

Soteriology

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IV. Soteriology

IV/1 Christ's Work of Salvation

“God so loved the world that he gave his only Son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (Jn. 3:16). God in his love and mercy wanted to save man who had lost the communion with God through sin and so was condemned to destruction and death. This decision of God was carried out by God’s Son and Logos who, in the fullness of time, “for us men and for our salvation” was sent into the world and was made man, “humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross” (Phil. 2:8).

The Son of God completed the work of salvation by his incarnation and his entire earthly life, his baptism, his word and his deeds, his suffering, his death on the cross, his descending to the realm of the dead, his resurrection and ascension and the sending of the Holy Spirit.

By his incarnation, the Lord began to fulfill the great mystery of salvation. In the person of God the Logos, the hypostatic union of the human and divine natures came about forming the foundation and starting point for the salvation of the whole human race, which is understood as one organic and unified whole (cf. Gregory of Nyssa, *hom. opif.* 16 – PG 44.185). God the Logos assumed a special human nature in his incarnation but because of the unity of the human race he united all humanity within himself, the “one united and undivided nature” (Gregory of Nyssa, *tres dii* – PG 45.120) which he redeemed and restored to its original beauty. The Lord has recapitulated and united to himself “the original form of man” and “the long history of men” so that we gain in him what we have lost in Adam: the freedom from sin and death and eternal life in fellowship with God (cf. Irenaeus of Lyons, *haer.* 3.18.1, 7 – PG 7.932, 938; cf. also Cyril of Alexandria, *Jo.* 9 – PG 74.273; Leo I of Rome, *sermo* 12.1 – PL 54.168f). In the last Adam the image of God which had been darkened and distorted by sin in the first Adam has been restored, renewed and made richer.

Furthermore the message, which Jesus Christ, as the greatest prophet and teacher of mankind, has proclaimed in word and deed, has a saving power for man in order to liberate the spirit of man from the darkening effect and the error that came from sin. What he taught he confirmed through signs and predications about what was to come. Through his entire earthly life he proved himself to be the best and

unsurpassable example of holiness and obedience to the will of God. The message of the Lord, which is indestructible (cf. Mt. 24:35; Mk. 13:31; Lk. 21:33) and not in need of perfection, is offered by a gracious God to all men without distinction. It is the call of God directed to all to turn back “out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Pet. 2:9), to the truth and salvation in Christ which has absolute and universal character and is meant for all at all times.

The divine Saviour achieved the salvation of the human race by humbling himself and by his total obedience which he demonstrated during his entire life, particularly by his suffering and his death on the cross by which he has freed the human race of sin and “became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him” (Heb. 5:9). The sacrifice made on the cross by Jesus Christ as the eternal High Priest and Mediator of the New Covenant (cf. Heb. 9:11–15) in our place and for our sins was an atonement. He became “the expiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 Jn. 2:2). By his sacrifice he redeemed and saved us because he offered his life out of love as a ransom. By his death on the cross the Lord took upon himself the sins of men (cf. Is. 53:4f; 2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Pet. 2:24) and washed them from us by his blood “that we might die to sin and live to righteousness” (1 Pet. 2:24). The power of the sacrifice offered on the cross at Calvary once and for all embraces humanity of all ages, giving to them the saving grace flowing from it.

The Lord completed his work of salvation in glory. This is evident in his descending to the realm of the dead, in his resurrection and ascension to heaven, in his sitting at the right hand of the Father, in his capacity as future judge of the living and the dead, as well as in the Church founded by him. In it he continues the redemption of the world through the work of the Holy Spirit sent at Pentecost to remain in it forever, by giving of himself to those for whom he continuously intercedes before God (cf. Heb. 9:24). The resurrection of the Lord is the confirmation and certain guarantee that man is freed from sin, corruption and death, and it is at the centre of the Christian faith (cf. Rom. 8:11; 1 Cor. 15:20–23). It is the pledge and the beginning of the resurrection and immortality of all, for the Lord is “the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep” in which “all shall be made alive” (1 Cor. 15:20–22; cf. Col. 1:18).

The last manifestation of the glory of the Lord is his coming again at the end of time, for he will judge the living and the dead, renew

heaven and earth and reign with the elect in the Kingdom of the Father to all eternity.

In the view of the Joint Orthodox–Old Catholic Theological Commission, the above text on “Christ’s Work of Salvation” represents the teaching of the Orthodox and Old Catholic Churches.

Chambrésy/Geneva, October 7, 1983

Signatures

IV/2 The Work of the Holy Spirit in the Church and the Appropriation of Salvation

Out of love for sinful man (cf. Jn. 3:16), God our Lord sent his Son into the world, who reconciled all things in heaven and on earth (cf. Col. 1:20) and renewed creation by his resurrection (cf. 2 Cor. 5:15–18). Jesus Christ commanded his disciples to proclaim the Gospel to all nations (cf. Mt. 28:19f) so that his salvation may give light to all who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death (cf. Lk. 1:79).

