritualization his kingdom preaching did nevertheless bring 'personal liberation', 'socio-economic liberation', and 'political liberation' by changing people's relationship to God and to one another and by changing their value system. However, France does not emphasize, as we do here, that these 'liberations' were concrete manifestations of the eschatological salvation that has yet to be consummated.

kingdom of God is already real here and now in its comprehensive sense, not just in comforting our 'souls' for our eventual salvation in the next world, but in removing our existential sufferings. Thus, the salvation of the kingdom of God that Jesus has brought does also mean deliverance from poverty, illness and oppression.²⁰ p. 57

CHRISTIANS AS THE BEARERS OF SALVATION WHO SUFFER

Then, how are we to understand the aforementioned sufferings of God's people that arise precisely out of their obedience to Jesus' lordship rather than Satan's lordship, out of their living as the citizens of God's kingdom in this world dominated by Satan? They are part of the sufferings which Jesus warned his disciples would suffer for the sake of his name and the gospel ([Mk. 8:35](#); [13:9-13](#)). Clearly Jesus saw them as inevitable, as a real part of the active opposition of the Satanic forces before the consummation of the kingdom of God at his parousia as 'the "Son of Man"'.²¹ Being fully conscious of them ([Lk. 10:3](#)), Jesus sent his disciples into the world to proclaim the gospel of the kingdom and to demonstrate the life of the kingdom of God in terms of love or service ([Matt. 10:5-15](#); [Lk. 9:1-6](#); [Lk. 10:1-12, 17-20](#)). So, it is clear that he expected his people to be bearers of the salvation of the kingdom of God for the world as well as enjoying that salvation themselves. Through their proclamation of the gospel and self-giving service they would make the salvation of the kingdom of God real for the world. Their self-giving service inevitably means sacrifice and suffering for them, as we have seen, but through it a greater degree of well-being individually, socially and ecologically is realized for the world, as we have seen. This was exactly the path that Jesus trod: the Son of God or 'the "Son of Man"' came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as ransom for many' ([Mk. 10:45](#)), so that 'by his poverty' we have 'become rich' ([2 Cor. 8:9](#)) and 'by his wounds (we) have been healed' ([1 Pet. 2:25](#); [Isa. 53:5](#)). Jesus commanded his disciples to follow him in this path of self-denial and service to bring about the salvation of the kingdom of God to the world ([Mk. 8:34](#)). The apostle Paul was a faithful follower of Jesus on this path, as by becoming 'poor' he 'made many rich' ([2 Cor. 6:10](#)). So, the Christians' life in obedience to Jesus' double command as the people of the kingdom of God realizes in a proleptic way the salvation of the kingdom from which all, including themselves, benefit; yet, at the same time, for themselves it also involves sacrifice and suffering. Jesus exhorted his disciples to bear the sufferings and

²⁰ So Jesus' message of the kingdom of God was really 'good news' for the poor, the sick and the enslaved ([Lk. 4:18](#); [Lk. 6:20-22](#); [Matt. 5:3-11](#); [Matt. 11:5](#); [Lk. 7:22](#)). 'The poor' (*anawim*) was indeed an honoured title in the OT and Judaism for those who, being faithful to the covenant, knew themselves to be totally dependent upon God. Their life of loyalty to God usually resulted in their material poverty and oppression by the wicked. So, in interpreting the sense in which Jesus used the term, we are not to 'spiritualize' it completely, in spite of [Matt. 5:3](#). This is prevented by his use of the term in association with various synonymous terms such as 'the hungry', 'the weeping', 'the hated', etc ([Lk. 6:21f.](#)), the hungry and thirsty, the naked, the imprisoned, the sick, 'the least' ([Matt. 25:31-46](#)), etc and by Jesus' strong concern for the materially poor ([Mk. 10:21](#); [14:17](#); [Lk. 19:8](#); [14:13](#); [16:19-21](#); etc). Further, the fact that [Matt. 11:5](#) ([Lk. 7:22](#)) has the simple *πτωχοι* indicates that in [Matt. 5:3](#) *τω πνευματι* is a Matthean addition to the original tradition preserved in [Lk. 6:24](#). So, by 'the poor' Jesus probably had in mind those who, being physically, materially, socially and spiritually weak, could look only upon God for their salvation, and while Luke highlights the external side of their need, Matthew seeks to stress the need in relation to God. See Jeremias, *Theologie*, 114f.; France, 'Liberation'. 14; further, E. Bammel, art. in TDNT vi, 888-912. It goes without saying, however, that Jesus encouraged the mammonistic idolatry of 'the poor' no more than that of the rich.

²¹ Tradition-historically, of course, this teaching of Jesus stands in the line of the *passio iusti* tradition prominent in the OT and Judaism: the idea that the righteous, those who are faithful to the covenant and the law, are to suffer at the hands of the wicked but are eventually to be vindicated by God at the end. On this, see K. Th. Kleinknecht, *Der leidende Gerechtfertigte* (Tübingen, 1984), I. Hauptteil.

persevere to the end in their commitment to his lordship, assuring them of the consummation of their salvation at his parousia as ‘the “Son of Man” ’ ([Mk. 8:34–38](#); [Lk. 12:8f.](#); [Matt. 10:32](#)’ [Mk. 13:9–13](#), [26f.](#)) and promising them the help of the Holy Spirit ([Mk. 13:11](#)).

