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HOW DOES JESUS CHRIST SAVE US?

An Indian Approach

Michael Amaladoss, S.J.

The question that Asians are often asked to answer is "How is Jesus the Universal Saviour, even of people who do not accept him in faith?" The underlying concern is the need to proclaim the good news of Jesus to everyone so that all may be saved. The sub-theme, of course, is that they will be converted and join the Church. "How does Jesus Christ save us?" is a question that is rarely discussed. It is taken for granted. It has been so from the beginning of the Church. The Christians in the early centuries had heated debates about *who* Jesus Christ was. This led to the definition in Chalcedon that Jesus Christ is one person in two natures. But its implications for salvation were not much discussed.

Though there were many explanations, as we shall see, the theory of his death as a vicarious expiatory sacrifice became the common belief in the Latin Church. Jesus was said to have suffered, shed blood and died for our sins. This view finds expression in the liturgical prayers and celebrations. The suffering body of Jesus starts to appear on the cross only in the 10th century C.E.[1] St. Anselm provides the theological

[1]See Rita Nakashima Brock & Rebecca Ann Parker, *Saving Paradise: How Christianity Traded Love of This World for Crucifixion and Empire* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2008).

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foundations for the theory. In the Latin tradition, two other theories were also popular. One saw salvation as the victory of Jesus over the powers of evil. The other suggested that Jesus has set before us an example that all have to follow. This last theory was proposed by Peter Abelard and was considered inadequate, though some theologians do use it even now. The death of Jesus was not merely a historical fact. It becomes a theological fact and affirmation when we say that Jesus died "for our sake."[2] "What does this mean?" is the question.

The Greek Fathers also used similar theories to explain the process of salvation. But they had an important addition. They spoke of salvation as "deification"—*theosis*. Irenaeus said: "Jesus Christ became what we are in order that we might become what he himself is."[3] Athanasius declared: "The Word became man so that we might be deified."[4] Sometimes it may have been just a metaphor; at other times, more real. As an Indian, I find this theory more attractive. I shall suggest later that such a theory will find a deeper meaning in the perspectives of *advaita* or aduality of the Indian tradition. But at the moment let us get back to history.

Many Theories

Jesus was condemned to death, tortured and nailed to the cross leading to his death. His rising again did not cancel out his suffering and death. The apostles had to find a meaning for this event. They obviously went back to their socio-cultural and religious experience looking for models. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, writing on Pauline theology in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, suggests that Paul is focusing only on Jesus' death, resurrection and exaltation. He continues:

> When Paul looked back at these moments, he realized what Christ Jesus accomplished for humanity, and he spoke of the effects of that accomplishment (the "objective redemption," as it has often been called)

[2]The Nicene Creed.

[3]*AdvHaer.* 5, preface.

[4]*De incarn.* 54.

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> under ten different images: justification, salvation, reconciliation, expiation, redemption, freedom, sanctification, transformation, new creation, and glorification. For each of these images expresses a distinctive aspect of the mystery of Christ and his work …. The multiple images have been derived from his Hellenistic or Jewish backgrounds and have been applied by him to that Christ-event and its effects.[5]

Paul also mixes metaphors. In a single passage, he can evoke more than one. He tells the Romans:

> Much more surely then, now that we have been justified by his blood, will we be saved through him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life. (Rom. 5:9–10)

Commenting on this passage, Stephen Finlan remarks:

> Paul often uses one metaphor to interpret another. Believers were: justified (judicial) by his blood (sacrificial or martyr image, or both), saved from the wrath of God (at Judgment Day), were reconciled (social/diplomatic) to God through the death of his Son (sacrifice and martyrdom).[6]

It is not my aim here to go into the complexities of Pauline theology of salvation. I just wish to point out that Paul uses images that would have been familiar to Jews and Greeks to explain a mystery, perhaps not giving any of them a special importance.

A modern theologian, Edward Schillebeeckx, says:

> The salvation brought by Jesus was not directly depicted as a birth from God or an adoption, but first and foremost as a new way of life and fulfillment, as redemption and forgiveness of sins …. Sixteen key concepts, which occur repeatedly in all parts of the New Testament are enough to give us a good idea of the New Testament understanding of what redemption through Christ Jesus is from and what it is for.[7]

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[5]*The New Jerome Biblical Commentary,* 1397.

