

# The Doctrine of Salvation

## Coherence, Comprehensiveness, and Theological Mapping

One of the central functions of doctrine is to serve as a gateway to the rich Christian understanding of reality and preserve it against distortion, reduction, and omissions. In the fourth century, Cyril of Jerusalem applied the term ‘catholic’ to the doctrinal witness of the church, arguing that Christian doctrine was characterized by its comprehensiveness, ensuring that the totality of the faith (and not merely some of its aspects) were proclaimed.<sup>1</sup> In this chapter, we shall explore further aspects of the function of Christian doctrine by considering the doctrine of salvation. This allows us to appreciate two distinct functions of doctrine: first, it helps us to *visualize* salvation—to grasp imaginatively, and not just rationally, the many facets of this concept, and how they are embodied and expressed in the life of faith. And second, like any good scientific theory, Christian doctrine helps us to comprehend both the coherence and comprehensiveness of the Christian vision of God and humanity by offering an epistemic coordination of a complex vision of reality—a theme which we began to explore in the previous chapter, but which needs more detailed consideration.

While New Testament scholarship has done much to recognize the importance of the *kerygma* as a distillation of the significance of Christ, it is important to acknowledge that this concept is variegated, shaped by different concerns, audiences, and social locations. As James Dunn points out, the complexity of the New Testament witness is such that we may have to recognize a series of *kerygmata*, rather than a single simple *kerygma*.

We must therefore beware when we talk of ‘the New Testament kerygma.’  
For if we mean the core *kerygma*, then we are talking about a kerygma

<sup>1</sup> Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* XVIII.23. For discussion of the issues, see Edwards, *Catholicity and Heresy in the Early Church*.

which no evangelist in the New Testament actually preached. And if we mean one of the diverse *kerygmata*, then it is only one form of *kerygma* and not necessarily appropriate or acceptable to the different evangelists in the New Testament or their circumstances.<sup>2</sup>

Dunn's observation helps us understand the role of Christian doctrine in discerning or constructing a single unified *kerygma* that enfolds and affirms these diverse *kerygmata*.

A good example of the form that this plurality of *kerygmata* takes can be seen in the 'soteriological metaphors' of the New Testament, which were intended to make the gospel intelligible within and applicable to a range of social and cultural places, far beyond that in which the foundational events of the gospel originally took place.<sup>3</sup> Christian doctrine coordinates a wide range of understandings of salvation, allowing these metaphors to be understood as different stretches of a continuous shoreline rather than as isolated and disconnected islands (p. 148). In this final chapter, we shall reflect on the role of doctrine in securing integration and coherence across this range of soteriological images. We begin, however, by reflecting on a concern that is often raised in discussions of the doctrine of salvation—the problem of 'theories of the atonement', which many consider to represent an excessive intellectualization of the process by which redemption takes place.

### On Theorizing the Atonement: The Problem of Intellectualization

Christian thinking about salvation has two main components: the question of how salvation is achieved, and the forms that salvation takes. The New Testament is more concerned to articulate the actuality of salvation than to offer an intellectual account of its mechanism or plausibility. For many later theologians, however, it is seen to be important to demonstrate the rationality of faith by showing that the mechanisms by which it happens are rationally defensible. Later in this chapter, we shall reflect on Anselm of Canterbury's exploration of this issue, which is clearly motivated by this concern. Yet

<sup>2</sup> Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament*, 30–1. For discussion of this point, see Lemcio, 'The Unifying Kerygma of the New Testament'.

<sup>3</sup> For a good overview, see Gorman, 'The Work of Christ in the New Testament'.

mapping and defending the rational hinterland of redemption does not require a monolithic account of the nature or means of redemption. As Paul Fiddes points out, Christianity has 'never made a single theory definitive for the meaning of atonement, and has rather relied upon a series of metaphors for understanding the work of Christ, derived from different social contexts'.<sup>4</sup> Christian theology is called on to identify and unfold the transformative potential for humanity of what the New Testament treats as 'a single, incomparable, final, and exclusive theological reality which constitutes, includes, and determines all other reality: Jesus Christ'.<sup>5</sup> Yet we need to reflect further on the language of 'theory' when applied to the atonement.

Many have expressed concern about the loose, untidy, and misleading phrase 'theories of the atonement', a theological innovation of the nineteenth century,<sup>6</sup> which suggests that a theology of salvation focuses primarily on the rationalization of the process of redemption. (It is no accident that theodicies, which offer rationalizations of the existence of suffering, became influential around the same time.) Where older dogmatic writings considered it appropriate to speak of 'theories of atonement', there has been growing concern about this notion in recent decades, not least because of its modernist intellectual emphasis on a (presumed) theoretical framework, and its reluctance to confront the rich diversity of soteriological images in the New Testament.<sup>7</sup>

This suspicion of the intellectual overreach of such 'theories' has been heightened by Emmanuel Lévinas, who raised some important concerns over the nature of theorizing itself, which are clearly significant for Christian reflection on soteriology.<sup>8</sup> Lévinas argues that modernist epistemological categories fail to acknowledge and respect the 'otherness' of that which is known; in attempting to 'grasp' or 'apprehend' the New Testament's rich

<sup>4</sup> Fiddes, 'Salvation', 180–1. For Fiddes's own approach to soteriology, see especially Fiddes, *Past Event and Present Salvation*.

<sup>5</sup> Harink, *Paul among the Postliberals*, 81.

<sup>6</sup> The term appears to be used for the first time in Ferdinand Christian Baur's influential work *Die christliche Lehre von der Versöhnung in ihrer geschichtlichen Entwicklung bis auf die neueste Zeit* (1838). For Baur's significance in shaping historical theology and particularly the 'history of dogma', see Zachhuber, *Theology as Science in Nineteenth-Century Germany*, 25–50. The subsequent history of German-speaking historical theology in the nineteenth century suggests the terms 'Theorie' and 'Lehre' are often used interchangeably to refer to an individual's views on the grounds and nature of redemption. See, for example, the technical terms (such as 'Satisfactionstheorie' and 'Versöhnungstheorie') frequently used by Karl Emil Benjamin Sulze in his review of dogmatic works published in 1899: Sulze, 'Dogmatik'.

<sup>7</sup> Such as Hultgren, *Christ and His Benefits*; Davidson and Rae, eds, *God of Salvation*.

<sup>8</sup> See the important study of Vanhoozer, 'The Atonement in Postmodernity'.

diversity of soteriological images and narratives, we destroy its 'otherness'. Kevin Vanhoozer neatly identifies the point at issue: 'The challenge for theology is to "theorize" the cross (i.e., in a doctrinal formulation) while simultaneously respecting it (i.e., as an "other" that eludes our conceptual grasp).'<sup>9</sup>

Yet while depersonalized and abstract 'theories of atonement' can be seen as a modern development, reflecting the rationalism of the Enlightenment,<sup>10</sup> attempts to make sense of the process of salvation without compromising its mystery can be traced back to early Christianity.<sup>11</sup> These pre-modern accounts of salvation respect the diversity of the biblical witness to the nature of the transformation of humanity through Christ, and avoid crude reductive intellectualizations of the issues.<sup>12</sup> They attempt to discern and explore the internal rationality of redemption, rather than to subordinate the means of salvation to human reason as 'the Supreme Court for all disputes (*oberster Gerichtshof über alle Streitigkeiten*)', as Kant suggested.<sup>13</sup>

In my view, the problem with 'theories of the atonement' lies mainly in a deficient understanding of the term 'theory', which is here understood and used in a broadly similar manner to the natural and human sciences. This, it must be noted, is not accidental; by the late nineteenth century, there was a growing appreciation within German academic theological circles of the importance of affirming that theology was *wissenschaftlich*, a discipline that fully merited its place in the academic culture of leading universities.<sup>14</sup> Yet this development effectively fractured the important link between the affective and intellectual dimensions of the classical Greek notion of *theōria*, leading to an imaginatively meagre and emotionally emaciated rational resolution of an intellectual puzzle: namely, how God could save humanity through Christ, a riddle that New Testament writers did not engage with, presumably because they thought it more important to proclaim the *actuality* of that salvation.

