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Contemporary approaches to Salvation

David Ford, David Hart and Aloysius Pieris

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Prohlášení

Prohlašuji, že jsem tuto diplomovou práci s názvem *Contemporary approaches to Salvation: David Ford, David Hart and Aloysius Pieris* napsal samostatně a výhradně s použitím uvedených pramenů.

Souhlasím s tím, aby práce byla zveřejněna pro účely výzkumu a soukromého studia.

V Praze dne 30. 3. 2012 Jozef Murín

Anotace

Diplomová práce *Současné přístupy ke spáse* podává přehled aktuálních problémů křesťanské soteriologie na základě představení, zhodnocení a diskuze tří současných autorů: irského anglikánského teologa Davida Forda, amerického ortodoxního teologa Davida Harta a srílanského katolického teologa Aloysiuse Pierise.

Práce je členěna do tří hlavních částí: v první části se autor zabývá tradičními křesťanskými obrazy spásy a vztahem mezi christologií a soteriologií, t.j. vztahem mezi osobou a dílem Ježíše Krista. Obsahem druhé části je představení soteriologických koncepcí tří současných autorů. Východiskem pro jejich hodnocení a vzájemné srovnání je teze amerického katolického teologa Davida Tracyho o třech základních teologických žánrech: praktické, fundamentální a systematické teologie. Závěrečná část práce diskutuje hlavní témata a problémy současné soteriologie tak, jak se objevily v diskusi se zmíněnými autory.

Klíčová slova

soteriologie, spása, vykoupení, David Ford, David Bentley Hart, Aloysius Pieris

Summary

The aim of the present thesis is to offer an expository account of the themes and problems in contemporary Christian soteriology based on the introduction and evaluation of three contemporary soteriological concepts of the Irish Anglican theologian David Ford, the American orthodox theologian David Bentley Hard and the Sri Lankan catholic theologian Aloysius Pieris.

In the Introduction the reasons for the choice of the topic, structure and method of this study are presented. Part I offers a brief overview of the key soteriological images and a discussion on the relationship of Christology and soteriology. Part II explores the theology of salvation of the three aforementioned contemporary theologians based on David Tracy's distinction of different but mutually interrelated notions of truth in practical, fundamental and systematic theology. Part III offers a discussion of the main soteriological themes and problems that were discovered. In the Conclusion Tracy's multifaceted hermeneutical concept of truth is argued to allow soteriology to affirm plurality of theology and, at the same time, to avoid the danger of falling into relativism unconcerned with criteria of truthfulness.

Keywords

Soteriology, salvation, redemption, atonement, David Ford, David Bentley Hart, Aloysius Pieris

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1 Introduction

Salvation is the reality at the heart of Christianity. Although the various books of the New Testament were written in different geographical and cultural contexts, they refer to the same 'fundamentally identical experience'[1] of salvation in Jesus Christ from God. The New Testament authors translate the Hebrew concepts of *hesed* and *hanan*, the benevolent and merciful love of God for humankind manifested in history, as *charis* – grace. Grace is a 'new way of life' opened for all and offered to all by Jesus Christ. It is a new 'mode of existence' where happiness and fulfilment of human life is experienced. The possibility for human life in community with God as preached and told in parables by Jesus and demonstrated in his life and death is a reality that was given many names: New creation, birth from God, redemption, atonement, liberation and salvation[2] are just a few of them.

The doctrine of salvation is not just one doctrine among many other Christian doctrines; it is rather the centre and focal point of Christian self-identity. The experience of Jesus Christ as saviour is the beating heart of Christian faith. Yet the traditional expressions of this faith became for many an obstacle for belief. How can we speak about salvation today?

In my quest for the contemporary challenges and hopes of Christian soteriology I have decided to consult three theologians, namely the Sri Lankan catholic theologian Aloysius Pieris, the Irish Anglican theologian David Ford and the orthodox American theologian David Bentley Hart. Looking at the three authors one can immediately notice the theological plurality that needs to be

[1] Schillebeeckx, *Christ*, p. 463

[2] In this thesis, I am using the term 'salvation' in its broader sense, as an all-encompassing term for the various forms of the experience of grace. I will discuss its specific meaning in second chapter called 'Metaphors of salvation'.

dealt with a proper strategy. All three theologians are contemporary, living authors, albeit from different generations, who, as I believe, are fairly unknown to the wider theological public in the Czech republic. They come from different cultural, political, economic, ecclesial and theological contexts. The exploration of these three theologians should allow us to get a big and vivid picture of contemporary soteriology. The question that remains is: can we find a frame that is able to hold this big picture? For this purpose, I have decided to use the framework developed by the American catholic theologian David Tracy. The next paragraphs explain the aim, method and structure of this thesis in more detail.

1.1 Aim

My aim in this thesis is to present an exploratory study in contemporary soteriology. I am going to present and discuss some problems that Christian theology encounters when it tries to articulate a soteriology or theology of salvation for the present day.

1.2 Method

The theological method used here is David Tracy's[3] *mutually critical correlation*. Originally method of correlation in theology emerged in 19th century as a way of mediation between two starting points of theology: the Scripture and Schleiermacher's 'religious experience'. It became later influential through Paul Til-

[3] David Tracy (1939) was born in the USA. After his priestly ordination he studied theology at the Gregorian University, where he received his doctorate (in 1969) for his thesis on Bernard Lonergan's interpretation of Thomas Aquinas. After teaching at the Catholic University of America he joined the University of Chicago, where he is currently a Professor of Theology and of the Philosophy of Religion in the Divinity School. He has lectured in numerous universities around the world, and served, among others, in the editorial board of the international theological journal *Concilium.*

lich. In his understanding, Christian thought should seek for implicit questions about meaning and proclaim the faith in a way relevant to these questions[4].

The method of correlation is now widely accepted among Roman Catholic theologians, although every author uses his own appropriation. For example Schillebeeckx speaks about critical correlation between two sources of theology: the tradition of Christian experience and the present day experience[5]. Schillebeeckx calls for critical correlation sometimes even critical confrontation of the two. Correlation is frequently used by Hans Kung, who understands the task of theology as the confrontation between the living Jesus and the present situation.

David Tracy understands the task of theology as an attempt 'to establish mutually critical correlations between an interpretation of the Christian tradition and an interpretation of the contemporary situation.'[6] In his view correlation can range from identity and similarity to dissimilarity and confrontation. He makes a distinction between criteria of appropriateness to tradition (the meaning of Christianity) and criteria of intelligibility to the situation (the truth of faith). The method of mutually critical correlation acknowledges the authority and validity of past religious traditions and tries to interpret them correctly for the present day. But it also sees a gap between the past message and the present situation. Tracy claims that if the 'present situation' is to be taken seriously, then we must pay critical attention to the question it raises, and, analogously, no one can claim that only those questions articulated explicitly in today's society are theologically relevant. For my purposes it is also important to note,

[4] Paul Tillich recognises three types of correlation: statistical correlation of data, logical correlation as interdependence of concepts and real correlation as interdependence of things and events. All types are present in theology. More in Fiorenza, *Systematic theology: Task and Methods*, p. 41

[5] Schillebeeckx, *Interim Report on the Books Jesus and Christ*, p.50

[6] Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination*, p. 88

that the mode in which a critical correlation between the interpretation of the situation and of the interpretation of tradition is established, depends on the context and determines the style of theology.[7]

The structure of my thesis draws from David Tracy's distinction of the tree styles of theology[8]. It seems that this distinction has found acceptance in recent catholic theology[9] but it is not confined to denominational concerns and it is ecumenically open.

Tracy stresses that theology is a public enterprise. It should not be sectarian. 'Publicness' of theology means that theology emerges from and addresses some primary social realities, which Tracy calls 'publics'. Here he finds an inherent source of pluralism in theology: 'Behind the pluralism of theological conclusions lies a pluralism of public roles and publics as reference groups for theological discourse.'[10]

He identifies three key publics for theology – the academy, the church, and wider society, and, corresponding to them, three distinct, but mutually related, theological sub-disciplines – fundamental, systematic, and practical theology. However, there will be some fundamental differences between fundamental, systematic and practical theologies. Tracy summarizes them in these points:[11] distinct primary reference groups, distinct modes of argument, distinct emphases in ethical stance, distinct self-understanding of the theologian's personal faith or beliefs and distinct formulations of what primarily counts as meaning and truth in theology. I will briefly characterize Tracy's styles of theology.

[7] Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination*, p. 88 note 44.
[8] Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination*, p. 442
[9] See for example: O'Collins, *Rethinking fundamental theology*, p. 323
[10] Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination,* p. 5
[11] Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination,* p. 56.

Fundamental theology's reference groups are universities and faculties. Its mode of argument is original research, rigorous thinking, and dialogue with academic colleagues, both believers and non-believers, seeking for fresh insights. Fundamental theology 'will be concerned principally to provide arguments that all reasonable persons, whether "religiously involved" or not, can recognize as reasonable'[12]. The task of fundamental theology is to explicate the relation between the truth of Christian tradition and our own experience. 'Adequacy to experience' as a criterion of truth in fundamental theology is best understood as a critical correlation of the meaning of basic human experience as interpreted by specifically Christian symbols. In ethical terms fundamental theology should proceed in accordance with the rules for honest and rigorous inquiry characteristic of academia.

Practical theology reminds us, that theology studies what truly can only be lived since 'saying the truth' is distinct from, although never separate from, 'walking the path'. It promotes justice and common good. It asks the inconvenient question: 'What does our theology lead us to do or leave undone?'

The goal here is to stimulate, interpret, and critique present action by a prophetic denunciation of evil and oppression and urge for solidarity with the marginalized. In terms of primary reference groups, *practical theologies* are related primarily to the public of society, or perhaps better said, to some concrete social, political or pastoral concerns that are argued or assumed to be in need of transformation inspired by faith. The main criterion for the meaning and truth of a practical theology will be *praxis,* which Tracy understands as 'practice informed by and informing, often transforming, all prior theory in relationship to

[12] Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination*, p. 57.

the legitimate and self-involving concerns of a particular cultural, political, social or pastoral need bearing genuine religious import.'[13]

The primary group of interest for *systematic theology* is the community of believers, the Church. It bears witness to triune God, revealed and reflected in liturgical celebration and anticipates final glory of the risen Christ. Tracy suggests that the notion of truth in systematic theology is similar to the notion of truth in the experience of art. In authentic experience of a work of art

> [w]e find ourselves „caught up" in its world, we are shocked, surprised, challenged by its startling beauty *and* its recognizable truth, its instinct for the essential. In the actual experience of art we do not experience the artist *behind* the work of art. Rather we recognize the truth of the work's disclosure of a world of reality transforming, if only for a moment, ourselves: our lives, our sense for possibilities and actuality, our destiny.[14]

The notion of 'the classic' is crucially important for Tracy's understanding of truth in systematic theology. Classics are 'understood as those texts, events, images, persons, rituals and symbols which are assumed to disclose permanent possibilities of meaning and truth.'[15] Most notable about a classic is that it resists any 'final interpretation'. It bears an 'excess of meaning', which demands constant reinterpretations of the classics in an ever changing context.

Explicitly religious classics are distinguished from classics of art, morality, science and politics because they address not just one concrete area of human existence but the 'whole':

> Like all classics, religious classics will involve a claim to meaning and truth as one event of disclosure and concealment of the reality of lived existence. [...]

[13] Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination,* p. 57.
[14] Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination,* p. 110
[15] Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination,* p. 68

> [E]xplicitly religious classic expressions will involve a claim to truth as the event of a disclosure-concealment of the whole of reality *by the power of the whole* – as, in some sense, a radical and finally gracious mystery.[16]

As we can see, the *locus theologicus* of systematic theology is divine beauty.

1.3 Structure

My thesis is structured into three main parts. In the first, *preparatory,* part called 'Theological landscape' I am preparing my ground by outlining the key metaphors of salvation (chapter 2) and discussing how soteriology shaped Christology (chapter 3).

In the second, *exploratory*, part called 'Contemporary soteriology' I am introducing and evaluating three contemporary soteriological theories. Tracy's hermeneutics is able, due to three different but interrelated notions of truth, to provide a theological framework that affirms the plurality of truth yet doesn't end in relativistic denial of any truth criteria. With the help of the theological framework provided by David Tracy I will interpret the soteriology of Aloysius Pieris (chapter 4) using the notion of practical theology as faith seeking social justice (*fides quaerens iustitiam socialem*), the soteriology of David Ford (chapter 5) using the notion of fundamental theology as faith seeking 'scientific' understanding (*fides quaerens intellectum scientificum*) and the soteriology of David Hart (chapter 6) using the notion of systematic theology as faith seeking adoration (*fides quaerens adorationem*).

Having identified the main contemporary soteriological issues I will discuss them in more depth (chapter 7). I will conclude with some thoughts about the criteria of a theology of salvation for the present day.

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[16] Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination,* p. 163.

Part I: Theological landscape

In this part I will explore 'the theological landscape' of Christian soteriology. This will allow me to set a solid base for the engagement with three contemporary theologies of salvation. In the first step I will be 'setting the coordinates' by outlining and evaluating the biblical images of salvation. Then I will move into a discussion about the relation of soteriology as an articulation of what Christ did and Christology as articulation of who he is.

2 Metaphors of salvation

The fact *that* we are saved through Christ seemed to be obvious to the first generations of Christian and did not arouse any substantial controversies in the first centuries of Christianity. What may be surprising is that even when we ask *how* we are saved, the Church fathers and early Church theologians do not provide a unified concept. We do not have clear doctrinal statements about salvation in the way we have official teaching about the person of Christ. It seems there was not even a proper heresy. It was in the second Christian millennium where first theological explanations of salvation began to appear, most notable being Anselm's 'satisfaction theory' and Abelard's 'moral theory'.