[6]Stephen Finlan, *Problems with Atonement* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2005), 58. See also 2 Cor. 5.

[7]E. Schillebeeckx, *Christ: The Christian Experience in the Modern World* (London: SCM Press, 1980), 477.

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These key concepts are: salvation and redemption, being freed from forms of servitude and slavery, redemption as liberation through purchase or for a ransom, reconciliation after dispute, redemption as satisfaction, peace, redemption as the expiation for sins through a sin-offering, redemption as the forgiveness of sins, justification and sanctification, salvation in Jesus as legal aid, being redeemed for community, being freed for brotherly love, being freed for freedom, renewal of man and the world, life in fullness, and victory over alienating "demonic powers."[8]

I just want to point out that many images have been used in the Bible to understand how Jesus Christ saves. It is a pity that the Latin Church privileges one of them, namely that of expiatory sacrifice. However it may be explained and spiritualized, it presents to us an image of God who is a vindictive and wrathful judge who imposes punishment and demands blood. In a feudal culture, such an image may have been compulsive. But such a God is quite unlike the Father of Jesus, who is loving and forgiving, waiting, like the "prodigal Father," for the least sign of repentance on our part. Jesus demonstrates this in his life and miracles (e.g., Mt. 9:2–8), making it very clear, quoting Hosea: "I desire mercy, not sacrifice" (Mt. 9:13).

The sacrificial image of salvation has not gone uncontested.[9] Ernst Käsemann wrote: "If we have any concern for the clarity of the Gospel and its intelligibility to the present generation, theological responsibility compels us to abandon the ecclesiastical and biblical tradition which interprets Jesus' death as sacrificial."[10] Having expressed my dissatisfaction with the predominant Latin image, it is not my intention here to examine and evaluate all the images of the

[8]Schillebeeckx, *Christ: The Christian Experience in the Modern World*, 477–512.

[9]Cf. N. Schreurs, "A Non-Sacrificial Interpretation of Christian Redemption," in T. Merrigan & J. Haers, eds., *The Myriad Christ* (Leuven: University Press, 2000); E. Käsemann, *Perspectives on Paul* (London: SCM Press, 1971), 42–45. S.W. Sykes, ed., *Sacrifice and Redemption* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) presents both sides of the debate—especially the last two papers.

[10]Ernst Käsemann, *Jesus Means Freedom* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), 114.

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biblical and Latin tradition. But tradition shows that, at the level of images, a pluralism is certainly possible. The images may often be complementary. They are necessarily incomplete. They may be more or less adequate. It is significant that *theosis* does not figure in the list of Schillebeeckx. Such a situation allows me to propose one more image coming out of the Indian religious context. But before doing so let me look at the Greek tradition.

Deification or *Theosis*

The Greek Fathers of the Church also use many of the biblical images to understand the mystery of salvation. But in addition, they also speak of *theosis* or deification. The image of "deification" may be traced back to Peter's second letter where he speaks of God's great promises "so that through them you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of lust, and may become participants of the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4). Commenting on this, James Starr concludes, offering us also a description of *theosis*:

> Does 2 Peter mean deification? … If the term means equality with God or elevation to divine status or absorption into God's essence, the answer is no. If it means the participation in and enjoyment of specific divine attributes and qualities, in part now and fully at Christ's return, then the answer is—most certainly—yes.[11]

For the Greek Fathers, deification is not a mere metaphor but indicates a real participation. This is possible because God is seen, not merely as a static essence, but as a dynamic source of "energies." God has created humans in God's image and according to God's likeness (cf. Gen. 1:26–27). The goal of deification is not, therefore, an afterthought. It is there already in creation. It finds expression in the Incarnation and is communicated to everyone in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Its fullness is achieved in the Eucharistic

[11]James Starr, "Does 2 Peter 1:4 Speak of Deification?" in Michael J. Christensen & Jeffery A. Wittung, eds., *Partakers of the Divine Nature: The History and Development of Deification in the Christian Traditions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 90.

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communion in which everything becomes the body of Christ. Such a vision distances itself from the narrow and unilateral emphasis on the death of Jesus. Sergius Bulgakov says:

> The Incarnation is the interior basis of creation, its *final cause*. God did not create the world to hold it at a distance from him, at that insurmountable metaphysical distance that separates the Creator from the creation, but in order to surmount that distance and unite himself completely with the world; not only from the outside, as Creator, nor even as providence, but from within: "the Word became flesh."[12]

The Greek Fathers, like Gregory Nazianzen, Gregory of Nyssa and Maximus the Confessor, explore the image of deification with the help of Platonic philosophy. Gregory of Nyssa speaks of the human's connaturality for the divine.