<sup>9</sup> Vanhoozer, 'The Atonement in Postmodernity', 369.

<sup>10</sup> For a corrective to such unduly rational approaches, see Crisp, 'Methodological Issues in Approaching the Atonement'.

<sup>11</sup> For example, Athanasius's defence of the rationality of the incarnation in *De incarnatione* involves reflection on how the specifics of Christ's person makes salvation a possibility for humanity. See Schneider, 'The Intimate Connection between Christ and Christians in Athanasius'.

<sup>12</sup> Calvin's account of the atonement illustrates this well. 'Calvin's presentation is, by design, a rhetorical performance that deploys a surprisingly broad array of categories and concepts' and thus avoids 'precipitous theorization of Christ's saving history' (Jones, 'The Fury of Love', 213). See also Anatolios, 'The Soteriological Grammar of Conciliar Christology'.

<sup>13</sup> Sterzenbach, 'Die Welt als Tribunal', 492–5; Friedman, 'The Court of Reason and Its Authority'.

<sup>14</sup> The best discussion of this point is Zachhuber, *Theology as Science in Nineteenth-Century Germany*.

Adam Johnson has raised several concerns about the notion of 'theories of the atonement', of which two may be noted here. First, the use of this term to refer to pre-modern theologians' reflections on the grounds of salvation is anachronistic. 'To speak of Calvin's or Irenaeus' "theory" of the work of Christ is to employ a category they themselves did not use, and therefore to run the risk of interpreting their thought in ways alien to their own intentions.'<sup>15</sup> In effect, this leads to the imposition of a modernist demand for rationalization on an earlier mode of theological discourse, which was much more attentive to the complexity of the issue, and its multiple aspects.<sup>16</sup> Second, Johnson rightly points out that the use of the heavily freighted language of 'theory' creates an expectation that there is a 'right' theory, which should be adopted by orthodox thinkers,<sup>17</sup> thus blinding us to alternative approaches which may offer a richer account of certain aspects of the Christian understanding of salvation.

The suffering Christ, however, serves as far more than the theoretical basis of salvation; he *embodies* the life of faith, acting as an exemplar and inspiration for those who seek to model their lives upon him, and who see him as a resource for dealing with the ambiguities of Christian existence. Yet Christ is clearly more than an exemplary 'narrative of a noble death',<sup>18</sup> in that the New Testament sees Christ's death and resurrection as initiating a new state of affairs. Yet while New Testament writers see salvation in terms of an objective transformation, it is quite clear that Christian thinking about the meaning of the cross cannot be detached from *affective* devotional contemplation of images of Christ suffering on the cross.<sup>19</sup> This reflection focuses on a *person*, on an *event*, on what happened at a specific *place* and moment in *history*, not an intellectual abstraction or theoretical framework. The image of the *suffering* Christ serves as a stimulus to reflecting on the problem of pain,<sup>20</sup> reassuring those undergoing suffering that their saviour

<sup>15</sup> Johnson, 'Theories and Theoria of the Atonement', 100.

<sup>16</sup> Johnson's point can be given added substantiation by considering Bernard Lonergan's reflections on rationalizations of salvation: Miller, 'Imitating Christ's Cross'.

<sup>17</sup> Some conservative evangelical thinkers, for example, insist upon a 'penal substitutionary' theory of atonement as the only valid interpretation of the New Testament's rich statements, and treat this as defining the bounds of evangelical orthodoxy: see, for example, Jeffery, Ovey, and Sach, *Pierced for our Transgressions*. For more thoughtful evangelical accounts of this approach and its place among other approaches to the atonement, see Holmes, *The Wondrous Cross*; Baker and Green, eds, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*.

<sup>18</sup> Doran, 'Narratives of Noble Death'. For reflections on the difficulties associated with the exemplarist account of Christ's death, see Crisp, 'Moral Exemplarism and Atonement'.

<sup>19</sup> For example, see Kirkland-Ives, *In the Footsteps of Christ*; McNamer, *Affective Meditation and the Invention of Medieval Compassion*, 1–25.

<sup>20</sup> Ross, *The Grief of God*. A similar process can be discerned in medieval imaginative readings of the gospel passion narratives: see especially LeVert, 'Crucifye hem, Crucifye hem'.

and God was no stranger to this experience, and thus could be a source of affectively mediated consolation in a time of need.

There is thus a clear need to recover the older understanding of *theōria*, widely accepted in early Christian theology and spirituality. Such a *theōria* weaves together an account of the new state of affairs resulting from Christ's death and the new way of living that arises from this transformation.<sup>21</sup> It holds together the rational and affective aspects of the Christian faith, which seeks to enfold and safeguard the complexity of the New Testament's account of salvation, rather than reduce this to intellectually tidy compartments. This same point is also important in considering the nature of salvation, to which we now turn.

### Coherence and Comprehensiveness as Theological Virtues

Christianity offers a plurality of insights concerning salvation,<sup>22</sup> which can be seen as an interconnected framework of images and ideas. Christian theology is under an intellectual obligation to give a comprehensive account of these 'diverse figures, images, and reasonings concerning divine salvation,'<sup>23</sup> ensuring that all are respected and integrated within a greater whole, without losing their distinct identity. Like a spider's web with multiple strands and nodes, this overall vision of salvation is given coherence and resilience by the theoretical bonds linking its components together. The New Testament tends to depict salvation using a plurality of analogies and metaphors, rather than developing a single abstract account of the nature of salvation. This suggests that the Christian vision of salvation is best apprehended—and mapped—through perception, imagination, and feeling, rather than purely through logical analysis.<sup>24</sup>

Coherence is widely seen as an epistemic and theological virtue. Early modern natural philosophers—such as the astronomer Johann Kepler—argued that the fundamental coherence of the natural order demanded a corresponding coherence in its theological and scientific representations,

<sup>21</sup> On the interconnection of *theōria* and *askēsis* in early Christian thought: see Coakley, 'Gregory of Nyssa on Spiritual Ascent and Trinitarian Orthodoxy'.

<sup>22</sup> For a global account of such concepts of salvation, see Green, Pardue, and Yeo, eds, *So Great a Salvation*.

<sup>23</sup> Blowers, *Maximus the Confessor*, 225. Blowers's account of Maximus's soteriology brings out the importance of respecting this diversity of soteriological metaphors.

<sup>24</sup> For some of the issues, see Viladesau, *Theology and Aesthetics*, 39–72. Richard Swinburne also considers the implications of revelation taking metaphorical forms, and its implications for its interpretation and conceptual coherence: Swinburne, *Revelation: From Metaphor to Analogy*, 38–52.

often using the musical image of 'harmony' to highlight the aesthetic aspects of natural ordering.<sup>25</sup> Kepler's astronomy, many have pointed out, was based on the theological presupposition of the coherence of the natural world,<sup>26</sup> leading him to search for the best mathematical representation of this ordering. Charles Darwin's theory of natural selection similarly seemed to make sense of certain biological observations that had to be considered as anomalies or inconsistencies within the framework of earlier theories of biological development.<sup>27</sup> To draw on William Whewell's image of a string of pearls (p. 119), a good theory is able to hold together a range of observations which would otherwise be seen to be disparate and disconnected.

The question of coherence is also important in Christian doctrine, as the work of Kathryn Tanner has made clear.<sup>28</sup> Yet the limits of theoretical coherence are well known, in that internal coherence does not necessarily entail that a scientific or theological theory will have a meaningful degree of traction on the real world. Karl Popper argued that while Marxism and Alfred Adler's 'individual psychology' were internally coherent, they seemed to be impossible to falsify by testing their correspondence with reality. The same problem is encountered with strong forms of 'scientism', which hold that the natural sciences alone are able to offer secure and reliable knowledge, in effect becoming enmeshed in a theoretical circularity that renders them impervious to criticism on evidential grounds.<sup>29</sup> For most philosophers of science, a viable theory should meet at least two formal criteria, one external and one internal: achieving optimal correspondence with what is observed in the external world on the one hand and being internally consistent on the other.<sup>30</sup> Both these fall into Larry Laudan's category of epistemic (or 'truth indicative') virtues.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Rothman, *The Pursuit of Harmony*, 33–69. For the importance of Kepler's Lutheran natural philosophy in this matter, see Methuen, *Kepler's Tübingen*.