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In *summary*, we highlight the following points in Jesus’ teaching on Christians’ salvation and suffering in this world:

- (1) The kingdom of God has been inaugurated with his ministry, [p. 58](#) death and resurrection, demonstrating its saving power.
- (2) The salvation of the kingdom of God that he has brought is all-comprehensive; it is making human beings and the world whole again in all dimensions of their existence by restoring them to the right relationship to their creator, i.e. by liberating them from the reign of Satan in sin and death and by making them participate in the creator’s infinite wealth. The salvation may not be reduced either to this-worldly well-being of the ‘body’ nor to the other-worldly well-being of the ‘soul’. It concretely takes its form in deliverance from all forms of suffering, physical, psychological, spiritual, social, this-worldly, other-worldly, or however we may identify it.
- (3) However, the kingdom of God has not yet been consummated, so that the world is still exposed to Satan’s reign in sin and death and there are still sufferings. Until the consummation of the kingdom and its salvation at the parousia of Jesus as ‘the “Son of Man” ’, Christians as well as non-Christians are subjected to the sufferings of the world under Satan.
- (4) Jesus set forth as the principle of life for the people of the kingdom of God the double command to love God with their whole being and their neighbour as themselves. In contrast to the Satanic principle of self-assertion against God and one’s neighbour that brings death, it leads to salvation. A Christians’ life in accordance with it concretely brings about salvation in the form of individual wholeness, social *shalom*, and ecological health.
- (5) Confronted by the rival claim of Satan’s lordship before the consummation of the kingdom of God, however, Christians cannot always render perfect obedience to Jesus’ lordship, to his double command, so that to the extent of their failure in this they cause sufferings to others and they also suffer under the reign of Satan.
- (6) But in this world where the Satanic principle of self-assertion against God and against one’s neighbour is the rule of life, the Christians’ very obedience to Jesus’ double command can also mean sacrifice and suffering for them as well as salvation for them and others. Jesus set forth this path of self-denial and service for the salvation of others as a requirement of his discipleship, and exhorted his disciples to bear the sufferings and persevere to the end when the salvation of the kingdom will be consummated.

Some of the *corollaries* of these points for the theologies of prosperity and suffering are:

- (1) The salvation of the kingdom of God that has been inaugurated in Jesus Christ *does* involve health and wealth (liberation from illness and poverty) as well as other values. But it involves making people *properly* rich and healthy, so that the preacher of the gospel must not identify salvation or ‘blessing’ simply with the mammonistic or purely materialistic prosperity, any more than he must

abstractize or 'spiritualize' it p. 59 in terms only of salvation of the soul in the next world.

- (2) Until the consummation of our salvation at the eschaton, our Christian life is marked by a dialectic of salvation and suffering. Any attempt to resolve the dialectical tension into a one-sided theology of prosperity without a theology of the cross is to ignore the eschatological reservation, to reduce salvation to a few materialistic values, and to encourage a life contrary to the double command of Jesus (i.e. mammonistic idolatry and exploitation of neighbour). The Corinthian *Enthusiasmus* is a perennial reminder of these dangers!
- (3) The preacher of the gospel must point to both the joy of salvation in Jesus Christ and the cost of discipleship. He must encourage Christians to persevere in the sufferings that arise out of their obedience to the Lord Jesus' double command, convincing them that only by living in such an obedience they can have salvation—their own as well as others—in the kingdom of God realized and hope to have the consummation of their salvation at the eschaton.

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The Communist Impact on the Church in Eastern Europe

Peter Kuzmič

It is a well known fact that wherever Communists came to power their long-term goal was to create not only a classless but also a religionless society. Christian faith was viewed as superstitious, obscurantist, obsolete, pre-scientific and thus a totally irrelevant way of thinking. Christian institutions were treated as a reactionary remnant of the old order and a hindrance to the progress of the new society and full human liberation of their citizens. Since Communists had a monopoly on both power (which they abused) and truth (which they have distorted) they developed comprehensive strategies and powerful instruments for the eventual elimination of religion. This included restrictive legislation, total atheization of educational institutions and media, control of selection and activity of church leaderships, discrimination in the work place, active persecution and other measures. The policies and methods have differed from country to country and in different periods even within the same countries, depending on what was politically expedient during various historical periods and in different regions. Generalizations are impossible for Eastern Europe has never been totally monolithic when it came to the treatment of religion, due to the complexity of the national, cultural, and religious history of different nations, and depending on international relationships and considerations. At best, however, Christian faith was barely tolerated and Christians marginalized and discriminated against as 'second class citizens', and at worst they were brutally persecuted. In Albania, for example, all visible expressions of religion were, from 1967, totally eradicated, as that small country prided itself on becoming the 'first atheistic state