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The Comprehensive Nature of Salvation in Biblical Perspective

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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]

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[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.

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[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

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[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

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[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 Albertz[11] 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

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[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 Frommigkeit 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

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[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

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[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

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[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 Messiansim: 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).

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[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 'anthropoligcal 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'.

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[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]

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[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

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[32] 32. *Naming the Powers: The Language of Power in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), pp. 7–12. This in 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 lightening!' (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).

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[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.

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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:

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[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.