<sup>26</sup> Hon, 'Kepler's Revolutionary Astronomy'.

<sup>27</sup> Cowles, *The Scientific Method*, 62–100.

<sup>28</sup> For Tanner's explorations of this theme, see Watson, 'Another Nature of Doctrine'; Helmer, 'A Systematic Theological Theory of Truth in Kathryn Tanner's *Jesus, Humanity and the Trinity*'.

<sup>29</sup> The philosopher Stuart Hampshire was particularly critical of the 'false epistemology' and 'naïve account of truth' that lay behind taking 'well-established scientific theories as the sole paradigm of literal truth' (Hampshire, *Innocence and Experience*, 10.) See further Kidd, 'Receptivity to Mystery'.

<sup>30</sup> I here follow Kenneth Hammond in defining coherence as 'the consistency of the elements of the person's judgment': Hammond, *Beyond Rationality*, 16. For the general principle, see Schindler, *Theoretical Virtues in Science*, 132–41. For an exploration of twelve potential criteria of theory choice (evidential accuracy, causal adequacy, explanatory depth, internal consistency, internal coherence, universal coherence, beauty, simplicity, unification, durability, fruitfulness, and applicability), see Keas, 'Systematizing the Theoretical Virtues'.

<sup>31</sup> Laudan, 'The Epistemic, the Cognitive, and the Social'. For discussion, see Douglas, 'The Value of Cognitive Values'. Laudan uses the terminology of 'empirical adequacy' and 'internal consistency' to designate correspondence with the external world and coherence of the internal world.

Yet another criterion is generally brought into play in scientific theory choice, often as a corollary of the criterion of ‘empirical adequacy’: how *comprehensive* is the theory? Is it able to enfold, encompass, and coordinate *as many observations as possible*? Some philosophers of science suggest that we may have to accept that the best we can achieve is ‘a complex plurality of perspectives’, rather than ‘one grand, simple, unified theory of great scope.’<sup>32</sup> In the following sections of this chapter, we shall reflect on how a Christian doctrinal framework is able to integrate a rich range of perspectives on the nature of salvation, holding them together in a broadly coherent whole which transcends the sum of its individual components.

In an earlier chapter (pp. 59–61), we introduced Mary Midgley’s important metaphor of mapping a complex reality, which allows complexity to be affirmed and respected, while at the same time disclosing the multiple individual elements of this greater coherent reality so that they could be individually appreciated. In what follows, we shall use this approach to examine the doctrine of salvation.

### The Doctrine of Salvation: Mapping the Benefits of Christ

In 1521, the German Lutheran theologian Philip Melanchthon—then aged 24—published his *Loci Communes* (‘Common Places’), a theological textbook that organized its discussion around central topics such as the identity and significance of Christ.<sup>33</sup> One phrase in that work stands out: ‘to know Christ is to know his benefits (*Christum cognoscere beneficia eius cognoscere*).’<sup>34</sup> To understand who Christ is, Melanchthon declares, we need to understand what he has done for us, rather than to speculate about the theological fine details of the incarnation.<sup>35</sup> Appreciating the Christian understanding of salvation involves identifying the ‘benefits of Christ’, mapping the multiple ways in which the New Testament understands Christ

<sup>32</sup> Douglas, ‘The Value of Cognitive Values’, 798. As examples of this approach, Douglas points to Kellert, Longino, and Waters, *Scientific Pluralism*, and Mitchell, *Unsimple Truths*.

<sup>33</sup> Kolb, ‘The Ordering of the *Loci Communes Theologici*’. For developments in Christological thinking during this period of the European Reformation, see Cross, *Communicatio Idiomatum*, 86–119.

<sup>34</sup> ‘Nam ex his propriis Christus cognoscitur, siquidem hoc est *Christum cognoscere beneficia eius cognoscere* non, quod isti docent, eius naturas, modos incarnationis contueri’. Melanchthon’s *Werke* in *Auswahl*, vol. 2/1, 7.

<sup>35</sup> For the significance of Melanchthon’s remarks, see Bauke-Ruegg, ‘*Hoc est Christum cognoscere beneficia eius cognoscere*’.

to have transformed human existence.<sup>36</sup> The individualism which flourished during the early modern period has unfortunately led some to develop highly privatized accounts of the gospel, in which the cross is seen as transforming the situation of an individual, often in terms of their juridical or relational status in the sight of God.<sup>37</sup> However, the biblical witness to this concept clearly indicates that there are both personal and communal aspects of salvation,<sup>38</sup> which most major historic traditions of theology are able to hold together.

The Old Testament affirms, not merely that the God of Israel is 'Lord', but that this same God is 'saviour'.<sup>39</sup> The New Testament is emphatic that something new has happened through the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, with the capacity to transform human life and thought—a transformation which is described using the unifying language of 'salvation'. So how is this transformed way of existing to be described? In exploring the conceptual contours of this transformation, New Testament writers drew on a series of metaphors and analogies that connected with the experiential world of their readers, enabling them to imagine or envisage what had happened to them in embracing Christ. Some were drawn from the rich heritage of Judaism, from which Christianity had emerged; others had their origins in first-century Graeco-Roman commercial, legal, and social worlds, familiar to so many readers of the New Testament letters.

Christianity did not exist in a vacuum, and therefore the Christian message of salvation was contextualized in language that was accessible to ordinary people. Imagery, metaphors and comparisons that these early Christians could understand and relate to became an important tool in the hands of the evangelists for explaining to these new converts what had happened to them when they ventured onto this new road with God.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>36</sup> For examples of such soteriological 'mappings', see van der Watt, ed., *Salvation in the New Testament*; du Toit, Gerber, and Zimmermann, eds, *Sōtēria: Salvation in Early Christianity and Antiquity*; Colijn, *Images of Salvation in the New Testament*; Greggs, *The Breadth of Salvation*.

<sup>37</sup> For the emergence of such forms of individualism, see Thiel, *The Early Modern Subject*. For their impact on Protestant theology, see Butner, 'Reformed Theology and the Question of Protestant Individualism'.

<sup>38</sup> See, for example, Colijn, *Images of Salvation in the New Testament*, 125–30.

<sup>39</sup> Müller, 'Treue zum rettenden Gott'; Moberly, 'Salvation in the Old Testament'; McFarland, *The Word Made Flesh*, 111–16. For this theme in the New Testament, see Green, *Luke as Narrative Theologian*, 261–82.

<sup>40</sup> Van der Watt, 'Introduction', in *Salvation in the New Testament*, 1.

These images became the basis of both teaching within the church and outreach beyond the church.

As Kathryn Tanner rightly observes, Christian claims are always constructed by ‘borrowing language in use elsewhere’, in such a way that their meanings are produced by subtly altering their original contextual meanings.<sup>41</sup> In this case, concepts and terms that have been ‘borrowed’ from Judaism and contemporary imperial culture have been repurposed for soteriological goals, often with shifts of meaning as a result. The diversity of presumed audiences for the New Testament’s proclamation of Christ may well underlie its plurality of accommodated formulations of the nature of salvation.<sup>42</sup> In this chapter, we shall reflect on the New Testament’s images of salvation, and consider both how they illuminate the identity and significance of Christ and how they can be woven into a coherent vision of transformed existence in which ‘different relations of connection or union elucidate one another.’<sup>43</sup> A theological system thus organizes and displays its foundational data in a manner that stresses its coherence and interconnectedness, where it might otherwise seem to be little more than a disorganized and unconnected accumulation of ideas.

The concept of salvation is, of course, complex. Many religions of the world of late antiquity offered the hope of salvation, while understanding this notion in radically different ways.<sup>44</sup> This same diversity persisted in later classical antiquity. For example, second-century Gnosticism used a soteriological vocabulary similar to that of Christianity, while understanding the basis and nature of salvation in its own distinct manner.<sup>45</sup> One of the central tasks of second- and third-century Christian theologians was to distinguish the Christian understanding of both the foundation and substance of salvation from its pagan and Gnostic rivals.<sup>46</sup> The core point was that Christ was both the ground and agent of the salvation that was promised and enacted by the God of Israel, but which was now extended in its scope and depth.