Rather we find a cluster of images or metaphors of salvation. These images or models of salvation can be *political* like imprisonment, ransom, victory, liberation; *cultic* like sacrifice, suffering, self-surrender, atonement, renewal of life, acceptance, rejection; *juridical* like substitution, treaty, covenant, rights and duties, transgression of the law, restitution, guilt, punishment, satisfaction, reward, pardon, repentance, compensation, justification; *personal* like community, freedom, friendship, responsibility, disappointment, injury, broken faith,

deceit, forgiveness, love.[17] The goal of this chapter is to explain why, when we speak about salvation, we have to rely on metaphors and to outline and evaluate the most important ones.

2.1 The role of metaphor in soteriology

Colin Gunton criticized strongly one result of the Enlightenment: its 'refusal to accept concepts, particularly those adjudged anthropomorphic, for what they say and the attempt to change them into something else'[18]. He holds that the rationalism of the Enlightenment narrowed the way in which words can express meaning. For the future only concepts purified of their imaginative and pictorial quality and valued for their clarity and distinctness are good enough to communicate truth. Guton argues that the opposite is the case. It is the metaphor that is of key importance for the advancement in knowledge.[19]

2.2 Key metaphors of salvation

According to McIntyre, salvation in the Early Christian centuries was profoundly experienced. The experience of salvation was omnipresent[20]. The oldest Christian statement about salvation in Christ comes from Paul: 'Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, he was buried, he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.' (1 Cor 15,3) For Paul it is the scandal of Jesus' death that is at the root of our salvation and need explanation. The connection between the death of Christ and forgiveness of sins was remembered liturgically. Every time a Christian attended Eucharist he heard:

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[17] This list of models of salvation is inspirited by a similar list in: Dalferth, *Der Auferweckte Gekreutzte*, p. 260

[18] Gunton, *The actuality of atonement*, p. 15

[19] Gunton, *The actuality of atonement*, p. 16

[20] McIntyre, *The shape of soteriology*, p. 8

> 'and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." ' (1 Cor 11,24)

In the liturgy the salvific language was enacted and performed. Thus, Eucharist is perhaps the privileged *topos* where the meaning of Christian salvation is experienced and communicated. The primordial metaphor (or symbol) of salvation is the liturgy of the Church[21]. As long as there is an unbroken sacramental communication of the meaning of salvation, salvation is something that is experienced rather than thought about. In the context of liturgy, hymns, prayers and creeds – to use the *wittgensteinian* distinction – *show* God's salvific actions, rather than *explain* them. They communicate meaning in a symbolic way.[22] It was the move from a participatory understanding of Eucharist to a more representative one that caused the need for the inquiry into metaphors of salvation and the need for full-bodied soteriologies.[23]

When we speak about the salvation in Christ and want to understand the images Christians used in the past, it may be helpful to ask: what is it about Christ that is 'exactly' salvific? Is it the fact he became human (incarnation)? Is it his suffering and death on the cross? Is it his life and teaching? In the Apostolic creed we profess that Jesus 'was crucified, died and was buried … and has risen' and that we believe 'in forgiveness of sins'. There seems to be a connection between salvation (forgiveness of sins) and his death and resurrection. The Niceno–Constantinopolitan creed says it was 'because of us and because of our salvation' that Jesus 'came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was made man'. Here the connection between

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[21] O'Collins, *Jesus our redeemer*, p. 1
[22] O'Collins, *Jesus our redeemer*, p. 2
[23] McIntyre, *The shape of soteriology*, p. 16

incarnation and salvation seems to be stronger. We can see now that when it comes to salvation in Christ there are at least two focus points around which salvation metaphors will be centred.

2.2.1 Salvation

The images of salvation (*soteria*), Saviour (*soter*) and to save (*sozein*) are perhaps the closest to an all-embracing metaphor[24]. The Hebrew name Joshua, which was originally Hoshea (Jesus), means: 'The Lord saves'. Bearing this name Jesus Christ is seen as a universal savior: 'there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved' (Acts 4,12). In Hellenism *soteria* was understood as forgiveness of guilt through ritual initiation, protection from demonic powers and granting of eternal life.[25] The emperor was called *soter:* the 'benefactor of all humanity'. For Christians to say that Jesus was *soter* meant to say that Christ is the true saviour and benefactor of humanity and not the emperor.

For Paul, *soteria* has eschatological significance, it means resurrection. In 1 Tim 1,15 we read that 'Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners', to save us 'from God's wrath' (Rom 5:9). Salvation may be understood as liberation (*apolytrosis*), deliverance *from* physical and psychical danger. But there is also a positive message of salvation. We are saved *for* the 'obedience of God', 'to receive the gift of the Spirit' (in Johannine theology) and to 'everlasting life'. Salvation reflects the experience of the presence and future of salvation whereas the next image represents salvation as a past event.

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[24] McIntyre, *The shape of soteriology*, p. 34 He calls it a complete metaphor.
[25] Schillebeeckx, *Christ*, p. 478

2.2.2 Redemption

The New Testament image of redemption (*lutrosis, apolutrosis*) comes from two possible sources: Hellenistic religious practice and Hebrew law. In the first it refers to the practice of buying back prisoners of war and also to sacral manumission of slaves.[26] A slave was free when his master died or when he was 'bought free' by the temple money of an ancient deity.

In the Hebrew context, God is called the redeemer (*goel*) in the Exodus narrative. He redeems the Israelites from captivity in Egypt. At the same time they become his people. In Hebrew law (Lev 25,8-55) *goel* is a close family member, who buys back the family possession and helps to recover what had been lost.

For Paul, God's grace comes 'through the redemption that comes in Jesus Christ' (Rom 3: 24). Moreover Jesus himself is the redemption (1 Cor 1,30). Redemption, given the right context, can be a powerful and mind capturing image. However when we try to turn it into a theory, difficulties arise: What is given in the redeeming act and what is received?

2.2.3 Ransom

> 'Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many'. (Mt 20:28)

Ransom (*lutron*) is an image closely connected with redemption and similarly it can be interpreted in the context of commerce or religious practice (obligation to pay ransom for the firstborn). Athanasius came with the idea that the death of Christ was like paying a debt. A problem arises when we ask to whom and for what exactly? Origen and Augustine (De Trinitate 13.19) held that the death of Christ was paid as a ransom to the Devil; his death was a propitiatory

[26] O'Collins, *Jesus our redeemer*, p. 2

sacrifice. Gregory of Nyssa evolved the image further: because of the Fall humans became slaves to the Devil, God tricks Satan by offering his Son, an innocent being, as ransom. In this way the power of the Devil over humanity is broken. Others like Cyril of Alexandria or Gregory of Nazianzus rejected this idea as dualistic: everybody belongs to God and the Devil has no greater power over us that God.

2.2.4 Sacrifice

The image of paying ransom is closely connected with the image of *expiation*, *punishment* and *propitiation*. Expiation means to undo the damage or to ask for forgiveness for what is done. The death of Jesus out of solidarity with humans and in faithfulness to God is interpreted by the Jewish Christian community as sin-offering.[27] It has its source in the priestly and cultic tradition (Lev 4,1-5,13) where it was possible to bring expiation for someone (but not in sense of vicariousness) by means of sacrifice. The priest offers the sacrifice on behalf of a person or group. If God accepts the offering, they are declared pure. The idea of substitution, transference of personal sins is foreign to the Old Testament[28]. When the authors of the New Testament use the language of sacrifice in reference to the death of Jesus, there is one difference to Old Testament: the death of Jesus is an atoning sacrifice that is at the same time forgiveness of sins, it is accepted automatically by God.

Propitiation means to try to placate or satisfy an angry God by means of a sacrifice. Together with idea of sacrifice it has one common problem: we find it difficult to reconcile the love of God and the wrath of God. Isn't this image of salvation bundled up with an image of God as that of a bloodthirsty tyrant?

[27] Schillebeeckx, *Christ*, p. 487
[28] Perhaps the closest to the idea is the Forth Servant Song in Isa 52,13-53,12.

The main problem I see with the whole cluster of images around sacrifice is that we do not have everyday experience of sacrifices as religious practice, so the meaning of sacrifice in religious sense becomes obscure. On the other hand, it may be to soon to declare the idea that Christ died for humanity a dead metaphor. Most people would understand the meaning of '*the soldier gave his life for his country*' without asking why this country is so cruel and why it demanded his self-sacrifice.

Nevertheless the image of salvation through sacrifice shows the seriousness and the costliness of forgiveness and the reconciliation received. God's love is shown in that he seeks reconciliation rather than the annihilation of the sinner.

2.2.5 Reconciliation

In the world of constant conflict, stress and tensions, the image of reconciliation seems to be very appealing. Reconciliation (*katallasso)* presupposes two parties, which are either enemies or just in a state of separation. In Christ we have been reconciled with God (Rom 5,10). It is humankind that needs to be reconciled with God, but this reconciliation is God's own action (II Cor 5,18-21). Through God's action, the people among themselves are also reconciled, like the Jews and Gentiles in the Church (Eph 2,14-16). Reconciliation changes hostility to friendship and love brings interpersonal harmony into a relationship, but it needs a change of heart (*metanoia*) on our part.

Reconciliation can also refer to the Hebrew concept of *shalom*, meaning to make good for any damage, to render satisfaction or recompense. Shalom results from the achievement of mutual agreement[29]. In this sense, it is different from paying ransom. It is about being in agreement with God, about subjection under the power of God.

[29] Schillebeeckx, *Christ*, p. 484

Although the metaphor of reconciling seems to be unproblematic we have to remind ourselves that it is only one image among others that balance it. We should not forget that reconciliation came (and still comes) at a price.

2.2.6 Forgiveness of sins

The forgiveness of sins can take a number of forms. It can mean the covering of sin, atonement for sin, purification of the person or God no longer remembering the sin. Forgiveness of sins can be the fruit of Jesus' death (Mat 18,11, Mark 1,4, Luke 1,77) but also a fruit of his ministry (Mark 2,10.15-17). A person can prepare for forgiveness, but the actual forgiveness is eschatological – it is fully in God's power. In the New Testament (John 1,29 for example), forgiveness of sins can also mean taking the sins of others on oneself and bearing the consequences of them. Only here the idea of substitution occurs.[30] Jesus Christ brings forgiveness of sins, but he himself also is forgiveness of sins.

2.2.7 Liberation

In Rom 8:21 Paul writes:

> 'For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.'

The image of liberation (*eleutheria*) became particularly important in liberation theologies that seek to liberate the people from oppressive political and cultural structures. Gustavo Gutiérrez, one of the founding figures of liberation theology defines liberation as following:

[30] Schillebeeckx, *Christ*, p. 489

> 'It is a complex, differentiated unity, which has within it several levels of meaning which are not to be confused: economic, social and political liberation; liberation which leads to the creation of a new man in a new society of solidarity; and liberation from sin and entrance into communion of God and with all men.'[31]

The narrative of Exodus introduces liberation as freedom from oppressive structures but also freedom for a new relationship based on a covenant with God. Such an image has proved to be a powerful vehicle for social change. It stresses the communal character of salvation. Liberation is sometimes the pre-requirement and sometimes the consequence of God's saving grace. It is sometimes both at the same time. Liberation is both a gift and a task – *Gabe* und Auf*gabe*, as is nicely put in German. It bears the tension of 'already here' and 'not yet' of salvation, the tension between what was already done and what yet needs to be done.[32]

2.2.8 Theosis

Theosis (or divinization) is a metaphor for salvation influential predominantly in eastern Christianity. The classic formulation of this metaphor can be found in Irenaeus: Jesus Christ, the Word of God 'became what we are, that He might bring us to be even what He is Himself.'[33] The biblical foundation for salvation as *theosis* is 2 Pt 1:4:

> Thus he has given us, through these things, his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of lust, and may become participants in the divine nature.

[31] Gutiérrez, *A theology of liberation*, p. 235
[32] Schillebeeckx, *Christ*, p. 514
[33] Irenaeus: Adversus haereses, V.

The metaphor of *theosis* is focused on incarnation. Christ would become human even if there was no original sin. *Theosis* served as a metaphor for several centuries, until it changed to a technical theological term in the 6th and 7th century. The classical definition comes from Dionysius the Areopagite: 'Deification (theosis) is the attaining of likeness to God and union with him so far as is possible.'[34] We see, that the image of *theosis* is connected with images of union and reconciliation to God. It points to the purpose of salvation and bears a strong emphasis on salvation as a personal process. In this way it can be an inspiring metaphor for spiritual life. What is probably an advantage and a disadvantage at the same time in this metaphor is that it enables us to speak about the 'good news' of salvation without the 'bad news' of sinfulness and corruption. Anthropology developed in connection with salvation understood as *theosis* is in danger to be too optimistic.

2.2.9 Theologies of salvation

There are many images of salvation to be found in the New Testament. Yet not all of them proved to be equally inspiring or provoking. Some of them were developed further into soteriological concepts. David Ford[35] recognises four main soteriological concepts in the history of Christianity. The first one was developed around the idea of sacrifice coming from the Temple cult. The Letter to Hebrews describes Jesus as the High Priest whose sacrifice is he himself. During the first millennium the metaphor of 'Victory over demonic powers' became widespread. The third soteriological concept comes from Anselm of Canterbury and is known as 'satisfaction theory'. It is inspirited by the Feudal system of allegiance and honour and unites political, economic and social reali-

[34] For an exhaustive study on the doctrine of deification see Norman Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition*.

[35] Ford, *Theology: A Very Short Introduction*, p. 103

ty with personal responsibility to honour and obey. The theory of salvation that came with the Reformation is inspired by the law court and can be described as 'justification before God'. It is strongly cross-centred. Jesus, in his death, took the place of those who deserved condemnation. By receiving God's forgiveness he makes the believer righteous.

One final observation can by made: the images and theories of salvation in the Christian West are predominantly cross-centred. In the Christian East, on the other hand, salvation is seen as deification and union with God. Therefore the doctrines of Creation and Trinity will play a stronger role in soteriological considerations.

2.3 Conclusion

We have seen that the images of salvation are sometimes descriptive (reconciliation, liberation); sometimes they try to provide a framework for explanation (the cluster of images around sacrifice). The advantage of metaphors is that they are not exclusive. More images can be valid and relevant at the same time. They not only show what salvation is; they also have the ability to enact and perform. In this way we are reminded that salvation in our daily experience is more an action that an end-result. It is possible to say, that *are being* saved, we *are being* redeemed, and we *are being* made divine.

