

# 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**

---

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 Piggins 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.<sup>1</sup> 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'<sup>2</sup> 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'.<sup>3</sup>

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*.<sup>4</sup> 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

---

<sup>1</sup> 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 *yesha'* and *soteria*, the primary words for salvation.

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

<sup>3</sup> 3. *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> 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 ([In. 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' ([In. 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](#)).<sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>6</sup>

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

---

<sup>5</sup> 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).

<sup>6</sup> 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.<sup>7</sup> 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.<sup>8</sup>

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.<sup>9</sup> 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'<sup>10</sup> 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

---

<sup>7</sup> 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).

<sup>8</sup> 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.

<sup>9</sup> 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).

<sup>10</sup> 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',<sup>11</sup> as Jacquelyn Grant perceptively writes. Social location surely matters to the one who 'knows all about our sorrows'.

## A PROCESSIVE 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)'.<sup>12</sup> 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'.<sup>13</sup>

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](#)).<sup>14</sup> 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

---

<sup>11</sup> 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).

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

<sup>13</sup> 13. Neville, p. 76.

<sup>14</sup> 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.<sup>15</sup> 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.<sup>16</sup> 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.<sup>17</sup> 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](#)).<sup>18</sup>

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.<sup>19</sup> Continuing in the faith requires patient attentiveness to the One who will 'lead us into all truth' ([Jn. 16:13](#)).

---

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

<sup>16</sup> 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.

<sup>17</sup> 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).

<sup>18</sup> 18. Moody, *Apostasy*, p. 28.

<sup>19</sup> 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.<sup>20</sup> 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!'<sup>21</sup> 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,<sup>22</sup> 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*<sup>23</sup> 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',<sup>24</sup> 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.<sup>25</sup>

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

---

<sup>20</sup> 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.

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

<sup>22</sup> 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).

<sup>23</sup> 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).

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

<sup>25</sup> 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,<sup>26</sup> 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'.<sup>27</sup> 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.<sup>28</sup>

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'.<sup>29</sup>

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.<sup>30</sup>

---

**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**

---

<sup>26</sup> 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).

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

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

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

<sup>30</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> 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'.

<sup>2</sup> 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.