<sup>41</sup> Tanner, *God and Creation*, 26.

<sup>42</sup> For the range of anticipated audiences for the New Testament epistles, see Smith, *The Epistles for All Christians*, 33–63.

<sup>43</sup> Tanner, *God and Creation*, 35.

<sup>44</sup> As noted by Jim, ‘“Salvation” (*Soteria*) and Ancient Mystery Cults’; Witherington, ‘Salvation and Health in Christian Antiquity’.

<sup>45</sup> See, for example, van den Broek, ‘Gospel Tradition and Salvation in Justin the Gnostic’; Dubois, ‘Controverses sur la sotériologie des gnostiques valentiniens’.

<sup>46</sup> Irenaeus of Lyons played a particularly significant role in distinguishing Christian and Gnostic, especially Valentinian, understandings of salvation: see, for example, Sesboué, *Tout récapituler dans le Christ*, 125–63; Litwa, ‘The Wondrous Exchange’.

Early Christian theologians thus faced an apologetic and pedagogical challenge which remains relevant to this day. Apologetically, the issue was this: given that the term 'salvation' was widely and variously used in classical antiquity, it was necessary to clarify what was distinct about the Christian understanding of this notion. Pedagogically, it was important to both affirm the diversity of concepts of salvation found in the New Testament and show how they were part of a greater whole, rather than competing alternatives. This task was made easier by the New Testament's grounding of its range of understandings of salvation in the death and resurrection of Christ, which enabled these to be understood as a set of multiple outcomes of the work of Christ, all of which in some way transformed the believer's relationship to Christ. These concepts of salvation, though offering a range of metaphorical elucidations of redemption, all radiated outward from the same central hub—the death and resurrection of Christ.

As I noted earlier (p. 59), the metaphor of 'mapping' is helpful in visualizing this connection. A map enables a series of features to be seen as interconnected parts of the same landscape, rather than as independent and disconnected entities. This point was made by the novelist John Banville in reflecting on Kepler's achievement in offering a unified model of the solar system in his *Harmonia Mundi* of 1619.

[Kepler's] *Harmonia Mundi* was for him a new kind of labour. Before, he had voyaged into the unknown, and the books he brought back were fragmentary and enigmatic charts apparently disconnected with each other. Now he understood that they were not maps of the islands of an Indies, but of different stretches of the shore of one great world. The *Harmonia* was their synthesis.<sup>47</sup>

Kepler's theoretical unification of the solar system offered him an intellectual map that connected fragmentary and seemingly anomalous observations in a coherent account of reality. Similarly, the 'islands' of individual soteriological metaphors can be seen as different stretches of the same vast shore, without losing their distinct features, within a panoramic vision of salvation through Christ. Just as Kepler's theoretical account of planetary orbits enabled him to enfold a range of phenomena convincingly within a single framework, so Christian doctrine is able to accommodate a diversity

<sup>47</sup> Banville, *Kepler*, 179.

of understandings of the nature of salvation within a unitary account of its grounds, modes, and consequences.

The Pauline idea that through faith the believer participates in Christ indicates that the *benefits* of Christ cannot be detached from the *person* of Christ.<sup>48</sup> Calvin argues that faith unites believers with Christ, and as a consequence of this union they are both considered righteous in God's sight, and are gradually conformed to Christ in the process of sanctification.<sup>49</sup> Christ, for Calvin, can thus be seen as the agent, ground, and goal of salvation, which can be seen as a process by which we are conformed to Christ. 'What was his by nature became ours by grace.'<sup>50</sup> To receive Christ is to be united with him and thus to receive his benefits—benefits that are not detached from Christ's person, but are received with him through faith.

Yet this relational and participatory transformation of believers through Christ can too easily be reduced to impersonal and transactional categories. In what follows, we shall consider this problem.

### A Problem? Anselm of Canterbury on 'Satisfaction'

Anselm of Canterbury's influential eleventh-century treatise *Cur Deus homo* set out the idea that Christ's death on the cross can be understood as a 'satisfaction' paid to God by Christ, as God incarnate. For Anselm, Christ *as a human being* was under an obligation to satisfy God for the offence of human sin; yet Christ *as God incarnate* alone possessed the capacity to make this requisite satisfaction to God. The incarnation thus enabled the salvation of humanity through the satisfying of divine honour through a transaction between God and Christ.

Many have expressed concerns about this approach,<sup>51</sup> noting Anselm's apparent disconnection of the *merit* of Christ from the *person* of Christ. Anselm, it must be said, can be defended against some of the criticisms

<sup>48</sup> Aernie, 'Participation in Christ'.

<sup>49</sup> Billings, *Calvin, Participation, and the Gift*, 24–102; McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 221–6. Cf. Horton, *The Christian Faith*, 591: 'This organic union with Christ is far richer than any notion of the Christian life as an imitation of Christ... [B]elievers bear fruit that is not the result of their imitation of Christ's life but of their being incorporated into Christ.'

<sup>50</sup> Calvin, *Institutes* II.xii.2. For comment, see Williams, *Christ, the Heart of Creation*, 148–50.

<sup>51</sup> For a particularly hostile reading of Anselm's approach, see Rashdall, *The Idea of Atonement in Christian Theology*, 350–7. For Rashdall, Anselm's approach 'is marred by his tendency to treat sin simply as a personal insult to God, and the satisfaction for it as a tyrant's delight in feeling that His honour has been vindicated and His rebellious subjects compelled to lick the dust beneath His feet' (357).

directed against him.<sup>52</sup> His primary concern was to demonstrate the rationality of the incarnation, possibly to Jewish and Islamic readers,<sup>53</sup> not to develop a fully nuanced account of the grounds and nature of salvation.<sup>54</sup> If Anselm's account of the atonement seems somewhat coldly logical or impersonally transactional, it is because his emphasis seems to fall on uncovering the theological logic of this process, and the implied rationality of the incarnation.<sup>55</sup>

Anselm, however, perhaps overstates his case in this treatise, apparently assuming that God had to redeem humanity through the incarnation, as if this were the *only* way of securing our salvation. Wiser theologians who followed him pointed out that God had other options, while recognizing that this redemptive method was particularly appropriate to the human situation. Hugh of St Victor is an important witness to the theological importance of this point:

God could have achieved the redemption of humanity in a totally different manner if he had wanted to. It was, however, more appropriate to our weakness that God should become a human being, and that he should transform humanity for the hope of immortality by taking its mortality upon himself. In this way, humanity might have the hope of ascending to the good things of the one who descended to bear its evils.<sup>56</sup>

Yet a legitimate concern still remains about Anselm's approach. Christ's 'satisfaction' seems to be *reified* or *commodified* rather than *personalized*, in that it is conceived as a payment which has lost any direct connection with

<sup>52</sup> See, for example, Pouchet, *La rectitudo chez Saint Anselme*; Sadler, 'Mercy and Justice in St. Anselm's *Proslogion*'; Waldow, 'A Love Greater Than Which Cannot Be Imagined'.

<sup>53</sup> As Richard Southern rightly observes, a possible Jewish audience 'has been too much overlooked as a source of criticism and an incentive to inquiry'. Southern, *Saint Anselm and his Biographer*, 88–9. Cf. Asiedu, 'Anselm and the Unbelievers', for the suggestion that Anselm's argument is directed towards both Jewish and pagan readers. Demonstrations of the rationality of the incarnation can be traced back to early Christianity: see, for example, Anatolios, 'Faith, Reason, and Incarnation in Irenaeus of Lyons', 553–8.

<sup>54</sup> McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 86–92.

<sup>55</sup> Anselm had personal misgivings about being perceived as too rationalist in his theological apologetics. It is often overlooked that he initially circulated his *Proslogion* anonymously until Archbishop Hugh of Lyons demanded that he sign it: Niskanen, 'From Author to Authority', 8.

