

## **Biblical and Christian Images of Salvation**

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### **0. Salvation, a universal Theme**

The theme of salvation is a universal theme. It links all religions and denominations, ideologies and the so-called “religions” or philosophies of life that do not speak of God. All of them are interested in salvation and speak on it and suggest ways for achieving salvation. The reason for this lies in the fact that everyone is in search of salvation in the sense of fulfilment or perfection, the ideal situation. This is echoed in the ancient prayer of the Indian seekers: “From ignorance, lead me to truth; from darkness, lead me to light; from death, lead me to immortality.”<sup>1</sup> Regarding the nature and content of salvation, as well as the way to it, there is, however, a wide range of different *opinions* (“dogmas” in the sense of its original meaning in the philosophical schools of thought). This is echoed also in the Malayalam term *matham* commonly used for *religion* (besides the word *margam* = path).

Not only the humans but also the whole creation is in need of salvation. “The creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God” (Rom 8:19) in the “hope, that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains” (Rom 8:21f.). We have hence to proclaim the good news to the whole creation (Mk 16:15).

It is to be observed that according to biblical revelation God desires the salvation of all (1 Tim 2:4). God has “no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from their ways and live” (Ezek 33:11). It is not the will of God that anyone should be lost (Mt 18:14); he does not want anyone to perish, but all to come to repentance (2 Pt 3:9). This all means that the longing for salvation is implanted by God the creator in the creation. He has created it in

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<sup>1</sup> *Brihadaranyaka Up.* 1.3.28.

order to fulfil it. This can be put into a formula: creation, in view of (for the sake of) salvation; nature, for the sake of grace; exodus, for the sake of the covenant.

### 1. Reality of Salvation

The longing for salvation is deep in the human *nature*. Precisely because this is a spontaneous, *natural* longing (“thirst” and “hunger”), and not an artificially induced or personally indoctrinated wish, its goal or end (*terminus ad quem*) must also be objectively real. Longing for salvation is inborn because it is inbuilt in the nature by the creator. Natural desires are oriented to the real possibility of being fulfilled. According to Aristotle<sup>2</sup> nature works ordained to a goal (“*Natura agit propter finem*”) and nature does not do anything without a purpose (“*Natura nihil facit frustra*”). In this sense Thomas Aquinas<sup>3</sup> holds that a natural desire cannot be frustrated (“*Impossibile est appetitum naturalem esse frustra*”).

The amazing complementarity and interconnectivity in nature in the form of a “dovetailing” sheds light on what is said above. This is demonstrated in the structure of the organisms. The shape and structure of the different sense organs *corresponding* to what is outside there provides a striking example here. This phenomenon of mutual correspondence is observable even at the microscopic and molecular levels as in the case of biological enzymes and receptors binding to specific ligands. This is at the same time a strong indication of a third party or an agent as a common intelligent designer. A body or an entity cannot develop itself spontaneously of itself in view of another body or entity unless guided by a common external or internal agent. The condition for the possibility of an unconscious or natural development in view of a corresponding to fit in another entity is its being ordained by a common designer. The hypothesis of spontaneous generation without a creator God is baseless and senseless. It is not, for instance, my digestive system that has provided food and nor is it the food that made my digestive system. Similarly, it is not my respiratory system that is

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<sup>2</sup> *Auctoritates, Physica* 89; *De anima* 168.

<sup>3</sup> *Summa contra gentiles*, 2.79.

responsible for the air and oxygen in the atmosphere and nor is it that atmosphere that has shaped my nose and lungs. The correlation and coordination between two independent bodies and realities can only be achieved through a coordinator, and not by themselves!

Not merely the external shape and structure of the organs but also the invisible but experienced needs of our body have their real counterpart, objectively to satisfy the need. That we have hunger, for instance, strongly suggests that there is and there must be something to eat. Similar is the case with thirst. In other words, the *natural* instinct of hunger and thirst is an indirect evidence of the reality and objectivity of food and drink. This is also perceptible in the psychological order, for example, in human need and longing for love. This “dovetailing” shows that there is sense and meaning in this world! Our innermost longing and craving for salvation can *really* be fulfilled. It is everyone’s experience that the human heart is restless until it finds its rest and fulfilment. In this sense St Augustine stated in his *Confessions*: “You have made us for Yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it finds rest in you”.<sup>4</sup>

## 2. Nature of Salvation

Salvation is not necessarily (*de iure*) connected with sin. In other words, even without sin, there is the need of salvation as perfection or completion. God has created us for salvation, in the sense that we may attain the perfection of our nature. Factually (*de facto*), however, salvation has also to do with sin, for humanity has sinned. Therefore salvation has both a healing as well as a perfecting aspect.

An important truth about salvation is that it is God’s free gift. When we may speak of just wages, then it is death that we can expect, for as St Paul writes, “the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 6:23). The parable of the generous landowner (Mt 20:1-

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<sup>4</sup> Book I, 1.1.

16) who gives to the last the same daily wage as to the first makes this point clear that salvation is not the agreed upon reward for our performance, but God's gratuitous gift. The image of the heavenly Jerusalem coming down from above illustrates this once again, as we shall see below.

Human nature is complex with manifold dimensions. Human salvation is correspondingly a complex reality impossible to be defined and described in one word. Referring to salvation the Holy Scripture employs hence various terms and images. As G. O'Collins observes, "both the OT and the NT abound with salvific and redemptive terms and images. Either directly or indirectly, almost every page of the Bible has something to say about salvation and/or the human need for it."<sup>5</sup> One important truth about salvation in the Biblical and Christian perspective is that it is not simply other-worldly, but also this-worldly reality. It affects also the earthly life and structures; salvation begins here on earth and has to do with this earth. That is why Christian faith lays stress on human promotion and building up of a just society. The Second Vatican Council makes it clear that Christ's redemptive work of salvation "includes also the renewal of the whole temporal order. Hence the mission of the Church is not only to bring the message and grace of Christ to men but also to penetrate and perfect the temporal order with the spirit of the Gospel."<sup>6</sup> The Christian laity has hence to exercise their apostolate in both the spiritual and the *temporal* orders. "These orders, although distinct, are so connected in the singular plan of God that He Himself intends to raise up the whole world again in Christ and to make it a new creation, *initially on earth and completely on the last day.*"<sup>7</sup> Renewing and constantly perfecting the temporal order belongs to God's plan for the world.

Not only among the religions but also within a religion itself there are different conceptions about the nature of salvation. The Indian religious

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<sup>5</sup> G. O. Collins, *Jesus Our Redeemer. A Christian Approach to Salvation*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2007, 1.

<sup>6</sup> *Decree on the Laity*, No. 5.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*; emphasis, mine.

traditions see salvation as liberation (*moksha* or *mukti*) from the chain of births and rebirths (*samsara*), from suffering or from the imprisonment of the body. According to Islam, salvation is thought of as a purely natural state of joy and happiness of the mind and senses.