> Since he was created to take part in divine blessings, man must have a natural affinity with that object in which he has participation. It is just like an eye which, thanks to the luminous rays which nature provides it, is enabled to have communion in the light …. It is just so with man, who since he was created to enjoy the divine blessings must have some affinity with that in which he has been called to participate. And so he has been endowed with life, reason, wisdom, and all those truly divine advantages so that each one of them should cause that innate desire of his to be demonstrated within him. Since immortality is one of those benefits that are appropriate to deity, it follows that our nature cannot be deprived even of this in its constitution, but must possess within itself the disposition to immortality in order that (thanks to this innate capacity) it might be able to recognize that which is transcendent far beyond it and might thus experience the desire for divine eternity.[13]

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[12]S. Boulgakoff, *Du Verbe incarné* (Paris: Aubier, 1943), 98, quoted in Michael J. Christensen & Jeffery A. Wittung, eds., *Partakers of the Divine Nature: The History and Development of Deification in the Christian Traditions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 36.

[13]Gregory of Nyssa, *Catechetical Oration 5*, quoted in J.A. McGuckin, "The Strategic Adaptation of Deification in the Cappadocians," in Michael J. Christensen & Jeffery A. Wittung, eds., *Partakers of the Divine Nature: The History and Development of Deification in the Christian Traditions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 104.

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Maximus the Confessor sets deification in the context of Trinitarian *perichoresis*. This brings out the reciprocal relations. Summarizing his thoughts, Elena Vishnevskaya writes:

> Maximus's idea of divinization subsumes a genuinely reciprocal relation between the believer and God, or rather the entire Trinity whereby the divine Persons, while three, operate and will as one. Maximus firmly upholds the Trinity, itself a "personal reality of perichoretic activity and supreme union. It is the mystery of love and the mystery of freedom which is the mystery of God, three in one."[14] And it is in keeping with this Trinitarian ineffability that God, in the greatest act of self-donation, interpenetrates into human existence and, at the same time, opens himself up for human participation, that is, the Trinitarian Godhead creates conditions for mutual indwelling in divinization. The believer reciprocates in love by entering into the life of the divine Persons—even while here on earth—and fulfills the human vocation of divinization as intended by God from eternity.[15]

A Brief Comparison

The Greek Fathers, though they were using the image of *theosis*, did not abandon the transactional theories familiar to the Latin tradition, but compared to *theosis,* the transaction theories look quite inadequate. There have been efforts to make them more palatable, but without much success in my opinion.[16] What is the reason? The Latin tradition is dualistic, distinguishing sharply the Creator from the creature. The

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[14]George C. Berthold, "The Cappadocian Roots of Maximus the Confessor," in F. Heinzer & C. von Schönborn, eds., *Maximus Confessor, Actes du Symposium sur Maxime le Confesseur* (Fribourg: Editions Universitaires, 1982), 56.

[15]Elena Vishnevskaya, "Divinization as Perichoretic Embrace in Maximus the Confessor," in Michael J. Christensen & Jeffery A. Wittung, eds., *Partakers of the Divine Nature: The History and Development of Deification in the Christian Traditions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 142–143.

[16]See Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall & Gerald O'Collins, eds., *The Redemption* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Gerald O'Collins, *Jesus Our Redeemer: A Christian Approach to Salvation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

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distance is further increased by sin. The human is totally helpless. There is also the dualism between God and the personified evil powers. The Greek Fathers too may have used these dualistic images, but they transcend them when they speak of *theosis*. There is a basic relationship between God and humans created in God's image. Humans, of course, will have to keep growing into this image. But a foundation has been laid in creation. Besides, the Word and the Spirit are in them, empowering them. Of course, everything is God's gift, including the interaction in love between God and humans. But the interaction is part of the growth process. We see this in the human and the divine in Jesus. This makes human participation easier since it passes through the Incarnate Word in the indwelling Spirit. Such a perichoretic vision is available in the New Testament. But it is usually ignored.

The Biblical Basis

Creation is not something projected outside God. A meditation on John's gospel will be helpful.