When God reveals his name to Moses he says: 'I am'. This is a no-name. It is not possible to get hold of the bearer of this name. God's true name is kept in secret so he cannot be manipulated. Maybe this is also the case with salvation in Christ. It is 'a treasure kept in jars of clay' (2 Cor 4,7). When we try to tightly embrace it with our concepts, we lose it. The cluster of images of salvation is at the same time fragile and strong like a web. It can hold weight several times its own but the knots and fibres have to be kept intact.

3 How soteriology shaped Christology

Two thousand years ago a group of disciples got a very inconvenient question from their master. 'But what about you?' he asked. 'Who do you say I am?' (Mt 16,15). There were a lot of answers in the air; some of them were more of an expectation than a real answer. This question remains with us until the present day. In this chapter I will show how an answer to Jesus' question is shaped by the reflection on his salvific work. I will provide two examples, one historical and one contemporary, of how Christology was shaped by soteriology. This will lead us to a discussion on the relation between Christology and soteriology.

3.1 Classical Christology

Who is Jesus? Jesus Christ is not a name like 'Adam Smith'. His name is at the same time a profession of faith: Jesus is *the Christ*. God's anointed one. Horst Georg Pöhlmann starts the chapter on Christology by one simple observation: New Testament authors do not treat the person of Christ and his works separately.[36] We can learn who he is when we look carefully at what he is doing. Through him God does his salvific work for all people. His role as saviour is affirmed by the titles he is given: he is a prophet, the high priest, the Messiah – the anointed one. He is the Son of Man, Kyrios, Soter. He is Logos, the Word of God, Son of God. He is 'My Lord and my God'. When we look at the titles given to him we realize a gradual transition from functional to ontological formulations. For the New Testament the matter is simple: Christ is what he does. Christology is soteriology.

In the early Church the fact of salvation through Christ was not something to be questioned. However, his *person* did become a topic of very passionate and

[36] Pöhlmann, *Abriß der Dogmatik*, p. 216

controversial debates. How should we think about him in order to do justice to what we believe he does? Is Jesus a man with divine power? Or is he God with a human face and appearance? For Origen, Jesus is *theanthropos*, a God-man. He is *ktisma*, created; *deutheros theos,* a second god, subordinated to Father. But he is also *homoousios*, shares the same substance with the Father. Early Christian theologians realized that they want to hold two contradictory convictions: Jesus as a man, who is fully human and at the same time Jesus who is divine. Moreover, they needed to connect these two statements and not every type of connection seemed right. Is this connection a mixture of two natures into one *mia physis* (Cyril of Alexandria) or can we keep these natures separate (Nestorius)?

The most influential eastern (deification) and western (satisfaction) Christian metaphors of salvation presuppose our need of salvation yet at the same time our inability to achieve it by us alone. Only God can save, but humanity is the place of his saving actions. The doctrine of incarnation becomes crucial. 'God has become human so that we may become divine' is the classic formulation by Athanasius. Salvation starts on God's side but is accomplished from the side of humans by Christ, the incarnate Word.

As Ireneaus writes in his work Adversus haereses (III.18.7 and III.19.1):

> 'If a human being had not overcome the enemy of humanity, the enemy would not have been rightly overcome. On the other side, if it had not been God to give us salvation, we would not have received it permanently. If the human being had not been united to God, it would have been possible to share in incorruptibility'.

This development culminated at the Council of Chalcedon (451) which defined that Christ is 'truly God and truly man', 'consubstantial with the Father

according to the Godhead, and consubstantial with us according to the Manhood', one person 'in two natures, unconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably'.

'Did Jesus expect his violent death?' asks O'Collins[37]. Did Jesus understand the crucifixion as a culmination of his mission? There are two contrasting answers: for some his death was not expected; for others his death was premeditated, almost planned. If we deny the free will of Jesus we portray Jesus as a passive victim of a murderer God. Without freedom on his part, there is no salvation.[38]

The debate about the person of Jesus returned once more at the Third council of Constantinople (681) where Christological questions were once again reexamined and with the help of the insights of Maximus the Confessor monotheletism was condemned. The main question discussed was the role the human will of Christ played in our salvation. The Council stated that Christ possessed 'two natural wills and two natural energies, without division, alteration, separation or confusion.' The true humanity of Jesus was affirmed again and the insight leads us to a deeper understanding of Jesus' humanity facing baptism, temptations and his agony in the garden of Gethsemane.

3.2 Contemporary Christology

We have seen that the early development of Christological formulas depends on certain metaphors of salvation like divinisation and victory over demonic powers. Edward Schillebeeckx in his book *Christ* introduces more than ten images of salvation in the New Testament. The danger from which we need to be saved in Christ can be different in various times and places. In this way it should not surprise us that contemporary Christology has become more and

[37] O'Collins, *Focus on Jesus*, p. 28
[38] O'Collins, *Focus on Jesus*, p. 31

more aware of the fact that it is contextual. The answer to the question 'Who is Christ?' can change when we start to build it on a different cluster of metaphors.

If we hunger for meaning but find an empty and banal world, Christ is to save us from meaningless nihilism. A Christology then has to address underlying questions of modernity. For Karl Rahner, theology and Christology have to be anthropologically constituted. He sees three theological concerns, which he wants to incorporate in his Christology. 1, God's universal salvific will 2, Jesus as the mediator of this will 3, affirmation of Jesus' full humanity. He wants to construct a Christology, which makes the divine offer for salvation through Christ evident even for those who lived before Christ or never heard his Gospel. At the same time he wants to keep the belief in Christ as the universal Saviour and 'sole mediator'[39]. Rahner also wants a fully human saviour. He holds that although this was never questioned in orthodox Christianity, in practise many hold a view of Christ that is 'crypto-monophysite' especially when it comes to Jesus' human intellect and freedom. Such a project for Christology has effects on theological anthropology. Rahner returns to incarnation as the focus point of Christology. Incarnation is an 'assumption of a portion of creation into the inner life of God.'[40] Incarnation completes human nature.

But what if we live in a situation of extreme poverty, hunger, political corruption and economical exploitations? Maybe we would not want a neutral Christology[41]. A Christology based purely on the chalcedonian doctrinal formulations would probably seem too 'distant'. We would long for a Christ who is

[39] Galvin, *Jesus Christ*, p. 316
[40] Galvin, *Jesus Christ*, p. 317
[41] Haigh, *An alternative vision*, p. 106

historical and concrete[42]. In such a case we would see Jesus of the Gospels who 'pronounced woes' to the rich and powerful, to whom he confronted the values of the world in his Beatitudes and who was able to demonstrate his anger. We would long for a Christology that would put emphasis on Jesus' self-emptying love and took seriously the message of the Kingdom of God. In conditions of oppression Jesus is seen foremost as the Liberator[43].

3.3 The relation of Christology and Soteriology

After we have seen how soteriological motives influence the development of theories about the person of Jesus Christ we can move further to a discussion about the relationship between Christology and soteriology. As I mentioned earlier, the authors of the New Testament did not treat the person and the work of Jesus Christ separately. However this raises an important question. What is the place of soteriology in the corpus of Christian doctrine? The question is crucial because it not only relates to the contents of soteriology and Christology but also to theological anthropology. Jon Sobrino wants soteriology to be 'the hermeneutical principle of Christology.'[44]

For Walter Kasper Christology and soteriology should form a unity.[45] But it can be broken in two ways: In the classical scholastic form of theological tractates soteriology came right after Christology. After a treatise on the person of the Saviour, a treatise on his salvific work and a treatise on his offices of prophet, priest and king followed. The doctrine of Christ became highly abstract with questions about the presence of divine nature within his human nature

[42] Sobrino, *Christology on crossroads*, p. 329

[43] See the titles of christological works by Leonardo Boff (1938): *Jesus Christ Liberator: A Critical Christology for Our Time* (1972) and Jon Sobrino (1938): *Jesus the Liberator* (1991) and its sequel, *Christ the Liberator* (1999).

[44] Sobrino, *Christology on crossroads*, p. 232

[45] Kasper, *Jesus der Christus*, p. 27

without a sense of relevance for Christian life. But to separate Christology and soteriology is to separate the content (*fides quae creditur*) from the act (*fides que creditur*) of faith, orthodoxy from orthopraxis. For Jesus Christ is not only the bearer of salvation, he is also the content of salvation.

The second way in which the unity of Christology and soteriology can be broken is the reduction of Christology to soteriology. In reaction to scholastics the Lutheran reformation stressed the importance of a personal viewpoint on Christ's salvific work. As Philipp Melanchthon put it: 'Hoc est Christum cognoscere, beneficia eius cognoscere' or 'To know Christ means to know his good works'. This architectonical principle of theological reflection is further developed by an existentialist interpretation of salvation by Rudolf Bultmann. He argues for a 'low Christology'. Such a Christology is not rooted in the paradox of incarnation but in the paradox of Jesus: in Jesus we find the image of substantial humanity in the real conditions of human existence.[46] Christ is representing God's image in man in the condition of fallenness. Jesus Christ is a person that is essentially and existentially human.[47] In this way Christology becomes a function of soteriology[48]: It is not that Jesus is God that is important but rather that his importance for us makes him divine.

3.4 Conclusion

In this section I have tried to show how soteriology influences our understanding of who Jesus Christ is and have provided examples from classic and contemporary Christology. Then we have moved to the question of the relationship of Christology and soteriology. We have seen that Christology and soteriology are, like the natures of Christ, not to be separated. Neither should Chris-

[46] Bultmann, *Das christologische Bekenntnis des Ökumenischen Rates*.
[47] Pohmann, *Abriß der Dogmatik*, p. 104
[48] Tillich, *Systematische Theologie*, p. 103

tology be reduces to soteriology and soteriology to mere 'hamartology'. Jesus as Saviour differs from other religious reformers in that he not only brings salvation, he is the salvation. (1 Cor 1,30) There is a unity between the messenger and the message. As International Theological Commission in the document *Select Question on Christology (1979)* warned, the person of Jesus Christ should not be divided from his salvific work.

For some Jesus is the Saviour because he is the Son of God. For others he is the Son of God because he is the Saviour. It seems that Christology and soteriology form an ellipse and should not be reduced to a circle. The two focus points cannot exist without each other. Maybe the best word to describe the relationship between Christology and soteriology is *perichoresis*: a mutual interpenetration and indwelling within each other.

Part II: Contemporary soteriology

In the second part of my thesis I will explore and evaluate three different approaches to soteriology. With the help of the theological framework of David Tracy I will ask how three theologians correlate the sources of Christian theology with their situation and context.

The first, Aloysius Pieris S.J., is an important figure of Asian theology of liberation. He is writing in the context of economic poverty and deep religiousness, as a catholic theologian in a society where Buddhists form a majority over the Christian minority. I will interpret his theology as theology done in the *practical style,* as faith seeking the *good*.

David Ford, living in Great Britain, comes from a context that is quite the opposite: economically developed and religiously secularized. He is working predominantly from within and with the protestant theological tradition but also engages in interreligious dialogues in a pluralist society. I will interpret his theology as theology done in the *fundamental style,* as faith seeking *truth*.

And finally, the American orthodox theologian David Bentley Hart is developing his theology in a context that differs from both previous authors: it is at the same time economically developed and profoundly religious. I will interpret his theology as theology done in the *systematic style,* as faith seeking *beauty*.

4 Aloysius Pieris

'If Christian salvation is salvation of and for human beings – men and women with flesh and blood, who by their very nature are directed towards creating free society for free human beings, this means that Christian salvation is not simply the salvation of souls but the healing, making whole, wholeness, of the whole person, the individual and society, in a natural world which is not abused. Thus Christian salvation also comprises ecological, social and political aspects, though these do not exhaust it. Christian salvation is more than that, but it is that too.'[49]

[49] Schillebeeckx, *God Among Us*, p. 100

'Jesus was born, lived, preached, and died in Asia.'[50] Asia's religious plurality is unmatched by any other continent. At the same time, Christians may be the biggest religious group worldwide but form only about seven per cent of Asia's population. These two facts, religiousness and religious plurality in Asia and the small number of Christians, lead to a number provoking questions: Is there room for Christ in Asia? Is there room for Christianity in Asia among other paths of Salvation?

In this chapter I am going to explore the theology of Aloysius Pieris SJ, a catholic theologian and Buddhist scholar from Sri Lanka. My interest here is to see what objections he finds when he tries to provide a positive answer. I will ask what nuances we have to take into account to make a positive answer possible. This will lead me to a presentation of Pieris' proposal for a soteriology, which is thoroughly Christian, and at the same time faithful to the context of the Asian continent.

One more thing must be noticed. As Pieris prefers to 'write books from experience' and not 'books from books', he doesn't provide a complex account of salvation. His insights are scattered in various theological papers that he has written at the request of European or American theologians. Moreover, his theological thinking develops over time. For this reasons, it is be quite difficult to provide a thorough and truthful overview of his theology.

4.1 Life and context

Aloysius Pieris, SJ (1934) is a catholic theologian from Sri Lanka and is known as one of the most influential theologians of Asian liberation theology. Liberation theology originally started as a theological and political movement within the Roman Catholic Church in Latin America in the 1950s–1960s reacting to

[50] Amaladoss, *The Asian Jesus*, p. 1

poverty caused by social injustice in that region. The term was coined by the Peruvian priest Gustavo Gutiérrez in his book 'A Theology of Liberation' (1971). Today, there are several theological currents that develop the initial insights further (e.g. African, Asian and Arab liberation theologies, black, feminist and womanist theology). What all these theological movements tend to have in common is the critique of various of forms of oppression, repression, exploitation, alienation and discrimination. They see liberation as the main task of theology and correlate Jesus Christ or the biblical prophetic principle to the present suffering. In addition to critique of ideological distortion they want to retrieve subjugated knowledge, forgotten symbols, ecclesiastical practices and ignored experiences.