### 3. Salvation as Deification (*Theosis*)

As attainment of the highest state of perfection, salvation is thought of as attaining God. In this sense Hinduism speaks of realization of God (*Brahmasākshatkāra*) as the supreme goal of the humans. This is the highest form of self-realization (*ātmasākshatkāra*), beyond which no other form can be conceived of. Related to this understanding of God-realization the Hindu theology speaks of union with God (*sāyujya*), sharing the same space with God (*sālokya*), nearness with God (*sāmiptya*) and becoming like God (*sārūpya*).

In Christian theology the idea and ideal of God-realization is expressed by the term “deification” (*theōsis*). The New Testament speaks of becoming “participants of the divine nature” (2 Pt 1:4). In the light of the divine revelation in Christ the Christian faith speaks of also communion with the Triune God; a communion with the divine persons of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. God of Christian revelation is not an impersonal super power, but absolute communion of divine persons. Attaining God has here not simply the sense of reaching, realizing, being united with God and becoming *like* God, but the deeper connotation of “becoming” God or sharing (participating) in God’s life and nature. This is something impossible for any created being. This is, however, made possible by God thanks to his grace. The highest goal of the Christ-event consists precisely in this grace. Speaking of the Incarnation the Fathers of the Church used to say hence that God became man, so that man may become God or that the Son became what we are so that he can make us what he is. Irenaeus writes about this “wonderful exchange” that God became human in

order that we humans might become divine.<sup>8</sup> The Church celebrates this in her Liturgy. This is explicitly referred to in the Latin Rite while the celebrant mixes water into wine in the prayer: “By the mystery of this wine and water may we be made to share in the divinity of Christ who has shared our humanity.” This prayer is echoed also in the Eucharistic Preface on the solemn feast of the Ascension of our Lord, where it is said that before the eyes of the apostles he ascended into heaven so that he may give us share in his divine life. In the Syro-Malabar Rite the celebrant explicitly thanks Christ for making us share in his divinity (second *G’hantha*, the Eucharistic prayer said by the priest with closed hands and bowed head, immediately after the Words of Institution).

We cannot describe how the deification as the highest form of human salvation would look like. Since God is absolute mystery our words are not adequate to fully comprehend God and so also deification. The *neti, neti* (not so, not so) approach of the Indian genius as well as the *apophatic* (negative) theology of Christian mysticism bring out this point very emphatically. About what is to come as our bliss and salvation we may hence say with St Paul: “What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him” (1 Cor 2:9). This does not mean, however, that we may also speak of certain images of salvation that could give us some inkling of it, either as partial experience or/and as fragmentary anticipation and pledge of salvation.

#### **4. Images of Salvation**

Human beings are not pure spirits but “embodied spirits”; body and spirit are the two essential aspects or dimensions of our being human. Not only our being but also our act of cognition is based on senses and images. Images have, therefore, a significant role in our life, both at the natural as well as supernatural orders.

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<sup>8</sup> *Adversus Haereses*, III.19.1; V,1,1: “Christ has become man, so that he makes us what he is.” Cf. also Athanasius, *Apologia Contra Arianos*, I,39;2,47;IV,2.59: “Christ has become man, so that we may become God.”

The Incarnation of God in Jesus Christ and the sacraments in the church are based on this anthropological-Christological truth. In the Old Testament we find for instance, symbolic acts as images and prophetic action symbols of God's message, such as Prophet Hosea marrying a whore (Hos 1:2-9) to express God's relationship with his people or Jeremiah breaking a jug (Jer 19:1-15) to indicate the impending destruction of Jerusalem and in the New Testament, Jesus calling twelve apostles as symbol of the restoration of the twelve tribes of Israel, his table fellowship with the sinners as sign of God's eschatological meal with the humankind. Jesus' own use of the parables belongs to this category of images. Every created image regarding the supernatural realm and reality has, however, its limitations. When we absolutize such an image, it becomes an idol. In this sense we understand the prohibition to make any image of God (cf. Ex 20:4; Dt 5:8). This can also be applied to the case of salvation in so far as this has to do with supernatural order. With this in mind, we shall attempt to speak of a few images of salvation, at the biblical-religious level and the earthly-secular level. There are various types of images: verbal, conceptual and real images. Conceptual images are those portrayed and described in concepts such as joy, peace, love, freedom, etc. Real (*res, rei* = thing) images are those represented materially which are objects of our senses. We can also speak of dynamic and static images. Dynamic images are images in happening, e.g., the images of salvation through the salvific *deeds* of Jesus. The parables of Jesus represent also dynamic images of salvation. Static images of salvation are those conveyed through symbols like the Covenant, Bread and Water of Life, etc.

The realities of this creation can work as images of salvation precisely because there is an inner relationship between this world of creation and the Trinitarian mystery of God, for this world is planned and created in the Son and the Spirit. The Trinitarian life of God with the otherness of the divine persons and the eternal mutual self-gift of the persons is the theological horizon and

condition of creation and its self-worth and autonomy before God.<sup>9</sup> The created world is, of course, basically and radically different from God, the Creator, for God is existence by himself while the created world is dependent existence, so much so that no deification of any created reality is warranted. That is why idolatry is not permitted. At the same time the nature can “proclaim” God to us, for God can be made transparent in nature (e.g., Psalms 29 and 50). Jesus’ use of the parables illustrates this.

As opposed to material images we can speak of *personal* images. Human being is created in the image of God (Gen 1:27), so much so man is an image of God. The Sacred Heart of Jesus is both a personal as well as a *real* image.

## **4.1. Biblical-Religious World**

### **4.1.1. Thematic and Material Images**

#### **a) Paradise**

According to the Yahwistic account of creation God “formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life” (Gen 2:7), and only then “the man became a living being.” Then God put the man in a garden in Eden. This garden of Paradise is an image of salvation in so far as it represents the original state of happiness, harmony and justice. This suggests twofold: i) that it is the divine spirit or breath of life that makes humans alive. This account of creation is a retrojection of what really happened later with the people of Israel which became a living nation thanks to God’s love and intervention in history and by his covenant with them; ii) God’s relationship brings us into salvation and happiness. This situation of salvation is now “localized” in a garden (Gen 2:8). In this garden (Paradise) God lets grow “every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil” (Gen 2:9).

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<sup>9</sup> For more on this theme, cf. G. Greshake, *Der dreieine Gott. Eine trinitarische Theologie*, Freiburg i. Br. 2007, 238ff.