> All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it …. The true light, which enlightens every one, was coming into the world. … He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God. … And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. … From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. (Jn. 1:3, 5, 9, 11–12, 14, 19)

Creation is seen as participatory. Everything comes to be in and through the Word and is destined to share in its glory. It is a process and this includes a possible dissension that will have to be overcome. But the fullness of glory is promised to all who believe. Jesus speaks of his death on the cross as a "lifting up" when he will draw all things to himself (Jn. 12:32). His death is his own glorification and his glorification of his Father (Jn. 17:1). This glorification is the mutual indwelling. "As you,

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Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us" (Jn. 17:21). For John such glorification starts with the incarnation (Jn. 1:14).

Paul has his own image of deification.

> Now the Lord is Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And all of us with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit. (2 Cor. 3:17–18)

The freedom of the Spirit enables us to address God as "Abba" with the same intimacy as Jesus, becoming joint-heirs with Christ (Rom. 8:1–17). Creation also is yearning to participate in this communion (Rom. 8:19–20). Another Pauline image for salvation is fullness. In his letter to the Colossians, Paul evokes this image and also shows how it is linked to Christ himself as the image of God and as the realization of the cosmic fullness.

> He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominations or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the first-born from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of the cross. (Col. 1:15–20)

While Paul manages to slip in the "blood of the cross" at the end, his image of cosmic and divine-human fullness, centered on Christ, starting with creation and reaching out to the last days, is breath-taking. Both John and Paul envisage this communion in which "God is all in all" (1 Cor. 15:28), not in juridical terms, but in organic images, borrowed from Jesus himself: the Vine and the branches for John (Jn. 15:1–10) and the body of Christ for Paul (1 Cor. 12:12–31; Eph. 4:1–16). In the context of this New Testament tradition it is more appropriate to speak of salvation in a participative rather than transactional language. The participative language also embraces the whole of history and not merely the particular event of the death of Jesus on the cross.

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A Philosophical Orientation

It is true that the Greek Fathers were guided by Platonic philosophy in exploring the event of salvation. One of the consequences is that they stress formal rather than efficient causality. Gösta Hallonsten comments:

> *Theosis* is connected to a certain anthropology, often based on the distinction between image and likeness and always teleologically oriented in a dynamic way toward the prototype. This prototype, the real Image of God, is Christ. Thus the importance of the Incarnation as the central point in the economy of salvation. This anthropology, further, is based on or implies a view of the relation between creation and its Creator that is characterized by formal causality and implies the continual presence and action of grace or the energies of God from the beginning to the end.[17]

This comment leads us to raise and clarify the philosophical question and also link it to the Indian philosophical tradition. In the Latin tradition, creation is understood in terms of efficient causality. The created world is projected out there, autonomous in its own functioning. The interaction between beings, including the Creator, is explained in terms of causality, specially efficient and instrumental. The Greek tradition uses, rather, formal causality, especially when "spiritual" beings capable of knowledge and love are involved. While expressing a preference for the Greek tradition, I would like to suggest here that the Indian vision of *advaita* or aduality can be useful for Indians (and other Asians familiar with Taoism) to explore the mystery of salvation.

The *Advaita*

In talking about the *advaita*, I shall follow a common-sense approach rather than the numerous philosophical schools in India

[17]Gösta Hallonsten, "*Theosis* in Recent Research: A Renewal of Interest and a Need for Clarity," in Michael J. Christensen & Jeffery A. Wittung, eds., *Partakers of the Divine Nature: The History and Development of Deification in the Christian Traditions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 287.

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which talk about it.[18] *A-dvaita* means not-two. The Absolute (God) and the universe are not-two. It does not say that they are "one." It seeks to avoid both monism/pantheism and dualism. It denies an exclusive focus either on the One or the Many. It affirms an inner differentiation and relationship.