Aloysius Pieris studied catholic theology in Europe and Buddhism in Sri Lanka. Initially he was teaching Buddhism in Rome but then returned to his homeland to found an interreligious study and research centre. In the 1970s he was involved in the Christian workers fellowship and witnessed an uprising of the Marxist-Buddhist youth in Sri Lanka. This experience directed him toward the problems of poverty, oppression and injustice – various kinds of structural sin, which he often calls 'greed' or symbolically 'Mammon'.

4.2 Poverty and religion as oppressive powers

Pieris discovers two characteristic traits of 'Asianess' that we have to understand. They are: a widespread and omnipresent poverty and multifaceted religiousness[51]. A religion failing to acknowledge these characteristics as central would not root deeply. Christians in the past were mostly western traders and colonialists. They belonged to the economic elite who came to Asia mostly for profit. Economic interest was linked with political and ecclesiastical expansion,

[51] Pieris, Political Theologies in Asia, p. 256

enabled by a kind of 'theology of domination'. Using the image of the narrative of Exodus, the poor majority in colonialized countries were like 'the hungry children of Jacob traveling westwards to the rich country of Egypt in search of economic aid, only to fall victim of the latter's cultural and political domination'.[52]

Asia is home to many religions or, as Pieris likes to call them, *paths of salvation*. The Christian mission in Asia was historically not overly successful. Pieris points out that during the last four centuries only two per cent of Asia's population converted to Christianity. The only Asian country where Christianity plays a major role are Philippines, which in order to receive Christ had to give up their Asianess.[53]

In Sri Lanka, Pieris' homeland, the native Buddhist population was facing three-fold religious aggression. The education provided by the Christians to the Buddhist population was linked with attempts to 'westernize' it. Printing facilities, accessible only to Christians, produced not only Christian literature but also anti-Buddhist propaganda. Buddhists felt insincerity on the part of Christians when they, the Buddhists, made their preaching halls available for evangelizing but Christians would not do the same for them, because they would not 'cooperate with error'.[54]

Facing the history of the economic and religious oppression connected with Christianity in Asia it seems that there can be no room for Christ in Asia. Christianity in the past became so interconnected with the political system of colonialism that for people in Asia it can present a serious, even unbridgeable barrier. In Asian eyes, Western Christianity tries to reconcile that which is ir-

[52] Pieris, *Political Theologies in Asia*, p. 257
[53] Pieris, *Asian Theologies of Liberation*, p. 59
[54] Pieris, *Prophetic Humour*, p. 11

reconcilable: 'God and Mammon'. A speech by a Buddhist monk during a Christian-Buddhist conference illustrates the point vividly:

> 'In all revolutionary movements that brought some sort of liberation to the masses the Church clearly failed to take a stand on behalf of the exploited masses but deservedly became – together with the oppressive systems with which it was associated – the target of revolutionary attacks.
>
> Further, the evils of capitalism and colonialist exploitation originated in the Christian West and these very Christian countries are continuing to play the same game of manipulation even today.
>
> Therefore, when you Christians speak so enthusiastically in favour of the political liberation of the masses, we cannot help doubting your sincerity. What you say is so different from what you have done!'[55]

4.3 Poverty and religion as liberating powers

In the previous paragraph I have shown that according to Pieris, Christianity failed both to address the problem of mass poverty in Asia and to find a non-oppressive relation to Asia's religions. Was the door closed to Jesus? Pieris thinks that not all hope is lost. For poverty and religion are ambiguous. Forced poverty can be a sin, but it can also be beatitude when voluntarily accepted. Religion can endorse poverty and class hierarchies, but it can provide a critique. Wealth, when shared like Eucharist, can become a sacrament of communion or turn into idolatry.[56] Pieris illustrates this wonderfully by sharing his experience. When he was visiting Benares, the town where Buddha preached for the first time publicly, he wanted to enter a temple to pray. But he was stopped and sent out of the temple.

[55] Pieris, *Love Meets Wisdom*, p.96
[56] Pieris, *Political Theologies in Asia*, p. 258

> 'So I began to experience what the Buddha felt when he condemned a certain kind of religion, a clerical religion, commercialized religion, caste-related religion, I walked out with a feeling of disappointment and despondency.'[57]

Instead he walked to the river Ganges, where people were bathing. He was amazed by the contrast between the temple and the river. On one hand, the man-made temple with a structure of oppressive rules, and on another hand the God-made river, open to everybody, with nobody guarding it. He decided to bathe with everybody else and soon engaged in a conversation.

> 'In this atmosphere of absolute tolerance, I felt that I was free to speak, free to act and free to worship. … Bathing was God's sacrament, not human perversity polluting religion in the name of ritual purity.'

The story of a liberating experience brings us to the first central point of Pieris' theology. Jesus was baptised in the Jordan and became a disciple of John the Baptist, the embodiment of liberative religiosity of the deuteronomic prophetic tradition. In order to become a teacher Jesus first had to become a disciple. The baptism of Jesus was a lasting embarrassment for the first Christians.[58] Therefore, Christianity in Asia, in order to gain authority has to be baptized 'by bathing in the waters of Asian religiosity.'[59]

Pieris is not overly impressed by the 'fulfilment theory of the Fathers' that was also strongly present at Vatican II. Using the baptismal image he points out that following Jesus' example we should not try to 'baptize other religions' but

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[57] Pieris, *Prophetic Humour*, p. 4
[58] Pieris, *Asian theology of Liberation*, p. 46
[59] Pieris, *Prophetic Humour*, p. 6

to let them baptize us. [60] Interreligious dialogue is not 'academic luxury' but a necessity; it is 'a modus vivendi' in Asia.[61]

But 'a second baptism' is also needed. It is the baptism on the 'Calvary of Asian Poverty'.[62] Calvary is a reminder that Jesus is not a 'conqueror demanding submission' but a 'humble servant-teacher'. Pieris calls, together with liberation theologians from Latin America, for a preferential option for the poor[63], which are the religiously excluded, socially ostracized and economically dispossessed, physically handicapped and psychologically traumatized.

4.4 What kind of Christ for Asia?

By this time it should be clear that Pieris sees not only room for Christ in Asia but the need for Christ. We turn now to the question: What kind of Christ does Asia need? This question leads to the need of an appropriate Christology, reflecting the context of poverty and religiousness. Pieris proposes a Christology developed in dialogue with Buddhism, which is the only 'eastern' religion that is truly multinational and multi-linguistic.

An Asian Christology has to be 'baptized in the waters of Asian spirituality'. Pieris proposes a method of 'cross-reading of sacred texts'. Such a reading has to acknowledge its own but also foreign sacred texts as 'sacred' and at the same time to allow the authors, redactors and compilers to be human, i.e. to be deficient.[64] There are several paths that do not lead in this direction. One false path

[60] Pieris, *Love meets Wisdom*, p. 34
[61] Pieris, *Love meets Wisdom*, p. 3
[62] Pieris, *Political theologies in Asia,* p. 260
[63] The Jesuit superior Pedro Arrupe used the phrase 'option for the poor' in 1968 in a letter to the Jesuits of Latin America. The principle, that moral test of any society is how it treats its most vulnerable members, was articulated by the Catholic Bishops of Latin America (CELAM) at the influential conferences in Medellin and Puebla, as well as by several popes, particularly Pope John Paul II.
[64] Pieris, *Prophetic Humour*, p. 70

is to try to reconcile the different meaning at all costs; another false path is a polemic that wants to expose the alleged errors of a sacred text with the help of one's own in order to establish superiority.

One way of giving recognition to foreign sacred texts is their liturgical appropriation. For example, the Psalms and Wisdom literature contain work originally by gentile authors.[65] Appropriation is not syncretism; moreover Pieris rejects the 'western paradigm' of religious inclusivism, exclusivism or pluralism in favour of an 'Asian paradigm' of symbiosis. Symbiosis is a third option between syncretism (the distortion of the original meaning of one by another) and synthesis (blending, where the components lose identity). Symbiosis is a living encounter, a mutual illumination of two sacred texts.

In such a symbiotic encounter between Christianity and Buddhism the former appears to be an *agape*, redemptive love, and the latter *gnosis*, salvific knowledge.[66] They are not to be understood as alternative paths of salvation, but 'moods that can alternate according to spiritual fluctuations of individuals, groups, even entire cultures'. An encounter provokes comparison, mutual criticism, confrontation and reciprocal correction. In this light Pieris sees that contemporary Christianity has lost its familiarity with the gnostic idiom and has become 'almost exclusively agapeic.'[67]

In order to formulate a truly Asian Christology Pieris suggests we might have go up the stream of the history of Christian thought, past the dogmas of Chalcedon and Nicaea, up to the historical encounter between Pilate and Jesus. And from this point follow another route.[68] Traditional Christology, so says Pieris,

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[65] Pieris, *Prophetic Humour*, p. 85
[66] Pieris, *Love meets Wisdom*, p. 9
[67] Pieris, *Love meets Wisdom*, p. 85
[68] Pieris, *Christ Beyond Dogma*, p. 187

paid little attention to the commitment of Christ's mission. 'Preoccupation with Incarnation has eclipsed the politics of the cross'.[69]

Christian dogma should be understood as a guide and aid to faith, not a tool for exercising Church discipline. Here he finds the notion of a *sutra* helpful. A *sutra* is not used to define, or measure faith, rather to evoke it. He decides to develop and Asian account of salvation in Christ based on *sutras*, not on dogmas.

His first *sutra* is: '*Love is God's own Self as well as God's own Word to us*'[70]. Pieris sets aside or suspends chalcedonian dogmas based on a *logos*-Christology in order to develop a *dabar*-Christology. God's Word is not understood in terms of the Greek *logos* as a speculative reason but as the Hebrew *dabar*, a creative word that leads to commitment. When God in the Old Testament speaks, he makes a promise and thus establishes a covenant. Since Jesus is the Word of God, Pieris formulates his second *sutra*: '*God's Word-Covenant is Jesus the Christ - the Promised Word of Love, spoken and so fulfilled, because of God's fidelity*'.[71] Jesus is the Word that recapitulates and fulfils the Law and Prophets.

Pieris' critique of the formulation of the dogma of Chalcedon is based on two points. First, that it is unable to affirm the uniqueness of 'the person and mission of Jesus' and secondly that every translation in the Asian context will communicate the opposite of the intention of the council Fathers. It 'is utterly jejune and incapable of depicting Jesus' uniqueness before Asians.'[72] Jesus as god-man, an incarnation of a cosmic power, could have no salvific status in Asia.

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[69] Pieris, *Political Theologies in Asia*, p. 261
[70] Pieris, *Christ Beyond Dogma*, p. 192
[71] Pieris, *Christ Beyond Dogma*, p. 192
[72] Pieris, *A liberation Christology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 3

When it comes to the question of what specifically is salvific in the life of Jesus, Pieris strongly advocates the Cross as the 'summit of redemptive process'. The Cross stands for a social conflict between liberation by God and enslavement by 'Mammon'. [73] Jesus shares our condition and wins over it. Prieris' basic *sutras* are unfolded into a Covenant Christology:

'Jesus is God's two-fold Love-Command:

1. Jesus is God's Two-edged Word in Conflict with Mammon.

2. Jesus is God's Covenantal Word of Promise to the poor.'

Jesus, understood as 'love-command', is God's promise that he will abolish all oppression. God enters, in Jesus, into a partnership with the oppressed. Since the God-Mammon conflict is not a battle against atheism but against idolatry, Pieris is to enter a partnership with non-theistic religions, as they are also concerned with the liberation of humanity. Non-theistic religions can be anti-idolatrous and so a 'non-theistic expression of *soteria* is possible'.[74]

What is then the relation between Christianity and other religions? Pieris says that the first sutra expresses the soteriological core of every religion in the 'personalist and theistic idiom' of the Person-Word Jesus the Christ. The first *sutra* provides self-criticism but also mutual criticism between religions.[75] The second sutra is what distinguishes Christianity from other religions: Jesus is the covenant of God with the poor. Where the first sutra says in theistic language what is common to all religions ('no salvation outside God's reign'), the second sutra affirms the uniqueness of Jesus: 'no salvation outside the covenant with the poor'. For 'wherever God is loved the poor rule, not poverty; wherever the

[73] Pieris, *Christ Beyond Dogma*, p. 203
[74] Pieris, *Christ Beyond Dogma*, p. 218
[75] Pieris, *Christ Beyond Dogma*, p. 220

poor are loved and served, it is God that rules not Mammon'. The option for the poor may not be *proprium* of Christianity but the promise in Christ is. The Cross of Christ is not only a sign of the salvation offered but also a covenant, a call to action. It demands discipleship and collaboration with people of all religions to break down idols, not to proselytize them.

Christ's death and resurrection is a promise fulfilled. The death in loving obedience to the Father and out of love for humankind fulfils Pieris' first and second sutra. Jesus is not only God's word of Two-fold command but also a Human word of obedience. In this way Jesus is the embodiment of the covenant in which humanity is reconciled with God.[76]

4.5 Conclusion

By exploring the colonial past of large parts of Asia, full of exploitation and cultural and religious oppression, it seemed that Christianity 'closed the door' for Christ in Asia. Should Christ enter again, it will have to be through the same door once closed. This means the mistakes of the past must not be repeated.

Aloysius Pieris is, in a way, a Moses-like figure. He is at home in two different worlds at the same time and has a strong sense of past mistakes and present challenges. His theological framework tries to take seriously the privileged place of marginalized people in God's heart and he develops a Christology that can assert Jesus' uniqueness in a context of religious pluralism without competing with or downplaying other 'ways of salvation'.

The stress on God's covenant with the poor in the context of mass poverty is fully understandable. However, when Pieris addresses the issue of poverty only

[76] Pieris, *Christ Beyond Dogma*, p. 225

as a problem of idolatry he sees only one side of the coin - that is the problem of the redistribution of wealth. In his work he doesn't address the problem of the creation of wealth. A stronger creation theology might balance and deepen his insights. Similarly when he addresses the problems of Christianity he shows great familiarity with the western or Latin theological tradition but only little interest in the eastern Christian tradition.