The formal element of salvation in Paradise is the loving, friendly presence of the Lord God. “God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze” represents this “presence of the Lord God” (Gen 3:8). When Jesus promised to the criminal who was crucified along with him, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise” (Lk 23:43), paradise meant this salvation in the presence of God. The earthly paradise in the book of Genesis as a “localisation” of salvation has its other-worldly counterpart in heaven as the “place” of salvation in so far as God is conceived to be dwelling in the heavens. The phrase “kingdom of heaven” became thus equivalent to “kingdom of God” as a form of circumlocution for God. In this way, heaven also becomes an image of salvation. In this connection it may also be mentioned that according to some there is a distinction between heaven(s) and paradise: they consider heaven(s) as the “place” of perfect salvation for those who produce hundred-fold fruit and paradise as the “place of delights” for those who are less perfect, those who produce only sixty-fold.<sup>10</sup>

### **b) Tree of Life**

The tree of life in the midst of the garden (Gen 2:9) is an image of salvation in so far as it represents life. This is a dynamic image to the extent that it symbolizes nourishment and organic growth. This is also applicable to the “olive tree” that God has chosen for the salvation of the peoples (Rom 11:17). In the cross of Christ we have finally the true Tree of Life that brings us eternal life.

### **c) Covenant, Ark and Mercy Seat**

God ordered Noah to make an ark so that he and his chosen ones would be saved from the Great Flood (Gen 6:15). The ark is on the one hand a material image of being protected from the destroying waters and is at the same time the sign of the covenant God made with Noah. It is the covenant God wanted to establish with Noah (Gen 6:18) that was the basis of the saving ark. All those who enter

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, V,36,1f.

the ark, are saved from the destroying flood. This serves as an image of the church as the ark. Through baptism into Christ we are entitled to enter the ark that has been established with the blood of Christ at Calvary as the blood of the (new) covenant which is poured out for many (MK 14:24). We have been baptized into Christ and buried with him by baptism into death so that we participate in his resurrection and new life (cf. Rom 6:3f.). The Great Flood can also serve as an image of salvation to the extent that it destroys the sinful “flesh” (Rom 8:3-13) and purifies it. In this sense the waters represent the water of baptism that makes us into new creatures in Christ by purifying us from sin and bringing justification (Rom 5:21).

Just as the covenant and the ark of Noah are images of salvation in the book of Genesis, we have in the book of Exodus the Ark of the Covenant (Ex 25:10ff) as an image of salvation, for it contains the covenant (Ex 25:16.21) as well as the mercy seat (Ex 25:17.21). It is there that God meets with Moses and from above the mercy seat God wanted to deliver to Moses all his commands for the people (Ex 25:22). The cross of Christ has become in the New Testament the new mercy seat of salvation.

#### **d) Burning Bush**

God’s glory and transcendence were thought to be so powerful that seeing God face to face was feared to bring death (Gen 32:30; Ex 33:20). A variant of this belief leads to an atheistic misgiving that if one accepts God and believes in him, it would annihilate human interests. L. Feuerbach argued hence that faith in God leads to alienation from oneself. Religion is viewed as opposing to life and human happiness. F. Nietzsche is one of the vociferous humanistic “prophets” who reject God in the name of human salvation and fulfilment. But the biblical God of revelation is fully interested in the fulfilment of human life. Jesus has made it clear that he has come so that we may have, life in abundance (Jn 10:10). Man must not die so that God may live. God-realization and our self-

realization grow not in inverse but direct proportion. St. Irenaeus has put this succinctly saying that the glory of God is the fully alive human.<sup>11</sup> An image of this salvific truth is the burning bush that is not consumed (Ex 3:2). God is not the limiting principle but the infinite horizon of human potentiality. Divinity is the fulfilment of humanity, for as K. Rahner would say, human nature is active “obediential potency” (*potentia oboedientialis*) and positive openness for God. Scholastic theology has expressed this in the axiom that grace does not destroy nature, but presupposes and perfects it. The dynamic affinity and openness of human nature for God is exemplarily fulfilled in the Incarnation.

In terms of the image of the burning bush we may say that the divinity of the Son of God did not consume, abrogate or absorb the humanity of Jesus Christ. He is both God and man, fully divine and fully human, one in being with God the Father and with us humans. The twofold consubstantiality of Christ is a personal image of the burning bush. Similarly, his conception and birth did not violate Mary’s virginity: she is both mother and virgin! It may be noted here that St. Ephrem, on whose poetical theology professor Thomas Kalayil has written his doctoral dissertation, finds the parallel between the first Adam and second Adam (Christ) precisely in this virginal conception: just as Adam was created from the virgin earth, so came Christ from the virgin mother.

While the burning bush without being consumed is an image of salvation in the context of God’s epiphany, burning without quenching is in the context of God’s “wrath” an image of ruin and condemnation. In this sense we understand the following words: “My anger and my wrath shall be poured out on this place ...; it will burn and not be quenched” (Jer 7:20). In the context of sacrifice, however, fire of the Lord consuming the offering is an image of salvific acceptance (cf. 1 Kings 18:38). In this connection we may also recall what Paul says about the fire testing the sort of work one has done, whether one has built

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<sup>11</sup>*Adversus Haereses*, IV, 20, 7.

on the foundation that has already been laid, namely, Jesus Christ (1 Cor 3:11), with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay or straw (1 Cor 3:13).

#### **e) Passover and Exodus**

A classical and paradigmatic image of salvation is the exodus. Oppression through the mighty, helplessness of the weak and the intervention of God to liberate them is best illustrated in this historic and historical experience of the people of Israel. In the face of the oppression under the mighty Egyptians they experienced salvation primarily as deliverance (Ex 14). God heard their cry and intervened in their history: “The cry of the Israelites has now come to me” (Ex 3:9). The Passover and the ensuing exodus are the classical paradigm and image of salvation for the Israelites as well as for all of us. God the Lord shows himself as the Lord who is on the side of the weak and the oppressed. Salvation is liberation from oppression and entry into a new land. The Paschal mystery of the “Passover” of Jesus to the Father and his glorification as the Lord (Philip 2:9) is for us the pledge and promise of salvation.

#### **f) Promised Land**

In his love and mercy God promised to Moses that he would lead the Israelites from the misery and oppression of Egypt into “a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey” (Ex 3:8). As a “good and broad” land it would be a joyful situation in which people will experience the goodness and broadness of God’s heart; it would be also an experience of the goodness of the fellow human beings. In this situation of love, peace and harmony, nobody will have to suffer any want; milk and honey *flow* there. Again, the fourth commandment in the Decalogue to honour the parents is connected with the promise of long life “in the land” that the Lord the God gives the people (Ex 20:12; Dt 5:16). The Promised Land is thus an image of salvation as a new, good and broad land into which God leads us from the land of misery and death. Land is thus in itself a symbol of life and salvation. This has existential bearing on the just distribution

of land as well as ecological responsibility. The irresponsible exploitation of the land and forest that poses threat to the very existence of the aboriginals (*adivasis*) in India, the Amazon region, and other places is a contrast image of salvation. This is also applicable to evacuation of the people from their land<sup>12</sup>.