<sup>56</sup> Hugh of St Victor, *De sacramentis* I.viii.10. For Hugh's reflections on Christ's significance, see Coolman, *The Theology of Hugh of St Victor*, 83–102. The notion of 'fittingness' within the rationality of the atonement was more fully developed by Aquinas: see Johnson, 'A Fuller Account'.

the person of Christ. Perhaps more significantly, Anselm brushes away the question of how someone *benefits from*, or *connects with*, the satisfaction that Christ delivers, as God incarnate. It is certainly possible to argue that this could be seen as peripheral to his purposes in *Cur Deus homo*, in that his argument primarily concerns the rationality of the incarnation.<sup>57</sup> Yet the subsidiary question cannot be overlooked: in what way does the payment of a satisfaction to God change the status or nature of a potential believer? Vladimir Lossky's critique of Anselm at this point needs to be heeded, even if some feel he overstates his case. For Lossky, Anselm believed that the juridical image of 'redemption' constituted 'the very body of the truth, its "rational solidity," *veritatis rationabilis soliditas*, the reason why it was necessary for God to die for our salvation.'<sup>58</sup> Yet a more sympathetic reading of Anselm's *Cur Deus homo* would interpret it as a demonstration that 'the scriptural record is intellectually sound, necessary and fitting, and God's character merciful, gracious and wise.'<sup>59</sup>

This difficulty is at least mitigated, if not entirely removed, through framing salvation in Pauline terms as arising through the believer being 'in Christ', and thus receiving and participating in the benefits of Christ—benefits that are not detached from Christ, but are integral aspects of his identity.<sup>60</sup> For example, Paul insists that Christ *is* our righteousness: 'It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption' (1 Cor. 1:30). Christ does not bring to us a righteousness which *originates* from somewhere else or *belongs* to someone else, or which can be *detached* from his personal identity.

Calvin similarly highlights the interconnection of Christ and Christ's benefits in the economy of salvation: 'For someone who is justified possesses Christ... who as the Apostle teaches, (1 Cor. 1:30), has been given to us for our justification and for sanctification. And where there is this righteousness of faith, which we maintain to be freely given, Christ is there as well.'<sup>61</sup> These ideas were developed in later Reformed theology, which insisted upon each soteriological benefit being linked to the person and work of Christ.<sup>62</sup> The 'righteousness' which is bestowed upon believers is

<sup>57</sup> See, for example, Asiedu, 'Anselm and the Unbelievers'.

<sup>58</sup> Lossky, *In the Image and Likeness of God*, 97–110; quote at 101.

<sup>59</sup> The view of Sonderegger, 'Anselm, *Defensor Fidei*', 343.

<sup>60</sup> Gorman, *Participating in Christ*, 3–28.

<sup>61</sup> Calvin, *Reply to Sadoleto*, 43; in *Joannis Calvini Opera Selecta*, vol. 1, 470. For discussion, see McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 223.

<sup>62</sup> For a good discussion of this motif, see Fesko, *Beyond Calvin*.

thus not some abstract juridical concept, but a personal quality of Christ, which saturates their character and actions, and helps bring about the spiritual and moral goal of conforming to Christ.

### Imagining and Articulating Salvation: Four New Testament Metaphors

So how is this transformation to be visualized *imaginatively* and articulated *verbally*? If Christ is to be known through knowing his benefits, how can we ensure a proper appreciation of what these are, and how these enable responsible reflection about the nature of Christ? By exploring these questions, a theological pathway is opened up between grasping the change that Christ makes to the human situation and his identity. In what follows, I will reflect briefly on how four New Testament images of salvation, both individually and collectively, help frame or inform an understanding of the identity of Christ, and as well as on the nature of sin and salvation. Each image casts its own distinct light on the human predicament, and how it is transformed through Christ, making the complex notion of salvation accessible both to those within and beyond the church, which ‘actively socializes the salvific reality that attends Jesus’ universal Lordship’.<sup>63</sup>

#### Drawing Near to God: Salvation and Cultic Purity

In its first phase, Christianity sought to clarify its relation to the history of Israel, presenting itself as the simultaneous fulfilment and reframing of the hopes and mission of the people of God. Christ’s declaration in the Sermon on the Mount was widely cited in support of this view: ‘Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets. I have come not to abolish them, but to fulfil them’ (Matt. 5:17). The letter to the Hebrews developed an approach which was particularly influential, portraying Christ as having fulfilled the cult of ancient Israel—and in doing so, made redundant the practice of sacrifice and the institution and instruments of the cult itself.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>63</sup> Rowe, *World Upside Down*, 124.

<sup>64</sup> For critical accounts of the argument, see Mason, ‘*You are a Priest Forever*’, 8–39; Hooker, ‘Christ, the “End” of the Cult’. On early Christian views on animal sacrifice, see Ullucci, *The Christian Rejection of Animal Sacrifice*, 65–118.

Christ is presented in this analysis as both a purified high priest and a perfect sacrifice, framed by the context of the traditional 'Day of Atonement' cultic ritual (Lev. 16:6; 15–19; 32–33).<sup>65</sup> The fact that this ritual had to be repeated annually is interpreted as indicative of the failure of this cultic means for purging sin, partly on account of defects or impurities on the part of both the High Priest who offers the sacrifice and the sacrifice which is offered. The problem is *affirmed*; it is not possible to draw close to God without an effective sacrifice; the cultic solution to this problem, however, is *rejected*. While sacrificial language is not frequently used in Paul's letters, Christ is nonetheless presented as a 'sacrifice of atonement (*hilastērion*) through his blood' (Rom. 3:25), drawing on recognizably cultic sacrificial imagery.<sup>66</sup>

The letter to the Hebrews thus offers an interpretation of the priestly and sacrificial aspects of the Israelite cult which portrays the Levitical priesthood as a corporate 'antitype' of Christ. Christ is the High Priest whose 'once and for all' sacrifice has finally dealt with the problem of sin. The human situation is here depicted in terms of loss of access to the presence of God. Humanity is depicted as contaminated or tainted by impurity, and thus unable to draw close to God. Christ is the one who, by making a sacrifice on behalf of humanity, is able to secure renewed access to God through the removal of the taint of impurity. This theme has been developed intensively within the long tradition of Christian theological reflection. For example, Hans Urs von Balthasar interprets the sacrifice of Christ in terms of his experience of 'utter alienation and forsakenness, the very darkest point of human existence', resulting from Christ bearing this human separation from God.<sup>67</sup>

The original Day of Atonement ritual, as set out in the book of Leviticus, certainly provided a framework for early Christians to understand how Christ's death could be seen as fulfilling the practice of ritual sacrifice.<sup>68</sup> Such sacrifices appear to have come to an end with the destruction of the second Temple by Titus Vespasian in 70 CE, so that sacrifice no longer

<sup>65</sup> I here follow Cortez, 'From the Holy to the Most Holy Place'. For the development of this ritual, see Eberhart, *The Sacrifice of Jesus*, 14–29.

<sup>66</sup> The meaning of the Greek term *hilastērion* has been much discussed. In my view, a good case can be made for translating it as 'the atoning presence of God (*die sühnende Gegenwart Gottes*)', for the reasons set out by Breitenbach, *Versöhnung*. For a critical assessment of this view, see Collins 'The Metaphorical Use of ἱλαστήριον in Romans 3'.

<sup>67</sup> For a perceptive analysis of this point, see Fiddes, 'Sacrifice, Atonement, and Renewal'.

<sup>68</sup> For its potential application in modern secular western culture, see Maginnis, 'The Same Yesterday and Today and Forever?'

appears to have been a routine element of Jewish life by the late first century.<sup>69</sup> Some scholars consider the rabbinic project to have aimed, at least in part, to create a post-sacrificial version of Judaism.<sup>70</sup>

To speak of Christ's death as a sacrifice thus might risk linking it with a receding past, causing it to lose traction on the religious imagination. Yet early Christian theologians—such as Athanasius in the fourth century and Augustine of Hippo in the fifth—developed and refocused the idea of Christ's death as a sacrifice, subtly redirecting it in ways that downplayed its links with the Jewish cult, and enabled it to connect with the life of the church.<sup>71</sup> While there are some problems in communicating the significance of Christ in the twenty-first century using sacrificial language inherited from scripture and tradition,<sup>72</sup> it can be reframed and given a new lease of life.