The soteriology of Aloysius Pieris is not a fruit of, as he would say, a western Christian church *in* Asia but a fruit of new emerging Church *of* Asia. His notion of 'Asianess' should help him to defend the uniqueness of Asian Christianity over western theological dominance but one has to ask, whether he himself is paying enough attention to the unique flavours of different liberation theologies in Asia (Dalit theology, Filipino Theology of struggle, Indonesian contextual social theology, Minjung theology in dialogue with Juche philosophers)[77].

Nonetheless his Covenantal Christology seems to be an original theological contribution of *an* Asian theology that becomes self-confident and profoundly inspiring.

[77] Even more considered he is the author of an encyclopedia article about Asian liberation theologies. See Aloysius Pieris: *Political Theologies in Asia*. In: The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology. Edited by: Peter Scott and William T. Cavanaugh, p. 264

5 David Ford

And we all, who with unveiled faces reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. (2 Cor 3:18)

5.1 Life and context

David Ford (1948, Dublin) is an Irish Anglican academic and public theologian. He studied classics at the University of Dublin and theology at the University of Cambridge, Yale Divinity School and the University of Tubingen and defended his doctoral thesis on Karl Barth. He was a lecturer at the University of Birmingham while at the same time being engaged in civic study groups and parish work. He also gained experience in religious dialogue. While working in a multicultural, multi-ethnic and multi-religious but also secularized environment he developed a method of scriptural reasoning that bought Christians, Jews and Muslim to study their sacred texts together. In 1991 he moved to

Cambridge and founded the Centre for Advanced Religious and Theological Studies and widened his ecumenical and inter-faith activities. His research interests are political theology, ecumenical theology, theology and poetry, hermeneutics and inter-faith relations. In 2008 the Sternberg Foundation awarded Ford its Gold Medal for Inter-Faith Relations.

David Ford is the editor of *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology in the Twentieth Century* and author of *Self and Salvation: Being Transformed* (1999), *Christian Wisdom. Desiring God and Learning in Love* (2007), *Barth and God's Story: Biblical Narrative and the Theological Method of Karl Barth in the Church Dogmatics* (1981) and a recently published manifest *The Future of Christian Theology* (2011). Currently he is working on an interpretation of John's Gospel.

5.2 The face as soteriological concept

Ford's soteriology in his *Self and Salvation* is an attempt 'to engage with the traditional doctrines of Christianity, and at the same time to locate and make sense of them within the secular context'[78]. Such exposition is indeed difficult, because salvation is not one theme in Christian theology; it is perhaps 'the theme' of theology. As Ford puts it, salvation is not just one locus of theology, 'it relates to every locus'[79]. To develop a contemporary soteriology, a broad range of sources will be needed.

The central theme in Ford's soteriological conception is developed with the help of a phenomenology of a 'face' and 'facing' in dialogues with Emmanuel Levinas, Paul Ricoeur and Eberhard Jüngel. The genre he chooses to use to formulate his ideas is 'an articulated essay'. This decision enables him to bring

[78] Ford, *Response*, p. 562
[79] Ford, *Response*, p. 564

together different genres under one roof: meditation, critical dialogue, exegesis, liturgy, historical and doctrinal discussion, and poetry. Salvation is a topic that is 'self-involving, God-involving, and world-involving all at once'[80].

Ford correlates his philosophical anthropology, where the notion of a face as an icon to the self, to his exegesis of the *panim* (face or presence) in the Old Testament:

> 'if Christian theology is convinced that it has to be submitted, among other tests, to thorough engagement with the richest and most rigorous contemporary thought about its major themes, then Levinas is an ideal partner.'[81]

A face of a person marks his or her individuality and uniqueness, at the same time it is shaped by time, experience, race and ethnicity, showing the persons origin.[82] It is partly given, partly shaped by life experience. A person is recognized by his or her face. The face relates to the self, from which it cannot be separated. The face is a place where the surface and depth meet. A face can reveal –in which case it is an icon of the person – or it can hide and deceive. But the self is more complex that the face: the self is shown but not exhausted in the face.

Of course, 'face' and 'facing' are images very common in the Old Testament. The Hebrew word for face, *panim*, can be also translated as presence, sight, countenance, person. It can be used to communicate direction of place like 'in front of', 'toward', 'away from'. Ford gives us several examples from the Pentateuch and the Psalms: Adam and Eve 'hid themselves from the *panim* of the Lord God'. (Gen 3:8) 'Cain went away from the *panim* of the Lord'. (Gen 4:16) Jacob is fighting in the *panim* of God at Jabbok. Moses asks God that his

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[80] Ford, *Theology*, p. 103
[81] Ford, *Self and Salvation*, p. 32
[82] Ford, *Self and Salvation*, p. 17

panim will accompany the people. In Psalms salvation is described as the shining of God's *panim* on people. And the absence of *panim* – 'why are you hiding your panim?' – is a reason to lament.[83] The word *panim* is connected to various themes of soteriology: God's presence, obedience, shame, responsibility, sin and punishment.

5.3 Salvation between facing and feasting

The notion of self that Ford seeks to develop is a self that is hospitable and responsible. He agrees with Levinas that enjoyment plays basic role in the constitution of the self. The definition of life by Levinas is: 'Life is love of life'. At the same time, when a face meets another face, it finds itself in an ethical relation. The hospitable self is at the same time the responsible self, the self that can suffer and is able to be of sacrifice. Moreover, this self has to reject idolatry, the tendency to totalize reality. An idol is 'a good capacity which has been absolutized and became autonomous'[84]. An idolatrous self is violent to the others by 'making them play roles where they no longer recognize themselves.'

After establishing a self that is anti-idolatrous a further step is need. The self was defined negatively – what is mustn't be, but is has to be defined also positively. Ford brings the ideas of Levinas, Ricouer and Jungel together into a *worshipping self*. It united the idea of a joyous and responsible self with the ecology of worship, where the self flourishes. While the self being an idolatrous self it would position itself as 'I', the self being a worshipping self resists self-positioning of 'I' because it is posited by God in community. The worshipping self draws its character from the community's testimony to God. In worship

[83] Ford, *Self and Salvation*, p. 197
[84] Ford, *Self and Salvation*, p. 47

the worshipping self recognizes God as creator of all, legislator of all, love for each all?.[85]

5.4 Journey of intensification

After building up his biblically informed philosophical anthropology, Ford takes as on 'the journey of intensification' on which we meet several 'theological classics'. We face an exegetical, liturgical, Christological and hagiographical meditation.

Ford's exegetical meditation reflects the *Letter to Ephesians* as a testimony to the quality of transformed life in a worshipping community[86]:

> 'Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.' (Ephesians 5:18-21)

Here, 'singing' is interpreted as transformative practice, transforming individuals and communities. Church is a community of transformative communication of blessings, proclamations, praises, thanks, and intercessions. It communicates God's abundance, transforming the self into 'a singing self'. Ford interprets the participation in transformative communication as salvation. The eschatology of Ephesians is realized eschatology: we are being transformed by something, which Christ has already accomplished. This transformation happens through unity with Christ (Ephesians 1:10) and includes social relationships: our spouses, children and work colleagues. There is no sense of *Parousia*. In singing the worshipers are singing to each other, which encourages alertness

[85] Ford, *Self and Salvation*, p. 100
[86] Ford, *Self and Salvation*, p. 107

to others and embodies shared responsibility. Voices of the singers are not exclusive for they can blend harmonically. Singing brings new sense of life, which is nicely formulated by Rowan Williams:

> 'It is no longer time for action, achievement, dominion and power, not even time for acquiring ideas. It is simply time for feeding upon reality; quite precisely like that patient openness to God that is religious contemplation …
> A musical event is – whether we know it or not – a moral event, a recovery of the morality of time …'[87]

Fords 'soteriology of abundance'[88] based of his reading of the Letter to the Ephesians introduces an abundant, lavish, loving and reconciling God. Such a soteriology can indeed be proposed as a remedy for a society built upon economy with scarcity as one of its basic principles.

After an encounter of self and Word we move further to the sacramental self. The Eucharist, as a ritual most participated in and most discussed, was perhaps the first conception of salvation.[89] Ford proposes an understanding of the Eucharist as a non-verbal and habitual wisdom that is acquired by way of apprenticeship: in training, learning and acquiring skills. Such wisdom has to be enacted and it invites apprenticeship and in this way builds a community of understanding and misunderstanding, crises and divisions. The Eucharist is a welcoming but also confrontational presence, since it uses the language of imperatives (Take! Drink! East! Do this in my memory!). It expresses a covenant relation of command and obedience. The Eucharist as remembrance of the last meal of Jesus facing death gives hope to disciples of all times.[90] It creates a self that is blessed and blesses, it is re-placed (placed anew), its history is 'timed'

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[87] Williams, *Keeping time*, p. 248
[88] Ford, *Self and Salvation*, p. 113
[89] Ford, *Self and Salvation*, p. 139
[90] Ford, *Self and Salvation*, p. 145

with the event of Last Supper and it is commanded to recapitulate Christ's teaching and example[91].

The most interesting parts of Ford's soteriological essay are chapters dedicated to Jesus Christ. He is enriching the Christology of Ingolf Dalferth with the implication of his anthropology of the worshipping self. When we face Jesus we are facing the face of the historical Jesus and the face of the risen Christ at the same time.

Ford starts right away with his interpretation of the resurrection and the New Testament testimonies to it. In the resurrection stories of the Gospels there are signs of recognition of the risen Lord, but not of identity. There is a 'sense of a disturbance of ordinary recognisability'.[92] The risen Lord is the same person, but at the same time he is different. He is 'radically alive'[93]. The risen Christ is facing all people: he is calling for disciples of all nations and offers forgiveness to all nations. Ford ends his meditation with the face of the dead Jesus. 'A dead face is an imaginative sign of the unimaginable'[94]. The gaze in the dead face is a barrier against domination and totalitarianism; it shows all victims of political and religious powers and represents a dangerous memory for domesticated Christianity.[95] It is a dead face of a sacrificial victim who confronted temptations and the dynamics of idolatry. The structure of salvation is revealed in the cross: God acts – Jesus Christ appears – his disciples are transformed. Jesus embodies the 'economy of gift' and the 'logic of superabundance'.[96] He is a worshipping self who blesses like God and is blessed like God.

[91] Ford, *Self and Salvation*, p. 164
[92] Ford, *Self and Salvation*, p. 171
[93] Ford, *Self and Salvation*, p. 178
[94] Ford, *Response*, p. 570
[95] Ford, *Self and Salvation*, p. 208
[96] Ford, *Self and Salvation*, p. 166

The face of Christ must have a shape, so a discussion of the historical Jesus is necessary. New Testament testimonies bear a historical reference that is also part of the Apostolic Creed: Jesus 'suffered under Pontius Pilate', Jesus made conversations, acted, ate meals, met people. The Christian tradition has a history of learning to discern idolatries, often moving between position of the *iconoclasts* and the *iconodoulos*.[97] Facing the historical and the risen face, we must reflect on the political practice. Concerning the political action and implications of the life of Jesus Christ Ford raises the question as to what led to his death. What was Jesus' choice between the possibilities he had? He probably held sympathies for the radicalism of Zealots ('take up the cross') but disagreed with the idea of violent rebellion (e.g. his command to love enemies). He had agreed with Pharisees on devotion and prayer, but criticized them for drawing borders between those who belong to the community of God and those who do not. The strongest conflict Jesus had was the one with the politically powerful Sadducees. They embodied power (collaboration with Rome) and control (organisation of the Temple cult). It is the Temple, the heart of Jerusalem, where Jesus' mission culminated. This leaves dangerous implications for a world dominated by various form of oppression[98]. Jesus' mission was a political threat. Not because he could be a competition to the power centre, but because he challenged it.

How can we bring the historical and the risen face of Jesus together if we recognize that 'the relation and differentiation of crucifixion and resurrection, do-

[97] The motive behind The Second Council of Nicaea was of course soteriological and Christological. For only when Jesus is truly human and at the same time truly divine, he can save us. And if he was truly human, he then can be represented.

[98] Ford, *Self and Salvation*, p. 185

ing justice to the specifity of each, while also connecting them appropriately, is one of the most important tasks of Christian theology'?[99]

Jesus lived for God, suffered abandonment by God and people, was tortured and died in 'utter powerlessness'. In his dead face (an image that came into Christian iconography fairly late - in 9th century) we have before us an affirmation of body, finitude, an unrepressed sense of death resisting dualism. Jesus' death 'revises and supersedes' the Old Testament of sacrifice.[100] Sacrifice in Temple is no longer needed. The dead face is a face awaiting resurrection, it symbolises completed offering in utter trust in God. It is perfection waiting perfection. (Hebrews 5,7-10) That perfection comes as God's response, which is resurrection.

'Can the face of Jesus become an idol?' asks Ford. The interpretation of the testimony of resurrection include 'mistaken identity, fraud, delusion, vision, mythological or symbolic interpretation of the meaning of the crucifixion, a spiritual resurrection with no implication for his dead body, a transformed physical body about the physics and chemistry of which it is appropriate to remain agnostic, and emergence from the tomb which could have been photographed.'[101] Ford argues that resurrection is a 'God-sized event' so it is always 'greater' (Anselm) or 'better' (Bonaventure) that we are able to conceive.

The death of Jesus is perfection waiting to be perfected, awaiting God's response and being dependant on it. Jesus confronted temptation to false worship, to idolatry, offered true worship in sacrificial responsibility and completed that on the cross. God vindicates Jesus' worship as true worship in resurrection. And thus gave *the* example. The person of Jesus is content with worship, wor-

[99] Ford, *Self and Salvation*, p. 203
[100] Ford, *Self and Salvation*, p. 208
[101] Ford, *Self and Salvation*, p. 210

shipping him cannot be idolatrous. 'Whatever refers us to this face – whether the faces of fellow human beings, or the imagination aroused by scripture and worship, or works of art, or joyful responsibility, or "the face of the earth" – is seen with an iconic, not idolatrous gaze...'[102] We look at Christ and find ourselves being looked at.