The promise of God that he would gather the scattered people of Israel and “bring them into their own land” (Ezek 34:13) refers to the future salvation expected by the people. The image of the gathering the scattered is thus closely related to the land as an image of salvation.

### **g) Kingly Reign (Kingdom) of God**

Connected with the Israelite experience of salvation/liberation is the image and symbol of the kingly reign of God. They experienced God as their king and leader in the exodus. Kingdom of God is the situation of peace (*shalom*) and salvation where and when God reigns as the king. As the people of Israel later went through negative experiences of exile and oppression, injustice and disharmony, they were ardently longing for the kingdom of God again to come at the end (*eschaton*). Thus it became a master-symbol of salvation. Against this background of the much awaited end-time kingly rule of God Jesus proclaimed the Good News: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near” (Mk 1:15). This image of salvation in terms of the kingdom or kingly reign of God is in its original biblical and historical context primarily related to this world and its affairs, especially the socio-political situation. Jesus, however, makes a radical shift in this conception of salvation by introducing also the vertical and eternal aspects of salvation which are necessarily connected with the horizontal and temporal aspects. St Paul makes it clear that “the Kingdom of God is not food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom 14:17). According to Origen Jesus Christ is the kingdom in person, *autobasileia*.

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<sup>12</sup> The sensitive issue of the *Malayoram* farmers in Kerala (India) is related to this existential problem of land.

An important salvific aspect of the kingly rule of God is that here God himself is the judge; this means justice and fairness, precisely because God knows us intimately and thoroughly, whereas the others judge us based on what they see and hear externally. The psalmist hence prays to God: “Judge me, O Lord, according to my righteousness ... You test the minds and heart, O righteous God ... God is a righteous judge” (Ps 7:8-11). God judges the peoples with equity (Ps 67:4). God’s justice is not to be confined to a justice of sanction rewarding the just and punishing the wicked, but rather seen as mercy and compassion to the poor and the oppressed. His judgements are like the great deep; he saves humans and animals alike (Ps 36:5-6; cf. Ps 25:10).

#### **h) Homecoming (Son) and Welcoming (Father)**

All salvation comes from God and is God himself (Ps 27:1; 24:5; 62:1.2.6.7; Is 12:2; 17:10; Dt 32:15; 1 Macc 4:30 etc.). It is therefore decisive to be united with God. That is why the Lord God says to us: “Seek me and live” (Amos 5:4.6). This makes the psalmist seek God and thirst for him (Ps 63:1). This thirst produces a kind of spiritual homesickness in us, which will be aggravated in the state of sin, which is estrangement and separation from God. By sinning one deliberately misses the mark or target. Since God is the source of life and light, one who gets oneself separated from God and misses the goal automatically enters into death and darkness. This is the *internal* logic of sin. That is why St Paul says that “the wages of sin is death” (Rom 6:23). The very first pages of the Book of Genesis illustrate how sin has destroyed and disturbed the cosmic rhythm. Disrupting the vertical relationship with God has consequences for the horizontal relationship among the humans in the form of envy, fratricide, pride etc. Sin has also negative consequences and bearing on the subhuman world. The whole harmony and order has been ruptured by sin. The Book of Wisdom warns hence not to invite death by the error of your life. God did not make death, but the ungodly by their words and deeds summoned death (2:12.13.16). Referring to the temptation that led to human sin it is said that although God

created us for incorruption, through the devil's envy death entered the world (Wis 2:23-24). This is repeated by St Paul in his words that "death came through sin" and "death spread to all because all have sinned" (Rom 5:12).

In the context of the factual situation of sin, salvation has hence basically to do with liberation from and victory over sin. The reason for the name "Jesus" is precisely that he is to "save his people from their sins" (Mt 1:21). Psalm 130:8 expresses the hope that the Lord will redeem Israel from all its iniquities. Similarly, in Luke 1:77 the knowledge or experience of salvation is seen in terms of forgiveness of sins. The name "Yeshuah" is the abbreviated form of the Hebrew "*Yehoshuah*" that means "Yahweh is salvation" (Ps 62:2). From this come the words "*Yeshu*," "*Isho*", "Jesus" etc. Jesus of Nazareth is not merely named so, but he *is* what his name means and suggests. He is really and intrinsically related to God and his salvation. This salvation is offered as forgiveness of sins. This is amply demonstrated by Jesus' numerous deeds, words and behaviour with regard to forgiveness of and liberation from sin. The episode of the healing of the paralytic at Capernaum illustrates this. When Jesus saw the faith of those who brought the paralytic, he said to him: "Son, your sins are forgiven" (Mk 2:5). This shows immediately the intrinsic connection between salvation and forgiveness of sin. Although the paralytic is brought before Jesus for bodily healing, that is, of course, a very important aspect of integral salvation, Jesus grants him at first spiritual healing by forgiving sins. This implies that our basic and primary redemption is related to our vertical relationship with God *the* source of life and salvation. In the Gospel according to Mark the beginning of Jesus' public ministry is situated in the context of the baptism given by John for the forgiveness of sins and Jesus' own baptism from John. Jesus identifies himself with the sinners and comes now to be baptized as one of them and in their place! He takes up this vicarious role of the Servant of God (*ebedyahweh*) in the hymns of Proto-Isaiah. This is indicated in the same opening verse of the hymn as applied to Jesus as he comes out of the water after

the baptism (Mk 1:10): “Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights” (Is 42:1).

Liberation from sin or forgiveness of sin was hence one of the central messages and concerns in Jesus’ mission of salvation, and an important theme of his preaching and teaching. Jesus was conscious that he has come to call “not the righteous but sinners” (Mt 9:13). He saw his death as a sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins (Mt 26:27). From his own experience St Paul exclaims: “The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners” (1 Tim 1:15). So he had table fellowship with the sinners. Through various parables he has tried to instil into our hearts and minds that God is a merciful Father. The parables of the lost sheep, lost coin and the lost son (cf. Lk 15:3-32). Jesus’ central message is hence as Mark summarizes it: “The kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news” (Mk 1:15). Jesus calls for a conversion of heart, *metanoia*. This implies homecoming to the father’s house, turning away from one’s wrong path and turning to God, who is eagerly awaiting the return of the sinner in order to accept him again in mercy. The image of the merciful father welcoming the homecoming son is thus an important image of salvation. In this image a striking element is that the father accepts and welcomes the repentant and homecoming son, *without* asking him any question! In this connection I think of Henri Nouwen’s wonderful spiritual book *Finding My Way Home: Pathways to Life and the Spirit*.<sup>13</sup>

### **Brazen Serpent/Cross**

Redemption from sin is comparable with the redemption from the deadly bite of a serpent. Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness to save the people from death when they were bitten by the poisonous snakes (Num 21:8-9), so was Jesus lifted up on the cross, so that by “looking” at him we could be saved from

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<sup>13</sup> New York, 2001/2009.

our sins (Jn 3:14; 19:37). This is exemplified in the case of the bandit who was crucified along with Jesus: to the criminal's request to Jesus to remember him when he comes into his kingdom, Jesus assured him: "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise" (Lk 23:43). As St. Paul powerfully expresses, the message of the cross is the power and wisdom of God for those who are being saved (1 Cor 1:18,24). The crucified Jesus Christ became for us "righteousness and sanctification and redemption" (1 Cor 1:30). Therefore we are to proclaim Jesus Christ the Crucified (1 Cor 2:2). In the Syro-Malabar Liturgy of the *Qurbana* the priest offers peace to the congregation with the sign of the cross, indicating that we have our peace through the cross of Christ.