So what is the importance of the sacrificial model, given its cultural distance? It is clear that early Christian writers saw this as a powerful means of expressing the unapproachability of God in the presence of sin, which could only be neutralized by a perfect sacrifice. The metaphor thus allocates Christ a central place in the drama of redemption, in that Christ's identity as the 'holy one' enables him to achieve a soteriological good which is directly connected with his person—namely, being able to draw near to God, as Christ had done. The work of Christ is directly correlated with the person of Christ; Christ does something that enables believers to share in his proximity to God.<sup>73</sup>

## Healing the Blind: Salvation as Restoration of Wholeness

The second soteriological metaphor we shall consider is that of the healing of human vision, which establishes connections between the healing ministry of Christ and its extension through the Christian proclamation and the ministry of the church. The fundamental theme is that of the

<sup>69</sup> I here follow Guttman, 'The End of the Jewish Sacrificial Cult'; Stroumsa, *The End of Sacrifice*, 66–9. While private sacrifices may have continued in different configurations, public sacrifices appear to have come to an end after the destruction of the Temple by the Romans.

<sup>70</sup> For this view, see Heger, *The Three Biblical Altar Laws*, 377–82; Halbertal, *On Sacrifice*, 37–53. For an alternative reading of the evidence, see Balberg, *Blood for Thought*.

<sup>71</sup> For the continuing theological interest in Augustine's approach, see Nunziato, *Augustine and the Economy of Sacrifice*.

<sup>72</sup> For some of the issues that need to be engaged, see Zachhuber, 'Modern Discourse on Sacrifice and its Theological Background'.

<sup>73</sup> As Karl Rahner points out, Christ's proclamation of God's ultimate proximity is intimately bound with his own person: Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 250–5.

limited capacity of human theological vision, arising partly from our creaturely status, and partly through the distorting impact of sin on the human capacity to see ourselves, God, and the world properly.<sup>74</sup> This approach to understanding Christ picks up on the gospel accounts of healing those who were visually impaired, yet sees this act of ‘healing’ as signalling far more than bio-medical change; it is about the relocation of someone within a wider cultural context.<sup>75</sup> Since a healed person is now able to do certain things that were not previously possible, their social function and status are changed.

The image of healing the blind is significant in illuminating the human situation, clarifying the nature of Christ’s identity and function, and emphasizing the importance of *theōria* as a changed apprehension of reality. We see as we are; through Christ’s transformative work, we now see the world in a new manner. Early Christian writers highlighted the role of Christ as a physician who was able to heal humanity at the deepest level. Cyril of Jerusalem made this point in his Catechetical Lectures: “Jesus” means “Saviour” according to the Hebrew language, but “Healer” in the Greek language, since he is the physician of souls and bodies, the curer of spirits, curing the blind in body and leading minds into light.”<sup>76</sup> Augustine of Hippo’s comments are also representative of this tradition: ‘this is Jesus, the great physician, who comes to the land of the afflicted in order to heal them.’<sup>77</sup> Salvation is about the restoration of wholeness, the deliverance from an affliction that we are unable to heal ourselves. For Augustine, such a medical soteriology served to undermine Pelagian aspirations to human salvific autonomy: we cannot heal *ourselves*; we need someone to heal us.<sup>78</sup> Christ, as *medicus*, is an embodied figure of wisdom with the capacity to diagnose and heal the human situation, providing both wisdom in our diagnosis and medicine in our healing.<sup>79</sup>

<sup>74</sup> Azadegan, ‘Divine Hiddenness and Human Sin’. For some helpful studies of how two leading Christian theologians engage this theme, see Cuneo, ‘Combating the Noetic Effects of Sin’ and Helm, ‘John Calvin, the *Sensus Divinitatis* and the Noetic Effects of Sin’.

<sup>75</sup> The importance of this point is highlighted by Kok, ‘The Healing of the Blind Man in John’.

<sup>76</sup> Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* X.13. See also Guroian, ‘Salvation: Divine Therapy’.

<sup>77</sup> Augustine, *Sermo* 229.6: ‘hoc est Jesus, medicus magnus, ad regionem veniens languidiorum’. For an excellent study of Augustine’s ‘medical’ Christology and soteriology, see Martin, ‘Paul the Patient’. Two earlier studies should also be noted here: Harmless, ‘Christ the Pediatrician’, and Schneider, ‘Was hat Augustins “theologia medicinalis” heute zu sagen?’

<sup>78</sup> Martin, ‘Paul the Patient’, 241–51. Martin notes how Augustine’s attention to the ‘therapy of the *Christus Medicus* takes on a striking intensity’ at this point. Cf. Kolbet, *Augustine and the Cure of Souls*, 19–40.

<sup>79</sup> For these issues in the classical period, see Lehmann and Lehmann, ‘La pharmacologie romaine antique’.

For the great Greek physician Galen of Pergamon, the healer requires a knowledge of 'the quality and quantity of the relevant remedies', as well as the ability to apply them to individual patients.<sup>80</sup> Yet the Christian understanding of salvation depicts Christ, not as a physician who uses someone else's medicines, or who provides a 'satisfaction' to pay someone else for the means of healing, but who is himself the medicine needed to transform the human situation. There is thus a seamless link between the person of Christ and the benefit that he brings—namely, healing.

Yet the narratives of healing those who are unable to see properly is supplemented by a second, related theme—namely, that Christ *additionally* illuminates reality, so that it may be seen more clearly. Perhaps this is most familiar through the famous declaration of Christ in John's gospel, 'I am the light of the world' (John 8:12). This rich and multifaceted statement is open to many interpretations, such as Augustine of Hippo's theory that human beings require divine assistance to see reality—including the world, ourselves, and God—properly, comparable to the illumination of a dark landscape.<sup>81</sup> Yet it also points to Christ's significance as being located at two possible levels: the healing of the internal human capacity to see our world and the provision of additional resources to further enhance that capacity to see.

Both of these themes can be extended to the ministry of the church. As Augustine himself pointed out, Christian ministry offers a therapy based on divine illumination and self-examination that corrects the complex of misguided beliefs and disoriented desires that distort human attempts to live the good life.<sup>82</sup> Augustine set out this approach in one of his sermons:

Brothers, our whole business in this life is to heal the eye of the heart in order that God may be seen (*Tota igitur opera nostra, fratres, in hac vita est, sanare oculum cordis, unde videatur Deus*). It is for this reason that the holy mysteries are celebrated and the word of God is preached, and it is towards this goal that the moral exhortations of the church are directed.<sup>83</sup>

<sup>80</sup> See the discussion in van der Eijk, 'Therapeutics', especially 288–97.

<sup>81</sup> Schumacher, *Divine Illumination*, 25–65. For the importance of this idea for spiritual perception, see Miles, 'Vision: The Eye of the Body and the Eye of the Mind in Saint Augustine's *De Trinitate* and *Confessions*'.

<sup>82</sup> Kolbet, *Augustine and the Cure of Souls*, 65–117; Ebbeler, *Disciplining Christians*.

<sup>83</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *Sermo LXXXVIII.v.5*. Cf. Martin, 'Paul the Patient'.

For Augustine, this 'eye of the heart' is weakened or incapacitated by sin, and requires healing.

We see here an immediate connection between the Christian doctrine of salvation and Christian doctrine in general—namely, that doctrine brings about a renewed, corrected, and expanded way of seeing and understanding God, the world, and ourselves. Christ heals our native *theōria*—our natural way of beholding the world, which we are invited to behold in a new way using a restored and renewed faculty of discernment, illuminated by the 'light of the world'. One more, there is a continuous Christological narrative arc to this process: it is made possible by Christ (through healing), it is assisted by Christ (through illumination), and it leads to seeing God more clearly through Christ, as God incarnate (a theme explored in the previous chapter).<sup>84</sup>

### Liberation: Salvation as Deliverance from Bondage

The social world of early Christianity had little difficulty in making sense of the ideas of bondage and enslavement, in that both were pervasive social realities.<sup>85</sup> The Pauline notion of 'redemption' is set against a social context in which perhaps as many as one in three inhabitants of cities in the first century were slaves, generally falling into four categories:

People that sold themselves into slavery (for example, to pay debts), people that sold their children as slaves (for example, to pay debts or to improve the child's situation), people that were enslaved by their creditors, and the exposure of infants who, if found alive, could be raised as slaves.<sup>86</sup>

These slaves could be 'redeemed' through a commercial transaction, by which their freedom was purchased by a benefactor.<sup>87</sup> A form of 'sacral manumission' existed, in which slaves were set free by being 'sold' to a god,

<sup>84</sup> Schneider, 'The Intimate Connection between Christ and Christians in Athanasius'.