What does it say about the God who is the actor? He is the creator; he is free to act and reveals himself in creation and history. Jesus being intrinsic to who God is in creation and history. 'God acts, Jesus appears, the disciple are transformed.'[103]

When Jesus appears and breathes out his Spirit on the disciples, Ford sees this as a base for later Trinitarian development. Self-revealing God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Moses, trusting testimony that Jesus died and was raised, we are being transformed by the Holy Spirit.

Inspired by Edith Wyschogrod's 'hagiographic ethic' David Ford closes his soteriological project with a meditation on two modern Christian figures, Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Therese of Lisieux, linking them with traditional themes of justification, sanctification and vocation. The reason is his dissatisfaction with the fact that 'moral theories do not result in moral actions or in personal moral transformation'. Therese of Lisieux, also known as 'of the Child Jesus' or 'of the Holy Face', lived her life as practice of devotion to the face of Jesus in the 'little way' of child-like trust in the generosity of God and desire to love God.[104] Dietrich Bonhoeffer introduces an ethics of free responsibility between wrong radicalism and wrong compromises, drawing strength in a Nazi prison

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[102] Ford, *Self and Salvation*, p. 214
[103] Ford, *Self and Salvation*, p. 212
[104] Ford, *Self and Salvation*, p. 230

from daily praying of the Psalms. Saints embody salvation. They make it visible for us.

Feasting is the image Ford chooses as the eschatological theme of salvation. Feasting includes the body and the senses: taste, touch, smelling, seeing, hearing. Feasting is about enjoyment that can be further refined by art. Jesus' habit of feasting with sinners is a constant challenge to our understanding of who is accepted by God[105]. Can it challenge our contemporary issues of exclusion? What does it mean to face Jesus for a Buddhist or Muslim?

5.5 Conclusion

Ford's Self and Salvation presents an exploratory and interrogative reflection on several themes concerning salvation. He has been criticised in that his phenomenology of facing approaches theological concerns only in a 'tangential manner'[106] and that his soteriology doesn't reflect the theological testimony of the past (traditional images and theories of salvation) in a satisfying manner. This objection appears less relevant when we interpret his work as doing theology in the 'fundamental style', theology that is primarily oriented toward academia and a public that is well educated but secularized. The concern here was to be a truthful witness to various Christian testimonies.

It seems Ford understands salvation as primarily a present human reality, as human flourishing. This is the point that has been criticised the most[107]. If salvation is primarily a present reality, how can we make a connection to Christian eschatology? Although Ford writes about salvation in terms of human flourishing, it should not be understood as a purely therapeutic image. The image of salvation as health shows the breadth of meaning of salvation. It can

[105] Ford, Self and Salvation 268
[106] Webster, Review, p. 551
[107] Webster, Review, p. 584

be used in a variety of contexts: health can be physical, social, political, economic, environmental, mental, spiritual, moral[108]. None of these dimensions is excluded. What Ford's soteriological essay didn't address are the issues of the universality of salvation and the relation to other religions, gender, politics and economics.

6 David Bentley Hart

We left David Ford with the meditation on the dead face of Jesus and his sacrificial responsibility. One question remained unexplored and that is the problem of violence. Here we turn to David Bentley Hart (1965), an American Eastern Orthodox theologian, and his theological aesthetics. Hart brings Greek patristic authors (mainly Gregory of Nyssa and Maximus Confessor)

[108] Ford, *Theology*, p. 103

into conversation with contemporary philosophy and correlates patristic insights with contemporary questions.

6.1 Life and context

David Bentley Hart (1965, Maryland) studied theology at the University of Maryland, the University of Cambridge and the University of Virginia, where he started teaching. He was then a visiting professor at the University of St. Thomas (Minnesota), Duke Divinity School, Loyola College (Maryland) and Providence College (Rhode Island). Hart is a prolific author: he contributes regularly to several periodicals (Pro Ecclesia, The Scottish Journal of Theology, First Things, The New Criterion and New Atlantis) and he has published books on theological aesthetics (The Beauty of the Infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Truth, 2003), theodicy (The Doors of the Sea, 2005) and new atheism (Atheist Delusions: The Christian Revolution and Its Fashionable Enemies, 2009. For this book, he was awarded the Michael Ramsey prize in Theology in 2011). Most recently he turned his theological imagination to narrative fiction in a collection of short stories (The Devil and Pierre Gernet, 2012). His work was praised for his extensive knowledge of Western cultural heritage, ranging from ancient Greek to postmodern philosophy and including literature, art and history.

Hart belongs to the Orthodox Church in America. The roots of this Church lie in the missionary work of Russian monks in Russian Alaska during the early 19th century. There are several other orthodox groups present in the USA, mostly with ethnic or linguistic ties with orthodox churches in Eastern Europe or the Middle East. In the last decades the churches experienced a wave of conversions, mainly from protestant churches.

Although orthodox Christianity generally holds its ecclesiological exclusivity, David Hart declares that he belongs to the ecumenical 'left wing' of his church[109]. In a chapter eloquently named 'The Myth of Schism'[110] he claims that there is more substantial agreement between the Catholic and Orthodox churches than both parties of the ecumenical dialogue are prepared to admit to and that the consciousness of division is much younger than 1054. On the orthodox part it stems from the neo-patristic and neo-Palamite revival in Russian Orthodoxy in the 20th century. Hart blames especially Vladimir Lossky for narrowing the spectrum of what is considered to be authentically Orthodox[111] and John Romanides for misinterpretations of Western theologians, particularly Augustine and Thomas, which are 'miraculously devoid of one single correct statement'.[112]

Hart develops his doctrine of salvation in a context of one of the world's wealthiest societies, where the majority of the people are (still) religious and religion plays a very important role in public discourse. The reception of Enlightenment in North America differs radically from the situation of Europe.[113] In fact, Hart is highly critical about the cultural development in modern Europe:

> 'Europe will continue to sink into its demographic twilight and increasingly to look like the land of the "last men" that Nietzsche prophesied would follow

[109] Hart, *The Future of the Papacy*, [online]

[110] Hart, *The Myth of Schism*, in: Murphy, Asprey, Ecumenism today: the universal church in the 21st century.

[111] Hart, *Myth of Schism*, p. 98

[112] What Hart considers important in ecumenical dialogue comes down to the dogma of the Immaculate Conception and the teaching on Purgatory. Both teachings have important soteriological background and implications. The former questions the understanding of the Original sin and the latter the character of the 'purgative fire'. This fire cannot, according to Hart, be both sanctifying and punishing at the same time. Purgatory is either a kind of 'temporal punishment' that can be shortened by the believers. Or it is a kind of cleansing of the soul from every remains of evil - which is salvation. The question is, why should it be shortened?

[113] Hart, *Religion in America*, [online]

> the "death of God": a realm of sanctimony, petty, sensualisms, pettier rationalisms, and a vaguely euthanasiac addiction to comfort. For, stated simply, against the withering boredom that descends upon a culture no longer invaded by visions of eternal order, no civilization can endure.' [114]

On the other hand, he believes that modernity in America didn't put its roots as deep as it did elsewhere in the West. The shape of Christianity in America has, according to Hart, a unique and special quality. It isn't like Middle Age European Christendom used to be, nor is it a secularized post-Christian society. Hart struggles to find the right expression for it but in the end he proposes the description of 'new antiquity': while Europe became modern by loosening its religious ties, America became 'ancient' by keeping them. Hart believes America to be profoundly religious: not only more than 60pct of the population claim regular worship attendance, they 'are not merely pious, but God-haunted, apocalyptic, chiliastic, vulgarly religious, and always living in the end times.' It is a country where God and his angels still appear. The place of orthodox Christianity in this context is apparent:

> 'The tribulation that Eastern Christianity has suffered under Islamic and communist rule have insulated it from some of the more corrosive pathologies of modernity for a purpose, and endowed it with a special mission to bring its liturgical, intellectual, and spiritual strengths to the aid of the Western Christian world in its struggle with nihilism that the post-Christian West has long incubated and that now surrounds us all, while yet drawing on the strengths and charisms of the West church to preserve Orthodoxy from the political and cultural frailty that still afflicts Eastern Christianity.'

There is a connection between Hart's understanding of his ecclesial tradition and his cultural background. There is something of value in them that is worth

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[114] Hart, *Religion in America*, [online]

conservation. And this shows their relatedness, even dependence. As Hart puts it: 'A culture – a civilization – is only as great as the religious ideas that animate it'.

6.2 Christianity – an 'ontology of violence'?

In his book *The Beauty of the Infinite* Hart enters a critical discussion with various postmodern philosophers (Foucault, Derrida, Lyotard, Deleuze, and Levinas) and brings them into the company of Gregory of Nyssa, Maximus the Confessor, Augustine, Bonaventure and Anselm. He analyses the movements of philosophy between 'Apollo', representing stability and order imposed by a metaphysical system, and 'Dionysius', representing wild freedom. The central philosophical claim here is that every attempt to construct a metaphysical system, a 'metanarrative' or any other unifying principle is an act of violence and leads to violence. Since Christianity provides in its theology a metanarrative, it is guilty of being just one of many forms of 'ontologies of violence', in Nietzsche's view the worst case of apolloniarism. Hart refutes this accusation by showing that the Gospel offers an ontology of peace, where the unity and diversity of creation are embraced by Triune God revealed in history in Jesus Christ. Christianity stands outside the philosophical Apollo – Dionysius dichotomy, since its presuppositions are radically different. Where ancient philosophy and its modern reincarnations take the world for granted and violence as inevitable, for Christian theology the world is a non-necessary creation based in God's free will and love. The order of creation is *perichoretic*, since it is created to the image and likeness of its creator. In this world, violence 'may may often be unavoidable, but it is never necessary'[115]. Hart composes a '*dogmatica*

[115] Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite*, p. 142

minora' as a theological answer aimed at tellers of the 'story of no stories' and proclaimers of the 'truth of no truths'.

6.3 Beauty as soteriological category

The notion of beauty, as we will see, is the key notion in Hart's soteriological approach. Firstly, he is dissatisfied with the division of the beautiful and the sublime and the following reduction of beauty to prettiness, as something with a mere decorative purpose.[116] He believes that beauty, when understood correctly, has a salvific quality. It can make even 'the most intolerable circumstances bearable'[117] and help to overcome forms of ugliness and evil. Beauty helps to communicate meaning in a meaningless world; it has the power to reconcile many of the world's contradiction. Even the divine is experienced aesthetically: 'O taste and see that the Lord is good' (Psalm 34.8) Beauty evokes desire that doesn't lead to violence but love. It is *Eros* and *Agape* together, 'desire for the other that delights in the distance of otherness'.[118] For Hart, authentic theology has its source in *philokalia*: the love of beauty.

6.4 The Beauty of the Infinite

In the second part of his theological aesthetics Hart designs his '*dogmatica minora*'[119] with chapters concerning the Trinity, Creation, Salvation and Eschatology. In the start he praises the Rahnerian '*Grundaxiom*'[120] as the way of recovery and revival of the Trinitarian doctrine in the Christian West. The Trinitarian *perichoresis* – inner divine life in mutual self-donation and self-

[116] Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite*, p. 15

[117] For example, Hart mentions the Cambodian killing fields full of flowers or the sound of Bach's music in concentration camps.

[118] Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite*, p. 20

[119] Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite*, p. 153

[120] The economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity and the immanent Trinity is the economic Trinity.

reception resulting in creation and salvation – is for Hart the model for reconciled difference, a difference that is not violent but peaceful.

Hart points out that the whole Trinitarian teaching as elaborated and defended by the Cappadocian Fathers was 'the necessary theological interpretation of the economy of salvation, as truth made manifest in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ'[121]. The Trinitarian doctrine is in fact soteriology. It was developed as an explanation of *how* Christians believe but gradually changed into an object of faith, into *what* Christians believe. This shift starts with Augustine and it brings the danger of the division of the doctrine of God and God's manifestation in history, the division between the immanent and economical Trinity.

The order of relationship of the three persons of the Trinity is Beauty. Creation is God's play, 'artistry for the sake of artistry'. Creation is the aesthetic expression of Trinitarian Love. In this proclamation of Divine Beauty, God's beauty is reflected in the beauty of creation. For Hart, God makes him knowable in creation through *analogia delectationis*, analogy of delight.[122] Since the internal life of God is like a polyphony, Hart is able to call Johann Sebastian Bach one of the greatest Christian theologians.

In regard to Christology Hart understands Christ as 'God's rhetoric'. This makes it important to pay attention to the 'rhetoricity' of Christ's earthly life and message. Christ is not only the bearer of *kerygma*; he is also its content.[123] Aesthetically, Christ is the restoration and the measure of all beauty[124], 'perfect repetition and fulfilment of the form of creation'[125]. He comes to reconstruct

[121] Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite*, p. 156
[122] Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite*, p. 252
[123] Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite*, p. 156
[124] Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite*, p. 320
[125] Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite*, p. 321

damaged creation and is welcomed with violent resistance, culminating in his crucifixion, which is, at the same time, his abasement and exaltation.

Salvation is treated by Hart as recapitulation[126], an image of salvation that is traditionally associated with Eastern Christianity. Irenaeus introduced it in a typological meditation about the stories of Eve and the Serpent and Mary and the Angel of the Annunciation. Christ recapitulates humanity's struggle with evil and succeeds where humanity didn't. After the fall, humanity was unable to 'see the beauty', 'perceive the fragrance' and 'taste the sweetness' of God. Christ refashions humanity to its ancient beauty and restores it for relationship with the Father. His life effects a narrative reversal an 'ontological restoration of creation's goodness'. Resurrection is a demonstration of God's power to cross limits and the vindication of Christ. Where in the sacrificial economy of antique tragedy restores *a status quo ante,* the resurrection initiates a new history, a new form of life. This change justifies and sanctifies, reconciles humanity to God.[127]

6.5 Two 'aesthetic orders'

If the inner nature of God is perichoresis of beauty and love in peace, why is Christian soteriology depended on such violent images as sacrifice? How do we know, that a sacrifice is a discharge of debt and not its multiplication? 'How can a sacrifice defeat sacrifice?'[128] asks Hart and engages into a discussion with the early work of Rene Girard[129].