### **i) Healing**

Although Jesus emphasized the vertical aspect of salvation and gave prime importance to forgiveness of sin, he was not spiritualistic in his vision of salvation. He did not think of a purely spiritual salvation, but of *integral* salvation of man that affects all the human dimensions: material and spiritual; horizontal and vertical; immanent and transcendent. This is well reflected and echoed in his numerous deeds of healing the sick and in his mandate to the disciples to proclaim the good news of the arrival of the kingly rule of God, to heal the sick, to raise the dead, to cleanse the lepers and to cast out the demons (Mt 10:7f. || Lk 9:1f.; cf. Mk 6:13). The deeds of healing are thus parables in deed regarding salvation. At the synagogue in Nazareth Jesus solemnly applied to himself the messianic fulfilment of the words of the prophet Isaiah regarding this integral salvation: "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (Lk 4:21). And the text is: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour" (Lk 4:18). As external images of the integral salvation Jesus performed many works of healing.

### **j) Lifting up**

About the healing of Simon's mother-in-law by Jesus it is written: "He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up" (Mk 1:31). Similarly we also see Jesus saving Peter from sinking into the waters by reaching out his hand and catching him (Mt 14:31). In both these cases we have an image of Jesus' saving mission in terms of healing an illness or rescuing from a physical danger. Transferred to the spiritual realm, it signifies our liberation from sin through the forgiveness of sins. In the icon of the descent of Jesus into the "hell" (*sheol*) the Eastern Church depicts him as holding the hands of Adam and Eve and lifting them up to heaven, to eternal life. All of us are called to share in this ministry of lifting up the poor and downtrodden by our works of love and charity. The parable of the last judgement puts the salvific importance of such deeds into bold relief (cf. Mt 25:31-46). Lifting up our eyes to heaven implies and demands lifting up those who are in need. The parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:25-37) concludes hence to *do* likewise. Vincent de Paul, Mother Theresa,; Father Damien and Kuriakose Elias Chavara are luminous examples in this regard.

### **k) Family of God**

An important aspect of salvation is justice and peace, love and harmony already in this world. The corresponding image of salvation is hence that of a loving family. More than anyone else Jesus has emphasized this family bond and relationship by preaching God as "Our Father" (Mt 6:9 | Lk 11:2). More than that, we are all called to be the members of *God's* family. As St Paul puts it, we have received the "Spirit of adoption" so that we can cry to God "Abba! Father!" (Rom 8:15). "God sent his Son ... in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children" (Gal 4:4). "God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'" So you are no longer a slave but a child ... and an heir" (Gal 4:6f.). In Christ Jesus we are all children of God through faith (Gal 3:26). The Spirit bears witness with our

spirit that “we are children of God ... and heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ” (Rom 8:16). God wants us to be conformed to the image of his Son, “in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family” (Rom 8:29). As children of God we are brothers and sisters who ought to love and forgive one another. He has given us a new commandment to love one another (Jn 13:34; 15:17). We have to love even our enemies (Mt 5:44f.).

Jesus, the Son, has come to make and take us into the *family* of God. He gives us share in the communion of God’s Triune life and inner Trinitarian community. Just as God is communion and community of the divine persons of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit we, too, are called to be united (Jn 17:11.21), united with God and with one another. This unity is to be an active and dynamic unity. In this sense a loving family in all its forms, where the members are united in mutual love and respect, mutual sharing and self-giving, is an image of salvation. Each family is in this sense a domestic church.

### **1) God’s Home with us**

Closely related to the image of the family of God is the image of God dwelling with us. In the Old Testament we read of God’s Tent (Tabernacle) among the people; it is the Tent of God’s presence and meeting with them (Ex 26). The goal of the creation of humans is in the meeting between God and them. Through the prophet Jeremiah God expresses his desire to dwell with his people (Jer 7:3.7). This is echoed also in Jesus’ words that the Father and the Son will come to those who love him and keep his words in order to make home with them (Jn 14:23). Through the Incarnation God the Word lived and dwelt among us (Jn 1:14) and so he became “God-with-us”, Immanuel (Mt 1:23). In the Book of Revelation this idea is articulated in terms of the holy city, the New Jerusalem, as “**the home of God**” among the humans (Rev 21:2-3). God dwelling with us has the ultimate purpose to make us dwell with God. Jesus speaks thus of the many *dwelling places* for us in his Father’s house (Jn 14:2). St

Paul speaks of speaks of “a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens” (2 Cor 5:2). This image of the house, home or dwelling place is closely related to what is said above regarding homecoming or return to the father’s house. In connection with the final sate of salvation St Irenaeus speaks of the various mansions for the saints.<sup>14</sup>

### **m) Vine and Branches**

The image and metaphor of the vine and branches (Jn 15) illustrates the vital and dynamic unity and communion of the humans with God. We have life (*zoe*) only to the extent we are united with Christ, the true vine. He is the Good Shepherd, who has come so that we his sheep have life, life in abundance (Jn 10:10). For he is the way, and the truth, and the life (Jn 14:6): he is the resurrection and the life (Jn 11:25). As the Good Shepherd he goes after the one sheep that is lost until he finds it (Lk 15:3ff.; cf. Ezekiel 34:11: “I myself will search for my sheep, and will seek them out”, says the Lord God). This is further exemplified in the parable of the merciful father who accepts his “lost” and “dead” son with compassion as he returns home, celebrates his homecoming and restores him the status of the son (Lk 15: 11ff.).

### **n) Gathering and Sheltering**

An important aspect of salvation as homecoming is the gathering of the scattered. Jesus the Good Shepherd gathers the scattered sheep into his household. This idea of *gathering* the people is a basic element in the theology of Israel.<sup>15</sup> In Deuteronomy we read: “When all these things have happened to you, ... if you call them to mind among all the nations where the LORD your God has driven you, ... then the LORD your God will restore your fortunes and have compassion on you, gathering you again from all the peoples among whom the LORD your God has scattered you. Even if you are exiled to the ends of the

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<sup>14</sup> *Adversus Haereses*, V,36,2.