An easy way of understanding the principle of *advaita* is to look at the human. The human is a spirit in a body. I am my body. I am not only my body. I am not in my body. The body is not an instrument. I do not simply have a body. The body is more my self-expression. My body also relates me to the others and the world. The spirit has a certain priority. It can act alone. It can also act with the body. The body is dependent on the spirit. It is nothing by itself. While the dependence is total at the level of being a body, it has a certain autonomy of functioning. The body reacts to internal and external stimuli, sometimes automatically. A tasty dish makes the mouth water. A sudden noise makes the body shudder. The spirit and the body are not two beings. They are not simply "one" either. There is a duality in unity. There will be no body without the spirit. There will be no human either without the body. There is a relationship. But the body can hinder the smooth functioning of the spirit. The spirit can affect the body. We speak of psychosomatic diseases. The integration between the spirit and the body is not a given. It can grow. The yoga tries to do this. The human person is an advaitic union of the spirit and the body. As a matter of fact, the Vaishnavite theologian Ramanuja uses the human as a symbol to understand the Absolute in relation to the universe. He calls the world as the body of God. There is a dependent relationship. But it is one-sided. In the growth of the person the relationship can have a history. We Christians think that we cannot be really human without a body. That is why we believe in the resurrection of the body.

We can now project this composite image on Jesus. He is divine and human. His divine nature is eternal. He becomes human in time. The

[18]For a simple philosophical exposition, see Eric Lott, *Vedantic Approaches to God* (London: Macmillan, 1980); John Braisted Carman, *The Theology of Ramanuja: An Essay in Interreligious Understanding* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974).

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humanity is totally dependent on the divinity, while the divinity can act alone. Jesus today is the incarnate Word. The unity between the divinity and humanity is not such as to deny the double principle of action. Jesus has two wills. The humanity conforms itself to the divinity, but in full freedom. The difference of natures has not been much understood in the Latin tradition which focuses on the unity of the person. Let me simply quote Karl Rahner without elaborating this point.

> In accordance with the fact that the natures are unmixed, basically the active influence of the Logos on the human "nature" in Jesus in a physical sense may not be understood in any other way except the way this influence is exercised by God on free creatures elsewhere. This of course is frequently forgotten in a piety and a theology which are tinged with monophysitism. All too often they understand the humanity of Jesus as a thing and as an "instrument" which is moved by the subjectivity of the Logos …. The human nature of Jesus is a created, conscious and free reality to which there belongs a created "subjectivity" at least in the sense of a created will, a created *energia*. This created subjectivity is distinct from the subjectivity of the Logos and faces God at a created distance in freedom, in obedience and in prayer, and it is not omniscient.[19]

Traditionally, one speaks of the unity-in-duality in Jesus as being one person in two natures. We can see that the relationship is advaitic, as I have described it. While the unity is strongly affirmed, the duality is not denied, and the relationship between the divine and the human in Jesus must have grown throughout his life.

Based on these models, we can see the mystery of salvation as advaitic. There is an advaitic relationship between God and humans in creation. This is foundational. But this does not exclude an internal differentiation between God and humans. Humans are free and have to conform themselves to the divine will. Such an integration is not given but to be achieved and can grow (or deteriorate). It is actually a communion in love. The advaitic mystery of Jesus is a model for us. "If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as

[19]K. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith* (New York: Seabury Press, 1978), 287. See also 290–291.

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I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love" (Jn. 15:10). While the advaitic unity is foundational, it does not exclude a relationship of love, obedience and communion.

An Empowering Symbol

Dualism is avoided because the humans are not totally outside God and independent of God: "In him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 19:28). Paul tells the Romans: "Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words" (Rom. 8:26). He writes to the Galatians: "It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me" (Gal. 2:20). As Jesus himself tells the disciples: "No one comes to the Father except through me" (Jn. 14:6). Again, "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself" (Jn. 12:32). This means that Jesus is not merely a model or a symbol or an exemplar, in the manner of Abelard. He is not simply an outsider to us. Even as we are trying to respond to God's love, he is within us, empowering us. This is the mystery of the *advaita* between the divine and the human in each one of us. That is why the incarnate Word is more than a type. We are advaitically in communion with God in and through the Word, and so the prayer of Jesus is fulfilled: "As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us" (Jn. 17:21).

Our advaitic unity with God in and through Jesus Christ also unites us advaitically with all the others. Now, however, the communion is mutually inter-dependent. This communion acquires a symbolic form and realization in the Eucharist. But the Eucharist takes us a step further. It unites us advaitically also with the cosmos, made present to us by the food and drink, and so salvation becomes a mystery of *cosmotheandric* communion, as Raimon Panikkar would say.[20] I have envisaged it as a cosmic dance.[21]

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[20]Cf. Raimon Panikkar, *The Rhythm of Being* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2010).