[126] Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite*, p. 325
[127] Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite*, p. 337
[128] Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite*, p. 347
[129] Mainly Girard's works 'The Scapegoat' and 'Things hidden since the foundation of the world'.

When Caiaphas tries to convince the Sanhedrin, that 'it is better … that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish' (John 11:50) we are witnessing sacrificial politics at its best. It is better to suffer a small loss to save the greater good; it is better to allow some suffering to prevent greater suffering. Hart calls it sacrificial economics: inhibition of violence by an act of violence. According to Girard, Christ's sacrifice has divested violence of its sacred character and overthrown the old pagan order of sacrifice. Christ's death is in no sense a sacrifice.[130] But Hart objects that Girard is grossly oversimplifying the idea of sacrifice. Christ's crucifixion may have exposed the inadequacy or injustice of sacrifice as transaction and sacrifice as expedient to maintain the social order, but it exemplifies and establishes another order of sacrifice, that of self-giving.[131] His resurrection is God's 'judgement against sacrificial orders that build crosses'. Moreover, signs of this new order of sacrifice can be seen in the Old Testament: the binding of Isaac happens outside any city. It shouldn't found or preserve any order. His death would serve no economy of violence. In his later work, Girard has accepted similar objections to his work and further developed his position.

Surprisingly, perhaps, in a debate over Anselm's 'satisfaction theory' Hart defends the continuity of his theology with the Greek Church Fathers and argues that it is in fact a variant of the restitution and recapitulation theory of salvation. According to Hart, important theologians from the West (liberals Ritschl, Harnack and conservatives like Aulen) and from the East (Lossky) have misinterpreted Anselm. Anselm cannot break with the patristic theology of salvation, since there never was a privileged theory of salvation. [132] Moreover, his

[130] Girard, *Things hidden since the foundation of the world*, p. 180
[131] Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite*, p. 348
[132] Hart, *A Gift Exceeding Every Debt*, p. 342

theory clearly builds on patristic insights, particularly on those of Athanasius: 'In his body … Christ exhausts the wrath of the law, and offers satisfaction for our debt.'[133] (De Incarnatione Verbi Dei)

The starting point in Anselm is the theology of creation. If humans (and with them the whole of creation) are created in the image and likeness of God, then their purpose is to participate in God's life. Every creature owes God obedience. Sin of disobedience dishonours[134] God and hinders the whole of creation to gain the beauty intended by God. The offence of sin can, according to Anselm, be compensated only by satisfaction or penalty. Without one or another, God would allow sin to grow, and that would be unjust. Sin damages the nature of humanity, so a simple pardon would not solve the problem. Since God is a God of promise and covenant, He restores creation in Jesus, the 'Deus-homo', on behalf of humanity by giving infinite satisfaction for an infinite offence. The main purpose of Anselm's salvation theory is to vindicate the righteousness of God and only secondly to explain the salvation of humanity. The picture of God as a bloodthirsty tyrant is a distortion of Anselm's theology[135]. Salvation in Christ is not a 'cosmic child abuse'; it is an action of reconciliation. Hart shows that Anselm is following Gregory of Nazianzus in neglecting the idea of a ransom paid to the Devil. Christ's death is an 'internal relation of the divine will', not an external exchange of expiatory death.[136] It's not Christ's suffering, rather his innocence and full obedience, that is redemptive. His death

[133] Hart, *A Gift Exceeding Every Debt*, p. 347

[134] It may be important to notice that 'honor' in feudalism wasn't only connected to personal dignity and social status or pride, it was also a principle keeping a fragile social order in balance.

[135] O'Collins (Jesus our redeemer, p. 136) argues, than the idea of penal substitution has its early stages in the work of Thomas Aquinas. Aquinas adopts the soteriology of Anselm. He speaks about the death of Christ in terms of satisfaction, but also introduces punitive elements (STh 48. 4 ad 3um). It is Aquinas' version of substitution soteriology that opened the door to penal substitution soteriology.

[136] Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite*, p. 366

doesn't alter God's attitude toward humans, because that never alters: he wants the sanctification of the whole of creation. The gift God gives in creation is fulfilled in Christ and 'precedes, exceeds, and annuls all debt'[137].

6.6 Tragedy and Gospel

We have already seen that David Hart relentlessly recovers antique and medieval theological heritage. The perhaps most surprising teaching he tries to defend is God's *apatheia*. The tragedies and horrors of the 20th century led many theologians to discover the 'suffering God'. Hart doesn't welcome the sympathy for tragedy that theology has acquired in the second half of 20th century. He refers to Nicholas Lash, Donald M. MacKinnon and Jurgen Moltmann but also Hans Uhrs von Balthasar and Eberhard Jungel and insists that only a God that is who is incapable of shifting emotions is in fact able to save.[138] The idea may by scandalous but so was the idea of incarnation, life and death of God to antiquity. Secondly, only a God 'immune to suffering in his nature', who is love and peace, in in no way culpable in worldly suffering[139]. Thirdly, God's *apatheia* gives Christians hope for a God that is not violent. And lastly, we do have a fellow sufferer in Jesus Christ. 'What lays behind need for a "suffering God"?' asks Hart. Isn't it our wish for a God free of any demands? Isn't it our narcissism that needs to put God on a cross in order to be 'more compassionate'? In this way he shows the relevance of God's *apatheia* for soteriology, theodicy, Christology and anthropology.

[137] Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite*, p. 372
[138] Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite*, p. 373
[139] Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite*, p. 358

6.7 Conclusion

David Hart understands creation, incarnation and resurrection as 'aesthetic acts'. Human response should also be aesthetic: by taking part in true worship we are taking part in the growing body of Christ. Although Hart doesn't mention Christian liturgy explicitly, this theme is present in his work implicitly. Perhaps the experience of Byzantine liturgy[140] made him susceptible to beauty as a counterbalance to Western theology's preference of 'speculative concepts over poetic enjoyment'.

How does David Hart fit into our framework inspired by David Tracy? I am trying to interpret Hart's theology as *faith seeking beauty*. He is using the *systematic style* of theology. His primary locus of theology is divine beauty. The authorities he uses for consultation are great figures of patristic and medieval theology. He is not trying to be original but is defending various 'antiquities'. His primary audience and 'public' is the Church: his writing takes the form of a 'dogmatica minora'. On the other side, he is engaging in discussion with contemporary philosophy and that would put him close to the 'fundamental style' of theology. But a close observation reveals that Hart doesn't pay much attention to a sharp distinction between philosophy and theology (as such a distinction cannot be found in patristic and early medieval theology). Moreover, he sees continental philosophy as 'secularized theology', a 'misbegotten child of theology'. Actually, he doesn't treat postmodern philosophers as philosophers but rather as theologians, albeit theologians who are at times 'catastrophically wrong'.

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[140] There is a lot of sensuality in Hart's theology: God's word has to be heard but his Beauty has to be seen, tasted and smelled, as he repeats several times. It is no surprise: Byzantine liturgy is experienced as foretaste of heaven, as an action that is aesthetic and sensual. Whereas in the western traditions a priest is judged by the believers by the quality of his preaching, in the east he is judged by how beautify he is worshiping.

Nevertheless, there are several open questions. Hart doesn't provide us a treatise on sin and evil. The notion of evil he is working with is evil as the deprivation of good. Evil that 'is nothing'. In his critique of Eberhart Jungel Hart emphasizes that nothingness does not challenge God: 'there is no chaos, but only will toward chaos, and the violence it inflicts upon being'.[141] He writes about systemic sin, the fallenness of creation, but not about individual or moral sin.

Sin is something that pollutes human nature so that is needs to be purified. When Hart writes about the 'purifying fire' he makes no distinction, essentially, between the fire of hell and the light of God's glory and he offers cautiously the vision of universal salvation. He believes that even Hell is 'a period of purgation rather then final perdition'[142].

> 'It is the promise of Christian faith that, eschatologically, the music of all creation will be restored not as a totality in which all the discords of evil necessarily participated, but as an accomplished harmony from which all such discords, along with their false profundities, have been exorcised by way of innumerable 'tonal' (or pneumatological) reconciliations'[143].

The 'poor' of liberation theology do have an important place in Harts theological project. Whereas the 'poor' are privileged because they are living at the margins of society, where social sin is visible the most, for Hart God reveals himself among the suffering, children and the powerless because they are not violent; because they are without any possibility of coercive force.[144]

It is surprising that he doesn't pay much attention to various events in Jesus' life, like baptism or transfiguration (usually a welcomed theme for orthodox theologians).

[141] Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite*, p. 252
[142] Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite*, p. 407
[143] Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite*, p. 281
[144] Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite*, p. 338

Theology for Hart is *philokalia*, the love of beauty. He reminds us that theology:

> 'must never be a practice of coercion precisely because, in following the form of Christ (the Father's supreme rhetoric), is it always already placed on the side of the excluded, and must occupy this place as the place of triumph. […] Theology must, because of what its particular story is, have the form of martyrdom, witness, a peaceful offer that has already suffered rejection and must be prepared for rejection as a consequence.'[145]

[145] Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite*, p. 441

III. How to speak about salvation in the present context

7 Issues in contemporary soteriology

On the previous pages I have introduced three contemporary attempts to develop a soteriology for the present context. Each of them focuses predominantly on one salvific theme and at the same time reflects the context and the audience of its author. According to Tracy's method of mutually critical correlation such a theory has to be faithful to the Christian tradition and its witnesses and at the same time has to be intelligible to the present human subject and its situation.

Pieris is developing an Asian Christology that seeks in the tradition for 'lost knowledge' and draws from the wisdom tradition and the Old Testament notion of covenant. His Christology can participate in and share the salvific experience of anti-idolatry with other religions and at the same time hold to the uniqueness and universality of Salvation in Christ. Understanding Jesus as a covenant of promise leads the Christian continually to reflect upon his or her action toward the neighbour, especially the suffering and oppressed neighbour.

David Ford's soteriology of abundance and the flourishing self tries to communicate salvation in almost therapeutic terms to a secular society under the spell of scarcity. David Bentley Hart in his theological aesthetics develops a soteriological treatise defending Christianity against the accusation of being a totalitarian 'ontology of violence'. All three authors strive for a soteriology that has universal implications but at is the same time deeply rooted in the gospel story in is scriptural setting.

When we are facing a theology of salvation, is the face we are looking at a *familiar* face?

For God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to bring to light the knowledge of the beauty of God on the face of Jesus Christ. (2 Co 4:6)

A 'face' or facing probably is not a very privileged image when thinking about soteriology so it might be surprising that it may be the connecting line between

the three contemporary soteriologies. There is a very rare depiction of Christ on the cross in the art of 13th century: It is the Christ with a body that bears the marks of torment but with a smile on his lips. This image unites a ‘Suffering Servant’ Christology with a ‘Pantokrator’ Christology and could be acceptable for Pieris.[146] Ford could probably agree here, since he considers ‘living before the face of Jesus Christ, incarnate, crucified and risen’[147] as the locus of salvation. The face of Christ is the place where his person and his work are in unity. The dead face of Jesus unites his person and his passion and becomes an icon, an imaginative sign of the unimaginable because the transformation from being dead to being risen is beyond our imagination. Facing is linked to interpersonal communication and responsiveness. The advantage of the image of ‘facing’ is that this synecdoche unites the person of Christ and his actions.[148] Moreover, the smile on the crucified face of Christ is God’s eschatological smile. It is God’s redeeming glory/beauty that is manifested and revealed in the face of Christ. In the following pages I will discuss further themes that were raised in the three soteriologies introduced.

7.1 Style, breadth and depth

Salvation theory is perhaps more than any other theological doctrine (Trinity, creation, sin and evil, Christology etc.) strongly connected to all other doctrines. To find a balance here and do justice to the many places in the Scripture and Christian tradition that say something relevant and meaningful is a difficult task. The New Testament authors relied on a mosaic put together from many colourful images. Facing the surprising end of the ministry of Jesus in death and resurrection his disciples tried to grasp the new situation in a variety

[146] Pieris, *Prophetic humour in Buddhism and Christianity*, p. 38
[147] Ford, *Response*, p. 569
[148] Ford, *Response*, p. 569

of terms from a broad range of human experiences: some images are legal like justification, others military like victory, or cultic (sacrifice) or even financial (redemption). All these images together form a safety-net, each of them being a knot. When we press too hard on one knot in the net or decide we do not need some of the knots and cut them, the whole net becomes less stable.

A theologian developing a salvation theory has to make a decision on the breadth and depth of his treatment of the images salvation and the style adequate to this decision and his audience. A theory developed around a single or a few of images, as we have seen in Ford and Pieris, can be vivid, convincing and even transforming. The image of 'facing' David Ford uses deals with personal identity but also involves a relationship to God and to the neighbour[149]. But it is not tightly tied to the historical 'Jesus event' and Trinitarian theology and incarnation. Pieris liberationist emphasis on 'the poor' and God's covenant with them raises the question of how far can social activism go and whether it is secured enough against transforming into violence. A theory based on multiple images and engaged in a discussion over traditional soteriologies like Hart's is better equipped to defend itself as a full bodied theology and show that it is linked to other theological doctrines and in this way serve the inner life of the Church. But the variety of voices it allows to speak may render the message unintelligible for somebody who was not already touched by it.

7.2 Salvation: from what and for what?

The New Testament authors suggest a number of areas where we need to experience God's saving grace. We need to be freed from sin and guilt, from existential anxiety (then experienced as fear of demons), from fear of death (Heb 2:15), from inescapable fate, from fear for everyday needs (Matt 6:19), from

[149] Ford, *Response*, p. 569

disappointment by fellow humans, from despair and hopelessness, from love-lessness, credulity (Mark 13:5-7), exploitation of credibility (Like 17:1-3), from condemnation of others (Matt 7:1-5), from concerns about our reputations (Mark 10:35-45).