<sup>15</sup> For a detailed discussion on this theme of gathering, cf. G. Lohfink, *Jesus von Nazaret – Was er wollte, wer er war*, Freiburg i. Br.: Herder, <sup>3</sup>2012, 92-109.

world, from there the LORD your God will gather you, and from there he will bring you back” (Dt 30:1-4; cf. Is 11:12; Is 56:8; Jer 23:7f.; 32:17; Neh 1:9; Ezek 34:5). Against the background of the scattered people the prayer of the psalmist is: “Save us, O LORD our God, and gather us from among the nations” (Ps 106:47; cf. 147:2f.). The amazing love of God is manifested in the fact that he himself searches for his sheep and rescues them from all the places to which they have been scattered (Ezek 34:12). This is a marvellous image of salvation.

Jesus has laid much importance to the gathering of the people of Israel as his work of salvation. This is reflected in his words: “Whoever does not gather with me scatters” (Mt 12:30 | Lk 11:23) and “Jerusalem, Jerusalem ... How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings” (Mt 23:37 | Lk 13:34). This image points at the same time to the saving reality of God protecting the people. He covers us “with his pinions and under his wings” we will find refuge; for “his faithfulness is a shield and buckler” (Ps 91:4-5).

Salvation in Christ is gathering of the scattered. Through this the name of God is again sanctified, made again holy, in the sense that the nations among whom the people of Israel were scattered will not any more deride God’s holy name, saying :”These are the people of the LORD, and yet they had to go out of his land” (Ezek 36:20). The holy name of God that was profaned by the scattering of Israel will be again hallowed through the gathering. This is the context of the petition in the prayer of Our Lord: “Hallowed be your name!” (Mt 6:9 | Lk 11:2). Gathering of the people and the consequent hallowing of God’s name are thus images of salvation in Christ, which will be consummated in the final gathering of all.

Closely related to the image of the gathering of Israel is the special appointment of the *twelve* apostles (Mk 3:13ff.) representing the twelve tribes of Israel. This also shows that Jesus came to restore Israel (cf. Mt 15:24). This is,

however, to be seen in relationship to his vision of a universal mission of salvation on the other hand, which is manifested in the prayer “Our Father” where there is no mention of Jerusalem or the temple unlike in the classical prayer of Judaism. In the beatitudes Jesus hails *all* the poor as blessed (Mt 5:3).

### **o) Celebrating a Banquet**

Dwelling with God is closely linked with sharing meal and participating in the messianic banquet. He says to us: “Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me” (Rev 3:20). Feeding the five thousand (Mk 6: 30ff. || Mt 14:13ff.; Lk 9:10ff.) and the four thousand (Mk 8:1ff. || Mt 15:32ff.) are in this connection related indications of the great banquet of salvation. In this sense Jesus speaks of eating and drinking at his table in his kingdom, in the kingdom of heaven, in his Father’s kingdom (Lk 22:30; Mt 8:11; 26:29). Jesus consciously intended the sharing of meals with the sinners as an image of salvation. He sat at dinner in the house of Matthew (Levi) and Zacchaeus (Mk 2:14ff. || Mt 9:10; Lk 5:27ff.; Lk 19). The parable of the wedding banquet (Mt 22 || Lk 14:15ff) is another image of salvation as a happy social situation of sharing and celebrating in love and communion. This is anticipated and celebrated on earth in the Eucharistic meal, where Christ himself is the Host, the Food and the Drink. The image of the banquet alludes on the one hand to the status of being a member of God’s family and to the social relationship of fellowship based on equal status on the other.

### **p) Bread, Wine and Water**

The Eucharistic Bread and Wine representing Christ’s body and blood are symbols and images of salvation in so far as they sacramentally mediate the personal presence of the Son of God. This is the food that the Son of Man gives us that endures for eternal life (Jn 6:27), for he is the living bread of life (Jn 6:48.51). “Whoever eats of this bread will live forever” (Jn 6:51). Similarly,

Jesus has declared: “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the Scripture has said, ‘Out of the believer’s heart shall flow rivers of living water’” (Jn 7:37f.). Living Water signifies here the Holy Spirit, the greatest gift from the Father (Lk 11:13). Related to this sign is also the image of the water of baptism by which we are made members of Christ’s body. Here we may think of the blood and water that came out of Jesus’ pierced side (Jn 19:34) symbolising the salvific sacraments of the Eucharist and baptism. As has already been mentioned above, the symbolism of the water representing baptism of purification and sanctification alludes to the Great Flood at the time of Noah (Gen 7). The Manna in the desert as bread from heaven (Ex 16) and water from the rock (Ex 17) were types of the images of salvation in Christ. Alluding to the wandering of the Israelites in the wilderness, Paul mentions that the rock from which they drank was Christ (1 Cor 10:5).

#### **q) Light and Enlightenment**

As mentioned above, Enlightenment is an important aspect of salvation in the Indian tradition. This is reflected in the prayer to lead us from darkness into light. Liberation from ignorance is the basic theme here. To be a Buddha means to be an enlightened one. God has revealed Jesus Christ, the Word made man, as “the true light, which enlightens everyone” (Jn 1:9). He is the light of the world. Whoever follows him will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life (Jn 8:12), for he is the truth (Jn 14:6). He has come into the world to testify to the truth (Jn 18:37). In Christ God has called us “out of darkness into his marvellous light” (1 Pt 2:9). Therefore we are called to be the light of the world (Mt 5:14), in such a way that our light shines before others, “so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven” (Mt 5:16).

#### **r) Resurrection and Eternal Life**

Another important image of salvation is resurrection or sharing in the glorious resurrection of Christ, for he has been “raised from the dead, the first fruits of

those who have died. For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a human being; for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ” (1 Cor 15:20ff.). “The last enemy to be destroyed is death” (1 Cor 15:26). Death is the “wages of sin” (Rom 8:23), and “the sting of death is sin” (1 Cor 15:56). And Christ “who knew no sin” was made “to be sin” for our sake (2 Cor 5:21). His baptism at the Jordan symbolizes his vicarious role taking the place of the sinners. He overcame sin by his life, death and resurrection and thereby destroyed death. Our perishable body will put on imperishability and our mortal body, immortality. “The last enemy to be destroyed is death” (1 Cor 15:26). Then the saying will be fulfilled: “Death has been swallowed up in victory” (1 Cor 15:54). The victorious descent of Christ into the *sheol*, the underworld of the dead (1 Pt 3:19), is an icon of his glorious resurrection as well as the image of salvation. The icon portraying Christ holding the hands of Adam and Eve and lifting them up from the underworld is the typical symbol of the Resurrection of Jesus for the Greek Church tradition.<sup>16</sup> The resurrection of the flesh is hence an image as well as reality of salvation, as we profess in the Creed. According to St Paul the faith in the Resurrection of Jesus is of great importance for salvation. He writes: “If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved” (Rom 10:9).