The appropriation of salvation by individual human beings takes place in the Church through the work of the Holy Spirit who grants his grace. The Holy Spirit, who proceeds from the Father and rests in the Son and is given and has appeared through the Son to the faithful (cf. John of Damascus, f.o. 8 – PG 94.821, 833), always remains in the Church, fills it and builds it up, renews and sanctifies it and makes it into an “ark of salvation” for the whole world. He is the Paraclete who is sent by the Lord to lead the Church into all truth (cf. Jn. 16:13). All that the Saviour brings about in the Church for the well-being of men is, according to the holy Fathers, “fulfilled by the grace of the Spirit” (Basil the Great, Spir. 16/39 – PG 32.140). The Holy Spirit is as it were the soul of the Church, the life-giving, sanctifying and unifying power of its body. The Holy Spirit and the Church are inseparable: “for where the Church is, there the Spirit of God is also, and where the Spirit of God is, there the Church is and all grace” (Irenaeus of Lyons, haer. 3.24.1 – PG 7.966). The Holy Spirit is fundamental for the new existence of man in the Church whose rebirth occurs by water and the Spirit (cf. Jn. 3:5f).

We humans receive the gift of the Holy Spirit in the Church through Christ, and thus become children of God and fellow heirs with Christ (cf. Rom. 8:15–17); we are brought back into communion with God,

for which he has created us. The spirit of sonship lives in our hearts and cries: “Abba, Father” (cf. Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6). He “helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words” (Rom. 8:26). The Spirit lives in the body of the faithful as in a temple (cf. 1 Cor. 6:19). He unites them in the celebration of Holy Eucharist to the one body in the fellowship of the Church. He allows Christians to take part in his holiness; they become “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Pet. 1:4), i. e. “deified through the partaking of the divine shining of the light and not changed into the divine being” (John of Damascus, f.o. 26 – PG 94.924). He imparts to each individual his gift of grace for the building up of the Body of Christ: the gift of speaking wisdom, the gift of speaking knowledge, the gift of healing, the gift of discerning spirits, and especially the gift of ordained ministry as an organ for building up this Body (cf. 1 Cor. 12:4–11. 28f).

God saves man without violating his free will. “He wants all to be saved but he forces nobody. God is willing ... to save man not against his will and determination, but with his will and freely-made decision (John Chrysostom, hom. 3.6 in Ac. 9.1 – PG 51.144). The appropriation of salvation in Christ by man occurs by the cooperation of the Holy Spirit and man. The Holy Spirit effects the vocation, the illumination, the conversion, the justification, the rebirth in Baptism and the sanctification in the Church; man, for his part, accepts the grace offered and participates freely by faith and his good works, in other words, by “faith working through love” (Gal. 5:6). This cooperation is not to be understood as if God alone achieves one part of the work and man alone another; rather all things are achieved by God, without whose help man can do nothing for his salvation. But man also participates in all things, he is moved to act himself and not to remain inactive (cf. Augustine, corrept. 2/4 – PL 44.918: *aguntur ut agant, non ut ipsi nihil agant*). “From the God of the universe, who works all in all, we must believe that he does it in the manner that he awakens, protects and strengthens the free will which he himself once granted and not in such a way that he nullifies it” (John Cassian, coll. 13.18 – PL 49.946; cf. Augustine, Spir. et litt 34/60 – PL 44.240). This cooperation of God and man embraces the entire new life in Christ. One cannot say that man behaves passively in any act of faith – and were it even the first one – and that God alone works in him.

Correspondingly, the Church rejects any teaching according to which God alone grants his saving grace to some but not to others,

thus by his decree predestinating some to salvation, others to damnation. God is not the originator of evil but the source of life and salvation. That is why he desires “all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:4).

The rebirth and sanctification of men is the special work of the Holy Spirit. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit expected at the end of time has already occurred in the Church since the day of Pentecost (cf. Acts 2:16–18). The glory of the end time is no longer merely a hope but already a present reality. The presence of the Holy Spirit in the Church offers certain guarantee for this. If we have in our hearts the part, which is the pledge of the Spirit, we will not doubt the whole, which is the perfection of the gift in the blessedness of eternal life (cf. Rom. 8:23; 2 Cor. 1:22f; 5:5; Eph. 1:13f; 4:30; Tit. 3:6f; cf. also John Chrysostom, res. mort. 8 – PG 50.431).

In the view of the Joint Orthodox–Old Catholic Theological Commission, the above text on “The Work of the Holy Spirit in the Church and the Appropriation of Salvation” represents the teaching of the Orthodox and Old Catholic Churches.

Chambésy/Geneva, October 7, 1983

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