Gerald O'Collins suggests that there are three main reasons for the need for salvation. [150] Firstly, there are various forms of oppression, whether in the forms of sin, death or 'demonic forces'. Their power needs to be broken. Salvation comes in the form of liberation. Then there is misconduct and a sense of guilt, which strives for forgiveness and expiation of sins. And at last there is a lack of love that needs to be cured by true worship and social solidary.

A soteriology should provide an account of the forms of evil that are experi-enced as the most serious in its context. A theme that we discovered in both Pieris and Ford is the understanding of evil as idolatry, false worship. Idolatry for Ford is the dedication of desire, attention, obligation, energy and respect to anything that contradicts God.[151] The main problem of idolatry is that it is completely common and normal with idols like work, success, family, race, gender, nationality, pleasure or self-fulfilment. Idolatry can be monotheistic or polytheistic. Because idolatry is common, it is most visible not from in the cen-tre but at the periphery of society. Its consequences are felt the most at the margin.

Pieris' liberationist approach reminds us, that we encounter sin not only in the form of personal moral evil but also when we find ourselves part of the social structures that are damaging to human life and relationships or impede human flourishing. It is structural sin that, mainly through liberation theologies, be-

[150] O'Collins, *Focus on Jesus*, p. 177
[151] Ford, *Theology*, p. 78

came the focus of theology in the past few decades. We realize, that we are part of legal, political, economic and societal structures, which often militate against human flourishing. And there are situations where a single person cannot be held directly responsible for an evil but that responsibility is implicated. Can we blame the defective ethical responsibility of the scientific community for our ecological crisis? Can we blame the defective social responsibility of the financial institutions for our economical crisis? Can we blame the defective political responsibility of the religious institutions for the indoctrination of people with passions and hostilities? We all help to unleash forces ('demonic powers') that are changing societies yet that nobody can control.

The talk about 'demonic powers' brings us to the next controversial question. In the first millennium Christian theology understood evil predominantly in terms of *absence*: evil as the lack of good, evil as the lack of love, as corruption of order. But is it possible to talk about evil in terms of *presence*, even personal presence? Gerald O'Collins thinks that there are situations, where the amount or shape or evil and the absence of any logical explanation call for the use of personal language[152]. Pieris refers to a healing ritual (Daha-atasanniya) in Sri Lanka in which popular religiosity is used to exorcise evil by 'taking the devil seriously and laughing him out of existence'[153]. On one occasion several people danced in masks of daemons representing illness following an outbreak of ill-

[152] O'Collins, Jesus the redeemer, p. 117. Schillebeeckx (Christ, p. 507) describes the evolution of that question in the Hebrew thought. Before the Exile, everything – good and bad – could be ascribed to God, although humans were responsible for sin in the world. Belief in daemons was rejected on the ground of faith in Yahweh. During the Exile the image of God changed towards stronger transcendence. He was no longer directly present in the world but through the form of his personified attributes. This move made room for the existence of 'intermediary beings' (guarding angles, daemons, good and bad spirits) in the inter-testamental time. The 'satanology' developed in the Book of Enoch, Book of Jubilees, The Testament of Twelve Patriarchs and Life of Adam and Eve echoes in the New Testament: personified evil as Satan (Matt 12:26), Beelzebub (Mark 3:22), the Enemy (Luke 10:19), Belial (II Cor 6.15) and 'powers, forces, heights, rules, thrones' (Col 1:16).

[153] Pieris, *Prophetic Humour in Buddhism and Christianity*, p. 26

ness, which was possibly caused by bad milk powder, sold by a politically influential grocer. Who is the devil behind the human mask? Who is the human behind the devil's mask? The performance of the healing ritual shows the need for personal and communal healing. Calling the devil by name – here exposing the identity of the grocer in a satirical drama – is a kind of exorcism. The daemon of the grocer's dishonesty can be brought under human control and no longer has to be feared. To be able to clearly recognize evil is itself a sign of salvation.

Soteriology is not only about calling evil by its proper name. At the same time it also has to provide a positive, pneumatic vision. We are not only free from evil – we are free for freedom, righteousness, peace with men and God, for new creation and restoration of all things, joy and happiness, for life in eternal glory, for love and hope, sanctification, for ethical commitment, for equality, to overcome evil with good etc. Ford correlates his phenomenology of 'facing' with sources from Scripture, liturgy, and spirituality[154] and with the person of Jesus Christ and succeeds in formulating a vision adequate for a modern middle-class subject which biggest temptation is to be *incurvatus in se ipsum.* Hart's revalidation of the salvation theories of the Eastern Church Father enters the picture of salvation painted by Pieris and Ford into an even bigger cosmological frame. His work reminds us that salvation is not only personal, not even only interpersonal, but its ultimate goal is the renewal of the whole of creation.

7.3 Soteriology between iconoclasm and idolatry

The final point on our discussion on developing a salvation theory for the present day will be the one of the *locus*: what should be the starting point of our

[154] Spirituality embodied and exemplified in the life of modern-day saints: Thérèse of Lisieux and Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

considerations and what other places should we look at? I will turn here to a theological classic that came up at the last widely recognized ecumenical council. The crisis that led to the council started when the Byzantine Emperor Leo III ordered the removal of an image of Jesus from the ceremonial entrance to the Great Palace of Constantinople and its replacement with a cross: for only a cross and not a picture of the face of Jesus is able to represent the Christian truth. The iconoclasts argued that a religious image has to be of exact likeness of the prototype, which means it has to be of the same substance (ūsia). Any image of Jesus Christ has to represent both his divine and human nature. Since a painted wooden icon is not able to meet this demand, the only adequate icon of Jesus is the Eucharist. John of Damascus, referring to Deut. 4:19, argued that whoever venerates the icon doesn't venerate matter, but rather the creator of matter. Thus, what is prohibited is not image making itself, but adoration. The relation between Christ and an icon is the one of a prototype and a type. The iconoclasts thought that the prototype of an icon is the divine *usia*. [155] This could be viewed as idolatry[156]. But the icon does not reveal the divine, it reveals the personal.

The French Catholic philosopher Jean-Luc Marion provides an interesting insight into the phenomenology of the icon and idol. Icons and idols 'determine two manners of being for beings'[157]. The 'the idolatrous' (eidōlon) refers to the multiple colours and multiple meanings of the visible. In ancient Greece idols were made to be looked at, to attract attention, to fascinate, to 'fix our gaze'. The artist wanted to capture what is uniquely divine and to embody it into the idol. What makes an idol visible is not itself rather our intentional act

[155] Giakalis, *Images of the divine*, p. 83
[156] Giakalis, *Images of the divine*, p. 86
[157] Marion, *God without being*, p. 7

of viewing it. The idolatrous look captures divinity and bounds it into a piece of art or a concept. An idol is an invisible mirror of the visible.

The icon, on the contrary, 'does not result from a vision but provokes one'[158]. The divine is not seen in an icon, it reveals itself in it. The artist here in not the author, he is only the instrument. From the icon the divine looks at us. An icon is a visible mirror of the invisible. It is visible so the invisible can stay invisible. Our look doesn't rest on the icon, it is directed to the invisible.[159]

> *'The invisible of the icon consists of the intention of the face. The more the face becomes visible, the more the invisible intention whose gaze envisages us becomes visible. Better: the visibility of the face allows the invisibility that envisages to grow.'*[160]

What is it exactly that is salvific about Jesus Christ? Is it his teaching, his ministry, his life, his resurrection, the incarnation or perhaps a combination of some or all of them? And where should we turn first when we want to learn about salvation in Christ: the images of salvation in the Scripture, the metaphors of the Church fathers or the dogmas of the councils?

Pieris expresses his hesitations in the possibility of a Christology based on the Chalcedonian doctrinal statement to formulate a salvific vision for the Asian context. He suggests we go back to the story of Jesus and bypass the dogmas of Chalcedon and Nicaea.[161] And since Chalcedonian Christology is guilty of the 'preoccupation with Incarnation [that] has eclipsed the politics of the cross'[162] he wants to start with the passion of Jesus. Jesus Christ is the Word of God that became flesh. But it is not the Greek *logos,* speculative reason, but the He-

[158] Marion, *God without being*, p. 18
[159] Marion, *God without being*, p. 18
[160] Marion, *God without being*, p. 20
[161] Pieris, *Christ Beyond Dogma*, p. 187
[162] Pieris, *Political Theologies in Asia*, p. 261

brew *dabar*, a creative word-promise that leads to commitment.[163] Jesus is the Word that recapitulates and fulfils the Law and Prophets. At the same time, and this could be a corrective that Hart is providing to Pieris, Jesus Christ is also *hodos* – a path of true worship bearing witness to God's beauty, that he opened and that he became in his resurrection.

Developing a soteriology requires an on-going reflexion over the iconic or idolatrous potentials of the elements and structures of theological language. The task of the theologian is to find the middle path between iconoclasm or ignorance[164] of the communicative[165] and 'gripping power' metaphors of salvation and idolatrous treatment of 'dogmas' and salvation theories influential in the past. The task of theology is the search for the iconic, which 'does not result from a vision but provokes one.'[166] But the question whether some metaphors of salvation, events in the life of Jesus and the tradition of the Church have more potential for being iconic or idolatrous that other still remains.

7.4 The criteria for a theology of salvation

I have mentioned earlier that Christianity didn't have an officially defined doctrine of salvation. Let's summarize the reasons for this: first generations of Christians didn't need to develop a doctrine, salvation was an experience renewed in liturgy. The reality of salvation was proclaimed and testified. A series of images was developed as an interpretative framework for this experience of grace. In the second millennium came the rise of soteriological disputes. What does it take to construct a good soteriology? There are many problems that

[163] Pieris, *Christ Beyond Dogma*, p. 192

[164] In connection with the Seventh ecumenical council it is worth mention here that the Council of Frankfurt (794) rejected the veneration of icons. The paintings were said to be mere decorations for didactic purposes without any theological value.

[165] On the scientific values of metaphors see: Gunton, *The actuality of atonement*, p. 31

[166] Marion, *God without being*, p. 18

a theology of salvation has to address and it has to connect to various other doctrines to establish a fine balanced ecology.

David Ford provides several criteria, which a theologian must keep in mind when developing a theory of salvation. Firstly, as we have already seen in Pieris' insistence that 'Christology needs to be soteriology, or it will be a mere ontology' and Hart's remainder that the doctrine of the Trinity was developed primarily as an explanation of faith, a soteriological theory has to bear witness of *Christian identity*. It has to do justice to various testimonies of the New Testament and early Christian history. It has to confirm the uniqueness of salvation in Jesus Christ but at the same time its universal implications. If Jesus is the Saviour, the main events (Incarnation, life and teaching, death, resurrection, giving of Spirit) in his life should be interpreted. What image of God does the salvation theory communicate?

If we demand a soteriology to be universally open towards all humans, the formulation of such a theory has to rely on multiple images to address current intellectual, emotional and practical human concerns[167]. At the same time it has to inspire the imagination to encourage transformation and action. It has to be *relevant and accessible*. A salvation theory has to adapt to different settings and cultures. What is the place of the Church in salvation? Is salvation oriented toward humanity as whole or only its part? Or is it oriented towards the whole of creation?

The third point may be in tension with the previous one: has the soteriology one or more *strong images* that could be used to interrogate our present situation? As we have seen on the second chapter we have to affirm the plurality of images of salvation? Can we find a new interpretation of an older image or are

[167] Ford, *Self and Salvation*, p. 3

we able to find a new image that could be as fruitful as the traditional ones? There is a tension between the scope of a salvation theory and the intensity by which the message of salvation should be communicated.

A soteriology for the present day needs to have a key image or idea that could be used for interpretation of the Bible, tradition and life and inspire new insights, investigations and discussions.

Can a theology of salvation *bring life* to our prayer and worship, our experience of Christian community and our engagement for social justice? Jesus preached the Kingdom of God, so there should be a balance between on personal and communal (social) dimension of salvation.

8 Conclusion

In this thesis I have tried to introduce and discuss three contemporary soteriological concepts in relation to their ecclesial and sociological context responding to what they find as the primary form of evil. I have shown that each of them is predominantly orientated to a different type of 'public' (in Tracy's terms) thus operating as 'faith seeking social justice' (Pieris), faith seeking *secular* truth (Ford) and finally, faith seeking beauty (Hart). Pieris correlates his social experience and biblical testimony. Ford correlates biblical testimonies and testimonies of the tradition with modern thought. Hart correlates the Christian theological heritage with modern philosophy as 'secularized' theology. It seems that the three major ecclesial and theological traditions presented here – catholic, protestant, and orthodox – do indeed have the tendency to 'seek faith' in goodness, truth and beauty. Such mutually critical correlation shows that differences in the three mentioned soteriological projects don't have to be necessarily viewed as contradictions but as the result of different contextual concerns and can be used for mutual enrichment and correction.

Perhaps it could also be said that catholic theology has the tendency to stress the Incarnation as the 'point of departure' for soteriology, protestant theology stresses the passion and death of Jesus Christ and orthodox theology is focussed on the resurrection. In the context of Central Europe this can be evidenced by the popularity and church attendance of the liturgy of the respective feasts (Christmas, Good Friday and Easter Vigil). The three chosen contemporary theologians loosely fit into this pattern. Pieris in the way how he defends his choice actually not to use the Chalcedonian Christology but the baptismal-covenantal Christology for his soteriology; Ford with his meditation on the

dead face of Jesus and Hart with his Easter perspective on Beauty restoring the whole creation.

There is something about salvation that resists every approach of unification and systematization. We observed how different salvation theories react to different kinds of perceived evil; how they try to balance faithfulness to Christian witness and at the same time provide a transformative experience; how they try to base present salvation on a past event. The plurality of the images of salvation should be affirmed so that the images not used in a soteriology remain as a safety net or 'eschatological reserve' and the images that are used are not turned into idols.

Can there be a universal Christian theology of salvation? If we take the principle of Vincent of Lérins 'what all have at all times and everywhere believed' seriously, we can affirm that the reality of salvation constitutes an universal belief. But the explanations of this belief will necessarily differ, as the locus of salvation differs for different people and different times.

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