Participation in the resurrection is same as sharing eternal life. Salvation is precisely attaining this eternal life. Forfeiting eternal life is the real ultimate evil or condemnation. This is succinctly expressed in the words according to John: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life” (Jn 3:16). Jesus has been given authority over all people, “to give eternal life” to all whom God has given him (Jn 17:2). Jesus gives us “the food that endures for eternal life”

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. S. Athappilly, *Christology Today. Mystery and History of Jesus Christ*, Vol. 1; Bangalore, 2013 (second edition), 126<sup>a</sup> and 104ff.

(Jn 6:27). He himself is the Bread of Life (Jn 6:48) and “whoever eats of this bread will live forever” (Jn 6:51; cf. 6:58). It is Jesus who has “words of eternal life” (Jn 6:68).

### **s) Children of Freedom/ Victory over the Enemies**

Salvation is thus understood in terms of victory over our existential enemies of sin, death and devil (Col 1:13; 1 Cor 15:54-57; Hb 2:14-15). Jesus has liberated us from them. The many exorcisms performed by Jesus were signs of the arrival of the kingly rule of God (salvation) and the consequent overthrow of satanic rule (cf. Gen 3:15: “He will strike your head.”) By achieving forgiveness of sin, he has overcome sin. By his resurrection he has achieved victory over death (cf. 1 Cor 15:55f.). The Oriental Syro-Malabar Liturgy of the *Qurbana* refers to this in the second part of the third *G’hantha* (part of the Eucharistic prayer said by the priest with closed hands and bowed head) by mentioning that Jesus has “defeated our enemies”. Here we have the image of the new exodus. Just as Moses led the people of Israel from the bondage of the mighty and oppressing Egyptian rule, Christ the new Moses has delivered us from the bondage of sin and Satan. He has said: “If the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed” (Jn 8:36). Everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin (Jn 8:34). But Jesus the Son and the truth makes us free (Jn 8:32). His exorcisms (e.g., Lk 11:14ff) are illustrations of his activity of liberation from Satan and the evil spirits (cf. Lk 13:16: healing the crippled woman “whom Satan bound for eighteen long years.”)

Liberation is related to ransom by which one redeems someone from bondage/slavery. In this sense Jesus has said that he has come “to serve and to give his life a ransom for the many” (Mk 10:45). Peter speaks of being “ransomed from the futile ways” “with the precious blood of Christ” (1 Pt 1:18). In Christ we are also liberated from the imprisonment of the law (Gal 3:23; cf. Gal 2:15f. ; 4:21-26) and enjoy the freedom of the children of God (Gal

3:26), for we are “children of the promise, like Isaac” (Gal 4:28), and not children of the slave Hagar, who is “Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to the present Jerusalem” (Gal 4:25). “We are children ... of the free woman. For freedom Christ has set us free” (Gal 5:1).

#### **t) New Heaven and New Earth**

As fulfilment of creation, salvation is rightly seen as new creation. Renewed in the Spirit and putting on Christ (Rom 13:14), we become a new creation in Christ (2 Cor 5:17). This new creation happens not only individually but also collectively and cosmically. Paul describes the hope for salvation in terms of the waiting of the creation for liberation and the revealing of the children of God (Rom 8:18f); Peter speaks of our waiting for “new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home” (2 Pt 3:13). In the same way John envisages new heaven and new earth. Liberated from sin, death, law and evil powers we find ourselves in a new heaven and new earth (Rev 21:1, for God will wipe every tear from our eyes, death will be no more, and mourning, crying and pain will be no more (Rev 21: 4), for he makes all things new (Rev 21:5). The holy city, the New Jerusalem will come down out of heaven from God “prepared as a bride adorned for her husband” (Rev 21:2). This idea of the bride and bridegroom/husband is a favourite image of God’s love for the people (e.g., Hosea; cf. Jer 2:1.20; 3:1-9.20; 31:32) and Christ’s love for the church (Eph 5:25; Mt 9:15). In this new heaven and new earth there will be peace and full harmony.

In the vision of the prophet Isaiah the new cosmic situation is described in terms of cosmic harmony and peace as follows: “The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze ... and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder’s den. They will

not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD” (Is 11:6-9). Here we find the reversal of the consequences of sin that destroys peace and harmony as is suggested in the book of Genesis that speaks of the sin of Adam and Eve (cf. Gen 3:14ff).

#### **u) New Jerusalem**

The new cosmic rhythm and harmony is reflected also in the social relationship. Thus it is further said: “The jealousy of Ephraim shall depart, the hostility of Judah shall be cut off; Ephraim shall not be jealous of Judah, and Judah shall not be hostile towards Ephraim” (Is 11:13). Peace and reconciliation with one another is an important saving effect of Christ. As St Paul puts it, Christ “is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us” (Eph 2:14). Thus the Jews and Gentiles are reconciled in Christ. In Christ we are now one. “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:28). For “if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new” (2 Cor 5:17)!

The holy city, the New Jerusalem, is not the work of human hands, but comes “down out of heaven from God” (Rev 3:12; 21:2). It is “the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem” where there are the “innumerable angels in festal gathering” (Hb 12:22f.). That it comes from above, and not growing from below as a result of human making, suggests that the final salvation is God’s *gift*. As has already been mentioned above, the parable of the generous landowner (Mt 20:1-16) conveys this message that salvation is God’s free and generous gift. The law was given through Moses; grace came through Jesus Christ (Jn 1:17). We do not earn it, but inherit it. The Son of Man, the Shepherd and the King would say to the righteous: Come, you that are blessed by my Father, *inherit* the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world”

(Mt 25:34). In this connection we may recall what St Paul speaks of us as “heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ” (Rom 8:17). Another social reality related to salvation is mutual understanding among peoples. If at Babel God confused the language of all the earth (Gen 11:9), at the Pentecost when the Holy Spirit was sent, God united the languages, so that each one of the visitors from different places could hear the Apostles speaking about God’s deeds in the native language of each (Acts 2:8.11).

#### **v) New Covenant**

Against the background of the Sinaitic covenant with the people of Israel through Moses the salvation achieved in Christ is seen as the new covenant. The old covenant was only a prefiguration of this new covenant. At the Last Supper Jesus announces: “This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood” (Lk 22:20). God has announced through prophet Jeremiah: “I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah” (Jer 31:31). With the new covenant in the blood of the Lamb of God, ransomed with the “precious blood of Christ” (1 Pt 1:19) we have been made into the new Israel, “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people” (1 Pt 2:9).