[21]See Michael Amaladoss, *The Dancing Cosmos* (Anand: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 2003).

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History, Symbol of Mystery

One of the problems in understanding salvation as an expiatory sacrifice is reducing it to a particular action in history, namely Jesus' death on the cross. Efforts have been made to include the whole life of Jesus as salvific action.[22] The challenge is to make this salvific life relevant to the whole of human history, before and after Christ.[23] This can be done if we look at history as an actualizing symbol of mystery.[24] An example will make this clear. A man and a woman are in love. Their love transcends time and space. It is enduring and it grows. They manifest their love by particular words, gestures and actions at particular times. The actions may involve not merely making gifts, but also caressing, kissing, etc. Their loving relationship reaches a climax in an act of love. The love continues and finds expression in various ways also after the act of love. When a child is born, it too becomes a symbol of that love. In this relationship, love is an enduring reality and experience. It finds expression in various ways, more or less intense. Every expression also contributes to the growth of that love. There may be occasional tensions, estrangements and reconciliations. But a basic relationship continues. The expression reaches a climax in the act of love. But it is not fully meaningful taken by itself, but only when related to its past and to its future. The loving relationship between a man and a woman becomes in this way a history with a climax.

The love between God and the humans is also a history. It starts with creation which lays a strong foundation with the humans being in the image of God. This community is never broken. Within this framework, the love grows and wanes. God animates the people through the Spirit and continues to send leaders and prophets (Heb.

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[22]See Gerald O'Collins, *Jesus Our Redeemer: A Christian Approach to Salvation*.

[23]See I.U. Dalferth, "Christ Died for Us: Reflections on the Sacrificial Language of Salvation," in S.W. Sykes, ed., *Sacrifice and Redemption* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 299–301.

[24]M. Amaladoss, "The Symbolic Dimension of Christianity," *Indian Theological Studies* 14 (1977): 39–50.

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1:1–2). People continue to be disloyal. Finally God—the Word—becomes flesh and enters history so as to give a push from within, by starting a movement of people towards the kingdom. The death and resurrection are an expression of total self-gift from both directions. The Word empties itself in the human Jesus, who in his turn empties himself on the cross. Such mutual self-emptying seals a new bond that sprouts forth as the new life of the resurrection. The love story is marching along towards its final consummation when "God will be all in all" (1 Cor. 15:28). Jesus can integrate in himself the universal story of humankind only because he is also the Word, enlightening every one (cf. Jn. 1:9). The history of the world is also the mystery of God's presence and action in that world. We can say that history and mystery have an advaitic relation between themselves. History and mystery are not-two. History is the progressive manifestation of the mystery. History will thus lead to the fullness of mystery when God will gather up all things in Christ (cf. Eph. 1:10).

Conclusion

What is new in this advaitic perspective is to deny duality and affirm the basic unity that exists between the Creator and creation. It is not a unity of being, as in the Trinity, but an asymmetric inter-dependence, as in the incarnate Word. Thich Nhat Hanh, a Buddhist scholar from Vietnam, talks of inter-being. To be is to inter-be. The relationship can undergo all kinds of modifications. But it is never broken. The Spirit of God does not abandon even the sinner. If the sinner converts, s/he is inspired and empowered by the Spirit. If we are in solidarity with Adam's sin, we are also in solidarity with the second Adam's salvation (cf. Rom. 5:12–21).

Given this basic relationship, salvation cannot be a transaction between two individuals like satisfaction, expiation, redemption. It can only be an inner transformation through participation—a *theosis*. It is the realization of a basic relationship that already exists. The participation of the human in the divine is possible only because the gift from God and the capacity of the humans are already inbuilt in creation. Sin may

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make this dysfunctional, but does not totally destroy it, because God's love, mercy and grace are greater than human sin. This transformation is signified by the death and resurrection of Jesus. It acquires a cosmic outreach, transcending space and time, because Jesus is also the Word. This is assured already by creation, further strengthened by the incarnation and definitely confirmed by the resurrection. Death, even the death of Jesus, is only a necessary passage. Ultimately it is God who saves, sharing with us the fullness of God's life. Death can only be a necessary self-emptying to receive God's grace and glory in its fullness (cf. Phil. 2:6–11). It is total self-surrender, made poignant by the sufferings imposed by sinful humans, but necessary for the creative and absolute fullness of new life in the resurrection.

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