<sup>85</sup> See, for example, Glancy, *Slavery in Early Christianity*; Glancy, *Slavery as Moral Problem in the Early Church and Today*.

<sup>86</sup> Tolmie, 'Salvation as Redemption', 255. For a fuller account of the context and substance of Paul's understanding of salvation, see Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 317–532.

<sup>87</sup> For the practice of manumission and its links with the gods in the classical world, see Zelnick-Abramovitz, *Not Wholly Free*, 69–99.

who did not avail himself of this right of ownership.<sup>88</sup> Christianity modified this image, seeing God as the one who purchased this freedom through a transfer of ownership. For Paul, God has set us free by means of Christ, in order that we might be 'adopted' as God's sons (Gal. 4:4–5). Our freedom has been purchased, rather than secured by force; Christians have been 'bought with a price' (1 Cor. 6:20; 7:23).<sup>89</sup>

The concept of 'redemption' illustrates the distinctive threefold movement of Christian soteriology, *from* a state of bondage or alienation ('sin') *to* a state of authentic existence ('salvation') *through* the person and work of Christ.<sup>90</sup> This way of thinking about Christ's role in securing the salvation of humanity may seem impersonally transactionalist in terms of its foundation, but is clearly personalist in terms of the transformed situation of those who have been redeemed, who now stand in a new relationship with Christ and God. Christ is portrayed as a liberator, someone prepared to do what it takes to secure the release of captives and those in bondage so that they may become what they are meant to be. Christian theologians subsequently explored the question of what it was about Christ that enabled the purchase of the liberation of those in bondage. Two main lines of argument were developed: that Christ's capacity to purchase freedom for captives rested on his status as God incarnate; and that it was grounded in his active obedience to God.<sup>91</sup> These are not inconsistent, and can be seen as two complementary perspectives on this question.

Yet the important point is to note that redemption is not simply about being set free *from* something (here, an obligation to an alien other), but is about being set free *for* something better (here, to relate to Christ). 'The final goal of sacral manumission is liberty, that is, "to belong to oneself," whereas the New Testament view of the matter is that the goal of redemption is to belong to Christ.'<sup>92</sup> The narrative arc is thoroughly Christocentric: Christ both makes redemption possible and is the goal of the redemptive

<sup>88</sup> Sacral manumission is found predominantly around Delphi in central Greece, where the practice is thought to have originated. For a discussion of the issues, see Hamen, 'Sale for the Purpose of Freedom'.

<sup>89</sup> It is important to distinguish the 'price' of redemption from the 'cost' of redemption: Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 227–8.

<sup>90</sup> On the concept of sin, see Crisp, 'Sin'; Gerrish, *Christian Faith*, 77–106. Philip Toynbee's comments are interesting here: 'By far the greater part of sin is simply the dark scurrying of minds hopelessly preoccupied with their own trivialities; thus blinded to the light, deadened to the life of God' (Toynbee, *End of a Journey*, 166).

<sup>91</sup> For some representative approaches, see Baylor, 'With Him in Heavenly Realms'; Hoyum, 'Exchange, Atonement, and Recovered Humanity'.

<sup>92</sup> Tolmie, 'Salvation as Redemption', 250.

process. The redeemed individual is not depersonalized through a transactional analysis of payment of the cost of liberation; rather, this individual is enabled to achieve full personality and dignity through being set free from a limiting and restricting place of habitation, and given a new sense of identity and personal place through a relationship with Christ.

### Adoption: Salvation as Familial Relocation

Some of the images of salvation used in the New Testament have clear links with the history of Israel—such as the cultic image of Christ as a High Priest who makes a sacrifice that enables believers to stand in the presence of a holy God, discussed earlier in this chapter. Yet other images are located within an intellectual framework that might have been unfamiliar and unintelligible to Jewish culture.<sup>93</sup> A good example of this is the image of ‘adoption’, which Paul uses at several points in his letters to express the distinction between believers as ‘sons of God’ and Jesus Christ as ‘the Son of God’ (Rom. 8:15; 23; 9:4; Gal. 4:5).<sup>94</sup> This metaphor is grounded in Roman adoption law, under which the head of a family (*paterfamilias*) was free to adopt individuals—almost invariably males—from outside his natural family and give them the legal status of a son.<sup>95</sup> This had three consequences for the adopted person. First, it meant that all his existing debts would be cancelled; second, he would be granted the same inheritance rights as the natural children of the *paterfamilias*; and third, he would take on the name of the adopting family and have the same social status as its other members.<sup>96</sup>

The metaphor offers an intellectual and imaginative bridge between Christ and believers, who become members of the same family, with important consequences for the social status, inheritance rights, and self-esteem of believers.<sup>97</sup> However, it does not appear to clarify the agency

<sup>93</sup> For possible Jewish roots of the ‘adoption’ metaphor, see Kim, ‘Another Look at Adoption in Romans 8:15 in Light of Roman Social Practices and Legal Rules’, especially 134–5. Most scholars consider the metaphor to originate from a Greek or Roman context. Heim argues that Gal. 4:5 and Rom. 8:15 seem to draw on the model of Roman adoption, whereas Rom. 9:4 seems to draw more on a Jewish sonship model, which is correlated with the Roman model: Heim, *Adoption in Galatians and Romans*.

<sup>94</sup> For the background, see Lewis, *Paul’s ‘Spirit of Adoption’ in Its Roman Imperial Context*, 43–96.

<sup>95</sup> Lindsay, *Adoption in the Roman World*, 62–122.

<sup>96</sup> Burke, ‘Adopted as Sons’. See also his fuller discussion in Burke, *Adopted into God’s Family*.

<sup>97</sup> In late classical Roman culture, the term *familia* extended to include those who did not share the same biological descent. Gardner, *Family and Familia in Roman Law and Life*, 114–207.

of Christ in this process, in that both the motivation and grounds of the decision to adopt lay directly with God as the *paterfamilias*. The image of adoption thus reinforces the significance of God as *paterfamilias*, while leaving the role of Christ in this process somewhat unclear.<sup>98</sup> Yet its intended significance is clear; it provides a plausible analogy, drawn from Roman cultural practice, for the process of the legal and social translocation of the believer from outside the people of God to within this family.<sup>99</sup> The trajectory of salvation includes a new relationship with God as *paterfamilias*, including a new familial location and legal and social status, and a redefined relationship with Christ as the 'natural' member of this family.

Yet the important point to appreciate here is not simply the positive social and legal aspects of this act of social reallocation and redesignation, but its powerful emotional impact on those who are adopted—the outsiders who become insiders, gaining a status and new identity which results in relational transformation and personal and social transvaluation. They *feel* accepted and valued, and potentially empowered. As Erin Heim points out, the adoption metaphor has the potential to generate feelings of solidarity and intimacy within the Christian community.<sup>100</sup>

The affective aspects of metaphors need to be noted at this point. There is a growing research literature that suggests that metaphorical statements are more emotionally engaging and imaginatively stimulating than their literal counterparts.<sup>101</sup> While the neurological basis of these observations requires further investigation, it seems that images of salvation are able to lodge themselves in the imagination, leading to a generative process of reflection with both cognitive and affective aspects. Soteriological metaphors such as 'adoption' may require cultural explanation and contextualization; yet once grasped, they possess the ability to make both intellectual and emotional sense of redemption—both in terms of how it makes rational sense of the

<sup>98</sup> It could be argued that humans are created to be adopted in Christ, so that the actuality of adoption represents the Christologically grounded fulfilment of humanity. See Heim, 'In Him and through Him from the Foundation of the World'.

<sup>99</sup> The *paterfamilias* played an important role in maintaining stability and relational identity within an extended family. For the development of this understanding of God in Augustine's social ontology, see Augustine, 'Pointing the Way for Peace and Justice'.

