

The Redemption

An Interdisciplinary Symposium on
Christ as Redeemer

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Redemption: Some Crucial Issues

GERALD O' COLLINS, SJ

Love bade me welcome: yet my soul drew back,
Guilty of dust and sin.

(George Herbert, 'Love (III)')

It is our universal duty as human beings to elevate ourselves to this idea of moral perfection [found in the Son of God as] the personified idea of the good principle.

(Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, 2. 1)

Three earlier 'summit' meetings held in New York treated issues concerning Christ 'in himself': his personal resurrection from the dead (1996), his eternal life within the Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (1998), and his incarnation (2000). The fourth 'summit' of Easter 2003 focused on Christ 'for us' or Christ as the unique redeemer for all humanity and the whole created universe. Between our third and fourth 'summits' the terrorist attacks in the United States of 11 September 2001, the new wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and the continuing wars in the Congo, the Sudan, and elsewhere violently tore humanity apart and showed more than ever the need for reconciliation on a world scale.

Even more than at the previous 'summits', the issues that could have been raised seemed endless. The vast amount of material on redemption from the scriptures and the entire Christian tradition, not to mention current theological discussion and official teaching, raises question after question. Since, however, my brief is to compose an introductory chapter and not a complete book, I have selected seven overlapping questions which serve to map some important features of the present landscape of studies on the redemption and which can

introduce the chapters that follow. First of all, I take up the seemingly endless evil from which the whole of humanity and the universe itself needs to be redeemed.

UNIVERSAL NEED FOR REDEMPTION

Christian faith has always considered redemption to be necessary for all human beings. The all-pervading presence of evil and sin established this universal need for redemption.¹ Human beings were understood to be enslaved by hostile powers (e.g. 1 Cor. 15: 24–5; Eph. 1: 22–3; 2: 1–2), to suffer in exile, and to live under the shadow of death. Although the scriptures can think of death as the natural, normal end of a long and fruitful life (e.g. Gen. 25: 7–11) and even a friend (e.g. Phil. 1: 21–3), they also present death as the effect and sign of sin (e.g. Rom. 5: 12) and as an enemy to be overcome (e.g. 1 Cor. 15: 26). The heart of evil, however, is human sin, a condition which affects all people (e.g. Rom. 3: 23) and proves a tyrannical master enslaving human beings (e.g. Rom. 6: 12–7: 25). At times the Bible also portrays our sinful condition as that of those who are defiled and need cleansing (e.g. Ps. 51: 2, 7; 1 Cor. 6: 9–11), or those who lack affection and compassion (e.g. Luke 16: 19–31; Rom. 1: 31).

Through St Augustine of Hippo (d. 430), Paul's teaching on the inherited need for redemption (Rom. 5: 12–19) became articulated as 'original sin', a doctrine often accompanied by speculations

¹ Some expect that, along with 'the pervading presence of evil and sin', I should stress the universal 'wrath of God against all evil and sin' (Rom. 1: 18). Certainly we should not ignore Paul here, but we need to watch our language and that of the NT carefully. Whereas the theme of divine judgement recurs in the NT explicit reference to God's 'anger' is largely confined to the Pauline letters and Revelation. Furthermore, 'anger' for Paul is mostly eschatological or something to come (e.g. 1 Thess. 1: 10) and, as in this example, has, as it were, a life of its own and is not called the anger of 'God'. Translations are prone to add 'of God' to such texts as Rom. 5: 9 where the Greek original simply speaks of 'being saved from the anger'. Within the course of history, 'anger' expresses the permissive will of God who 'hands sinners over'—in the sense of allowing them to experience the self-destructive alienation from God which they have chosen for themselves (see Rom. 1: 24, 26, 28). 'Anger' designates God's judgement on sin and abhorrence of sin. In the context of this chapter, it is important to insist that the NT never invokes God's anger in connection with the sufferings and death of Christ.

