

SALVATION IN THE THEOLOGY OF SAINT PAUL

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ABSTRAK

Keselamatan mendapat tempat yang sentral dalam teologi Santo Paulus. Rasul para bangsa ini memandang keselamatan sebagai tema sentral dalam peristiwa kehadiran Yesus. Keselamatan tak lain adalah tindakan penyelamatan Yesus bagi manusia yang berdosa. Tindakan keselamatan itu diwujudkan melalui sengsara, wafat dan kebangkitan Yesus. Berkat tindakan keselamatan ini manusia dibebaskan dari dosa yang mengantarkan kepada kematian kekal. Menurut Paulus dimensi soteriologis inilah yang menjadi dasar peristiwa inkarnasi Anak Allah.

KEY WORDS:

Salvation, Sin, Theology, Sant Paul

Introduction

Salvation is one of the most fundamental theological teachings of Saint Paul in connection with the effect of the Christ-event.¹ The word “Salvation” itself is a general term which denotes the deliverance of people from dangerous situations. Salvation can be applied to the healing

¹Joseph A. Fritzmyer, “*Pauline Theology*,” in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fritzmyer, SJ and Roland E. Murphy, OCarm., editors, (Bangalore: Theological Publications, 2007), 1398.

of a disease or to safety in travelling or liberation from suffering.² In the Old Testament the term salvation is used to denote God's protection to the people of God and their deliverance from their hostile nations. In the New Testament, the Old Testament meaning of salvation is maintained and it is described in various images such as: "to set free those who are oppressed" (Luke 4:18), "born anew" (John 3:3), "turn from the dark to the light" (Acts 26:18), "free from the law of sin and death" (Rome 8:2), "enter the kingdom of heaven" (Mat 7:21).

But the term salvation is used particularly when it is applied to deliverance of sin so that one can enter eternal life.³ For Paul, "Salvation" refers to the saving act of Christ for sinners. In this context, salvation means the saving act of Christ through his suffering, death and resurrection, delivering us who believe in him from the power of the evil which leads us to eternal death. This is the very reason for the incarnation of the Son of God: "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" (1 Tim 1:15).⁴ For Paul, Jesus is the savior (Philippi 3:20, Ephesians 5:23).

A savior is someone who acts in rescuing or delivering people from dangerous situations such as: sickness, war and death.⁵ In many cultures, including Hellenism, savior refers to someone who has the ability to deliver people from distress, oppression, sickness and other dangerous situations. Therefore gods and heroes and especially rulers are called

²Gerald F. Hawthorne and Ralph P. Martin, *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 858.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Braulio Pena, *Soteriology, Jesus: His Person and His Work* (Manila: UST Press, 1985), 124.

saviors.⁶ But in the Old Testament, this title “savior” originally refers to God⁷ (Isaiah 12:2; Jer 14:8; Micah 7:7; 1 Sam 10:19; Deut 32:15; Judith 9:11). Other people, such as: Moses and the judges are also called ‘savior’ (Judges 3:9). However, it must be noted that they acted as deliverers or rescuers in the commission of God. So in their actions, people saw actions of God in delivering them (Judges 3:9, 15; 2King 13:5). And this title which is attributed to God is still maintained in the New Testament: “God is the savior” (Luk. 1:47; 1 Tim1:1; 2:3; Jude 25). Another way to express this designation, is the assertion of the New Testament writers that salvation comes from God (Luk. 1:69; 3:6; Acts 28:28; Rom 1:16; 1 Ptr 1:5). But sometimes the title savior refers to Jesus himself (Phil. 3:20, Luk. 2:11).

Salvation is a theological concept. Salvation, according to Paul, comes from God (Acts 28:28; Rom 1:16; 1 Thess 5:9). It is not a human effort but it is the grace from God, even though faith is required as a personal response to the gift of God. In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul clearly states: “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not from you; it is the gift of God; it is not from works, so no one may boast. For we are his handiwork, created in Christ Jesus for the good works that God has prepared in advance, that we should live in them” (Eph. 2: 8-10).

⁶Oscar Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament* (London, SCM Press Ltd, 1963), 239.

⁷Ibid.