<sup>100</sup> Heim, *Adoption in Galatians and Romans*, 236–7; 323.

<sup>101</sup> Recent examples include Lubart and Getz, 'Emotion, Metaphor, and the Creative Process'; Sopory and Dillard, 'The Persuasive Effects of Metaphor'; Citron and Goldberg, 'Metaphorical Sentences are More Emotionally Engaging than their Literal Counterparts'; Aziz-Zadeh and Gamez-Djokic, 'Comment: The Interaction between Metaphor and Emotion Processing in the Brain'.

redemptive trajectory of God's action, and the way in which redemption leads to joy through liberation from bondage.

## The Coherence and Complexity of Salvation

Thus far, we have highlighted the rich complexity of the Christian understanding of salvation, exploring a representative range of New Testament soteriological metaphors. Faced with something *complex*, however, the natural human instinct is to reduce it to something *manageable*, synthesizing multiple meanings into the kind of univocal 'meaning' that was seen as an intellectual virtue in the bygone 'Age of Reason'. When dealing with the New Testament, however, it is imperative to respect both its complexity and the particularities of its narratives and metaphors, rather than creating a single master narrative that controls and subjugates its multiple voices and styles—a tendency associated with modernist patterns of thinking.

In this chapter, we have considered a small group of soteriological metaphors, making no effort to smooth out the ragged edges that seem to be inherent in the genre of metaphors or identify a single controlling metaphor which suppresses the diversity of representations found across the New Testament corpus.<sup>102</sup> It is, however, entirely fair to suggest that the theological task of organizing or correlating this plurality of images and concepts to give the 'best account' of their significance cannot be avoided. Some may rest content with contemplating an aggregate of narratives, concepts, and images; most, however, will want to find some way of finding, however tentatively and provisionally, a more comprehensive map which enables them to be coordinated and interpreted, thus reducing the danger of relying on 'outlier' passages or concepts. The potential dangers of such an approach are well known. It is, for example, too easy for the resulting map to be reified and pronounced to be authoritative, thus transferring the focus and ground of authority from the New Testament to the human construction of the map.<sup>103</sup>

<sup>102</sup> For example, while Luke and Paul both use the verb 'to justify' (Greek: *dikaioushai*), there is no compelling a priori reason that they should understand it in the same way: Singer, *Iustus, justice, justification*, 111–300.

<sup>103</sup> See the discussion in Winther, *When Maps Become the World*.

Earlier in this work (pp. 59–61), we noted Mary Midgley's emphasis on the complexity of the world. Midgley resists reducing the world to a homogenized uniformity, affirming and protecting the distinct value of each approach, while at the same time trying to glimpse the bigger picture of which they are part. There is a real danger that Christian theology will fall into precisely this trap, presenting an abstract set of theological generalizations which is inattentive to the specificity of the images and narratives that embody this greater vision of reality. The New Testament *depicts* salvation, offering rich visual imagery rather than precise conceptual statements. The doctrinal task is to develop an inferred—for it is not *explicitly* stated in the New Testament—imaginative or cognitive framework which can enfold and correlate a range of such images and models,<sup>104</sup> respecting their distinct identities yet seeking to affirm their mutual coherence and interconnectedness.

A particular difficulty arises from the nature of metaphors, which remain fluid and open-ended, to the irritation of modernists who value conceptual closure. This often leads to the privileging of certain metaphors and the suppression of others, motivated by a desire to avoid the complexity which inevitably ensues if all the New Testament soteriological metaphors are given their due weight.<sup>105</sup> There is, however, ample evidence that individuals are willing to work with an ensemble of metaphors in trying to understand complex situations, in effect being willing to live with these tensions without definitively resolving them.<sup>106</sup> The main creeds of Christendom articulate neither a theory of atonement nor a preferred metaphor of salvation, leaving this rich territory to be explored further by the community of faith in the course of its pilgrimage through history.<sup>107</sup>

Yet the recognition of the multiplicity of New Testament metaphors raises the question of how we are to frame this diversity: is it a question of

<sup>104</sup> For an earlier attempt to develop such an approach, see McIntyre, *The Shape of Soteriology*, 27–8; 53–67.

<sup>105</sup> Colijn, for example, identifies ten distinct groupings of soteriological metaphors in her *Images of Salvation in the New Testament*. Gerhard Barth suggests seven such metaphors (Barth, *Der Tod Jesu Christi im Verständnis des Neuen Testaments*), and Ingolf Dalferth four (Dalferth, *Der auferweckte Gekreuzigte*, 260). Other enumerations could be added: for example, McIntyre, *The Shape of Soteriology*, 26–52. Note also Colin Gunton's argument that such metaphors allow us 'epistemic access' to the transcendent reality of salvation: Gunton, 'The Sacrifice and the Sacrifices'.

<sup>106</sup> For some of the issues, see Fetterman et al., 'The Scope and Consequences of Metaphoric Thinking'.

<sup>107</sup> Note Paul Fiddes's reflections on the importance of soteriological metaphors in allowing the recontextualization of discussions of atonement in the different historical and cultural locations experienced by the community of faith: Fiddes, *Past Event and Present Salvation*, 4–13. A similar point is made by McFague, *Metaphorical Theology*, 34–7.

'relativism, pluralism, or complementarity'?<sup>108</sup> Willem van Asselt suggests that it is more helpful to think of these as pointing to 'different conceptual frameworks' within which to interpret the meaning of Christ's death. This approach, van Asselt suggests, allows us to speak of 'a kind of hierarchy of conceptual frameworks, in which the more developed conceptual frameworks integrate the less developed one without eliminating them'.<sup>109</sup> Yet, like any hierarchical framework, there are clear difficulties in determining the priority of its various elements, in that the New Testament does not itself give us any indication of how we should rank its metaphors.

The important thing is to respect and take full account of this diversity, even if the task of integration remains unfinished. In his account of the constructive and critical role of metaphors in thinking about atonement, Colin Gunton failed to extend his analysis to explain how such metaphors related to each other, especially the manner in which they might correct and recalibrate each other.<sup>110</sup> He rather identified and affirmed their individual identities and the trajectories of imaginative reflection they precipitated, without indulging in what he clearly considered to be the vice of the 'overschematizing' of theology.<sup>111</sup>

Where some thinkers offer a rational framework to integrate these accounts of salvation, it might be better to think of a theological 'imaginary' developed with the intention of holding significant ideas together. While this might lack conceptual neatness, it nevertheless possesses soteriological comprehensiveness.<sup>112</sup> The analogies of a patchwork quilt or bricolage are helpful here; both are human constructions that are 'combinatorial' in nature.<sup>113</sup> A bricoleur is someone who 'interrogates all the heterogeneous objects of which his treasury is composed to discover what each of them could "signify" and so contribute to the definition of a set which has yet to materialize'.<sup>114</sup> If the theologian is a bricoleur, the hope of achieving ultim-

<sup>108</sup> I here follow the helpful formulation of the problem provided in van Asselt, 'Christ's Atonement', 63.

<sup>109</sup> Van Asselt, 'Christ's Atonement', 64.

<sup>110</sup> This is an important aspect of Ian Ramsey's approach to theological modelling: see Scharlemann, 'Theological Models and Their Construction'.

<sup>111</sup> For Gunton's approach, see Harvey, *The Theology of Colin Gunton*, 130–45. Harvey suggests that this failure on Gunton's part may well be 'a sign that there is no ready way to carry this project forward' (139).

<sup>112</sup> In his discussion of 'catholicity', Cyril of Jerusalem points out that the gospel is able to heal every aspect of human sin: Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lecture XVIII*, 23; 26.

<sup>113</sup> Johnson, 'Bricoleur and Bricolage'.

<sup>114</sup> Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, 18. The original French term 'objets hétéroclites' acknowledges and protects the otherness of the various components.

ate closure of definition may be maintained; for the meantime, however, we have to learn to live with a plurality of rich yet unintegrated insights, believing them to be coherent and benefiting from the rich vision of salvation that they disclose, individually and collectively. A central task of Christian doctrine is to coordinate this array of soteriological metaphors, allowing us to grasp and appreciate both these individual doctrinal insights and the grander vision of reality that holds them together.