#### **w) Peace (*Shalom*) and Rest (*Sabbath*) of God**

That Jesus has come to give us true peace is already indicated at his birth in the song of the heavenly host (Lk 2:14). Again and again Jesus speaks of this peace before his death and after his Resurrection. He says: “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you: I do not give to you as the world gives” (Jn 14:27). After his Resurrection he greets his disciples with the words: “Peace be with you” (e.g., Jn 20:19.21)! Salvation is peace in the sense of *shalom* that encompasses every realm of our life. When we attain this peace of Christ we will also have the rest of heart. Jesus has said: “Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest” (Mt 11:28). This rest is at the same time the fulfilment of the heart on the one side as St

Augustine has mentioned with regard to the divine discontent (restlessness) of our hearts and also the share in the great Rest or Sabbath of God to which God has called us to enter (Hb 4:1.4.10; cf. 3:11; 4:3.5). God the True Shepherd

The idea of the great Rest of God may also be applied to God himself in the sense that God comes to his Rest in the final fulfilment of the world when “the Son himself will also be subjected to the one who put all things in subjection under him, so that God may be all in all” (1 Cor 15:28).

### **x) Beatific Vision**

Entering God’s Rest signifies joy and happiness in so far as it is the fulfilment of our hearts. It is for this purpose that Jesus has come, that our joy may be complete (Jn 15:11). God is himself in eternal bliss, for he is in want of nothing. This idea is akin to the Hindu vision of God as *ānanda* (joy). According to the teaching of the Church God has created us not to increase his happiness, but to share it with us (Vatican I). According to the book of Revelation those who enter into the final salvation will see God’s face (Rev 22:4). According to the Letter of John “we will see him as he is” (1 Jn 3:2). Salvation is hence envisaged as beatific vision (*visio Dei beatifica*) of God. Irenaeus articulated this as follows: “Glory of God is the human fully alive; and the life of the human is the vision of God.”<sup>17</sup> In the second Eucharistic Prayer of the Latin Rite the celebrant prays for the dead so that God may grant them the grace to see him “face to face.”

An image related to the beatific vision of God is seeing and sharing in Jesus’ glory. Jesus’ High Priestly prayer concludes with the desire that those whom the Father has given him “may be with me where I am, to see my glory” (Jn 17:24). He has also given us his glory that he has received from the Father, so that we become completely one as he is one with the Father, he in us and the Father in him (Jn 17:22-23).

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<sup>17</sup> Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, IV, 20, 7 (:., *Gloria enim Dei, vivens homo, vita autem hominis visio Dei.*)

## y) Recapitulation of Everything

So far we have been mainly focussing on *human* salvation. When we now think of the whole creation and salvation, we can say that this consists in the fulfilment of God's "plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things" in Christ, "things in heaven and things on earth" (Eph 1:10). Jesus' command to his disciples is to "go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation" (Mk 16:15). God has created the whole creation for salvation. That is why this "creation has been groaning in labour pains" and "the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay" (Rom 8:21f.). And when all things are subjected to God, the Son himself will also be subjected to him "so that God may be all in all" (1 Cor 15:28).

### 4.1.2. Personal Images of Salvation

As opposed to the material and *real* images of salvation we have also *personal* images. The servant of the Lord mentioned in Is 42:1-4, 6-7; 49:1-7; 50:4-11 and 52:13-53:1-12 is a typical example of this personal image of salvation/saviour. This holds good also for the image of the Lamb of God applied to Jesus as the one who takes away the sin of the world (Jn 1:21ff). Jesus Christ is the visible image of the invisible God (Col 1:15); whoever has seen him has seen the Father (Jn 14:9). God is not merely our Saviour, but *is* our salvation (Ps 62:2); Jesus Christ as the visible image of God is hence the visible image of salvation. He is the "*Realsymbol*" (K. Rahner) and the "Sacrament of the encounter between God and man" (E. Schillebeeckx). Moreover, creation and salvation are closely related. It is the same Word who was at work in creation, is also at work in salvation. "In him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible ... all things have been created through him and for him" (Col 1:16) and "in him all things hold together" (Col 1:17). Through his Incarnation he is truly God and truly man and represents the entire creation. As the primordial sacrament of God's salvation, Jesus Christ is the

personal image of salvation; in him we have the highest realization of human transcendence as upward intentionality (“trans-ascendance” or “trans-ascent”). In Jesus Christ we have at the same time the realization of God’s downward intentionality (trans-“descent”). This was not a necessity in God, but the factual expression of his free love (*hanan/hesed*). In Jesus Christ the trans-“descent” of God and the trans-“ascent” of man meet and coincide personally. In the Incarnation we have the perfect and highest instance of the actualization of human openness (potentiality) for God and at the same time God’s eschatological, definitive historical self-gift. This makes Jesus Christ *the* personal image of salvation, besides being the one mediator of salvation (Acts 4:12; 1 Tim 2:5; Jn 14:6). He is salvation in person. This is echoed in the words of Simeon, who in beholding the child Jesus, praises God for letting him see his *salvation* (Lk 2:30): “My eyes have seen your salvation (*tò sotérión*).” As we have seen above, Origen has expressed this by speaking of Jesus as “kingdom in person” (*autobasileia*). We may also say that Jesus Christ is God’s grace and covenant in person. In him is fulfilled the prophecy regarding the Servant of the Lord: “I have given you as a covenant to the people” (Is 42:6). Jesus is our peace (Eph 2:14). As salvation in person, Jesus is “the way, and the truth, and the life” (Jn 14:6; cf. 11:25).

Mary, the mother of Christ, is a personal image of salvation, for she is the perfect (immaculate) and the fully *redeemed* one, and the type of the church. The reference to the “perfect one” in the Song of Solomon (5:2) was hence understood by the Latin Fathers to be addressed to Mary.<sup>18</sup> She is the Second Eve and the “immaculate earth” (*Terra immaculata*)<sup>19</sup>. We are all called to be such personal images of salvation/holiness; for all are called to holiness, as the Second Vatican Council teaches (LG 39; cf. Gen 17:1; 1 Thess 4:3; Eph 1:4). To

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<sup>18</sup> H. Rahner, *Maria und die Kirche*, Innsbruck, 1951, 26.

<sup>19</sup> Acts of Apostle Andreas, 5; cf. H. Rahner, 26.

be holy is the same as to be saved, for salvation (*salus*) means fulfilment, wholeness and holiness.

#### **4.2. Earthly-Secular Level**

There are also images of salvation at the level of our day-to-day “secular” experiences. We see them in the light and against the background of the biblical-religious images (memory of the past) and in view of them (anticipation of the future). In general, we could say that any instance of joy and fulfilment in this world is an image of salvation. Some of the most touching of them are: experiences of love and friendship; health after an illness; escape from a calamity; rescue in a danger; reconciliation with an enemy; receiving and offering forgiveness; liberation from slavery and oppression; – all these are images of salvation; they give us some inkling and foretaste of the final situation of happiness and fulfilment. Since these natural images correspond to human aspirations they have been adopted also in the religious order as realities and promises, because God’s salvation is meant for us humans as we are, addressing all the dimensions of our life and in a “language” understandable to us.