1. Jesus is the Savior

In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul strongly states that those believing in Jesus are “being saved” by his cross (1 Cor 1:18-21). By saying this, Paul wants to emphasize the saving act of Christ by his passion and suffering until his death on the cross. By his death on the cross, “the new tree of life,”⁸ Jesus redeemed those who believe in him. In this way, Paul and other New Testament writers attribute to Jesus the title ‘savior’ which the Old Testament writers attributed to God because he will save his people from their sins.⁹ By proclaiming his suffering and death, especially by his death on the cross (Philippians 2:8), Paul underscores the radical solidarity of Jesus with all human suffering and he even surpassed it. In this point the second Vatican Council in its document *Gaudium et Spes* emphasized the saving act of Christ by shedding his own blood on the Cross for the sake of our salvation. “As an innocent lamb he merited for us life by the free shedding of his own blood. In him God reconciled us to himself and among ourselves; from bondage to the devil and sin he delivered us, so that each one of us can say with the Apostle: The son of God “loved me and gave himself up for me” (Gal 2:20). By suffering for us he did not only provide us with an example for us to imitate, he blazed a trail, and if we follow it, life and death are made holy and take on a new meaning.”¹⁰ “By his death, Jesus Christ freed man from death”¹¹ (1 Cor 15:56-57). Peter in his first letter states, “He himself bore

⁸ Igno Giordani, *The Social Message of Jesus* (Boston: St. Paul, 1977), 332.

⁹ Ibid, p. 242.

¹⁰ Vatican II, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes* (7 December 1965), no. 22.

¹¹ GS. 18.

our sins in his body upon the cross, so that, free from sin, we might live for righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed” (1 Peter 2:24).

The saving act of Jesus Christ is evidenced in his humbleness in accepting his undeserved death. For Dermot A. Lane, the suffering and death of Jesus is the only way in which the saving power of God can come about.¹² That is the way Christ underwent to save all mankind. This saving act of Jesus expressed who Jesus really is. He is the savior not only by name, Jesus means savior,¹³ but he is truly the savior. This is how Matthew explains the name of Jesus. According to Oscar Cullmann, the title “savior” which was conferred upon Jesus was based on the faith in him as the risen Lord.¹⁴ Indeed, the title was given after the disciples really experienced the saving power of God which was revealed in the death and especially in the resurrection of the Lord.

However, it must be admitted that during his public ministry, Jesus exercised salvation to the people who were in need, when he liberated them from their sickness by healing them, he liberated those who were enslaved by the power of evil (Matt 17:14-20), he cured them by forgiving their sins Matt 9:1-7, (Mark 2:13-17, Luke 5:17-25).

¹²Dermot A. Lane, “The savior of the World”, in *Priest & People*, Vol. 11. No. 4, (April 1997), 136.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ibid, 238.

2. Faith is Required for Salvation

Margaret Fraser says, “Jesus saves, but not instantly.”¹⁵ Salvation requires faith in Jesus, the son of God. Paul says: “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved” (Rom 10:9) also in Rome 1:16 he says: “For I am not ashamed of the gospel. It is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: for Jew first, and then Greek.”

In another way Paul asserts, “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” (Philippians 2:12). By saying this, he wants to state that salvation is a gift from God. It is grace. But it is also the obligation of man who receives it to maintain the grace of God. In the same line Thomas Aquinas, based on the axiom that there is no salvation outside the Church, asserts that to be inside the Church, it is not enough to have faith in the existence of God. God requires explicit faith in the mystery of Trinity and incarnation.¹⁶ By saying this, Thomas Aquinas wants to accentuate the active faith of the one who believes in Jesus. Meaning to say that it is not enough to believe that there is Christ who can save him or her, but more than that one must surrender oneself to Christ the savior. One must believe with one’s whole heart, not only in one’s mind. By asserting this, Aquinas expresses what Paul emphasizes in his letter to the Philippians: “Work out your own salvation in fear and trembling” (Phil 2:12).

¹⁵Margaret Fraser, “No Instant Cures,” in *Priest & People*, Vol. 11 no. 4, (April 1997), 150.

¹⁶Avery Cardinal Dulles, “Who will be saved?” in *First Things*, no 180 (February 2008), 119.

In this way, the believer lives in the hope of future salvation. Paul strongly asserts, “But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we also await a savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. He will change our lowly body to conform with his glorified body by the power that enables him also to bring all things into subjection to himself” (Philippians 3:20-21).

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