about a state of original justice (graced by 'natural', 'supernatural', and 'preternatural' gifts), which Adam and Eve lost by falling into sin. The theory of evolution and other challenges to the view that all human beings are descended from one pair of ancestors have led many Christian thinkers to revise their account of the human race and its fall into sin. The heart of Paul's teaching concerns, however, an inherited solidarity in sin which personal sins express and endorse, and which found abundant confirmation from horrendous human behaviour in the twentieth century. In their own secular way, the novels of Albert Camus (d. 1960) depict our universal lack of innocence (e.g. *The Fall*). E. L. Doctorow's recent novel, *City of God* (2000), uses a broad range of characters to set out the omnipresent human suffering which prompts a hunger for meaning and salvation. The fictional works of Flannery O'Connor (d. 1964) spell out even more vividly the ubiquitous reality of sin and evil that goes back to human origins.

In the Genesis story, although offered the creator's friendship, Adam and Eve substitute themselves for God by independently deciding on good and evil and determining their destiny for themselves. Alienated from God, 'the man and his wife' become alienated from one another (Gen. 3: 16) and see their world spiralling out of control into murder and vengeful violence (Gen. 4: 24). Adam and Eve symbolize not only the dignity of human beings made in the divine image and likeness (Gen. 1: 26-7) but also their solidarity in sin from which the Redeemer will deliver them.

At the start of the third millennium, any belief about the universal need for redemption faces at least three challenges. First, a Pelagian-style self-redemption has assumed a new face in the modern world. 'The best and the brightest' often pursue success, aspire to self-improvement, and simply shake their heads over any suggestion that they are somehow enslaved, defiled, and in need of redemption. Poles apart from King David, who after committing adultery and murder, confesses 'I have sinned against the Lord' (2 Sam. 12: 13), self-sufficient moderns will only allow 'I made a little mistake'. Sometimes they will not admit even that, but talk more vaguely: 'Mistakes were made'. Selfishness is sometimes so smoothly distributed over every aspect of their life that they can continue for years without appreciating their radical need for redemption.

Sadly, some Christian writers and leaders in the Western world even champion the idea of self-redemption. They seem to endorse the

notion, 'whatever our spiritual problems, we humans can deal with and solve them'. Let me give just one example, Bishop Richard Holloway. When he reinterprets the grace of justification, it becomes self-justification, the 'moment of self-acceptance' when we change, and accept ourselves 'utterly' and 'unconditionally'.² In place of our being reconciled to God through the mission of the Son and the Holy Spirit and so receiving peace (Rom. 5: 1–11; Col. 1: 20), Holloway's version of redemption is reduced to our making peace with ourselves or to the creed of self-redemption propagated, as Robert Kiely illustrates below, by Ralph Waldo Emerson (d. 1882) and other notable writers. Holloway's account converges with the 'karmic' traditions criticized below by Stephen Davis, who defends 'grace' and the faith that human beings are radically incapable of saving themselves.

Second, many Christians (and others) have come to acknowledge that redemption is needed not only because of personal sin but also because of sinful 'structures', deep faults in cultures and societies that institutionalize enslavement to evil, pervasive corruption, and selfish unconcern for the sufferings of masses of people. Sins are primarily personal, but they also create and preserve evil structures which seem to enjoy a life of their own in keeping whole populations indentured to evil.

Third, more and more believers have become aware that the scope of redemption extends beyond individuals and societies to the environment. In the face of rising, global-warmed seas and polluted atmosphere, the NT teaching about the whole universe hoping for reconciliation with God has assumed a new urgency (e.g. Rom. 8: 18–23; Col. 1: 20). A novel like Doctorow's *City of God* expresses and reinforces the widespread sense that humanity and its universe needs God's redemptive action if we are to survive and flourish. But how should we describe, albeit haltingly, what redemption is like?

² *Doubts and Loves: What is Left of Christianity* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2001), 124–6.

THE NATURE OF REDEMPTION

When questioned on the nature of redemption³ (or, what are often its equivalent terms, atonement and salvation⁴), one might answer by pointing to the goal of redemption, those finally redeemed and at home with God and the redeemed universe to come, 'the new heaven' and 'the new earth' promised in the scriptures (e.g. 2 Pet. 3: 13; Rev. 21: 1). Resurrected from the dead, the redeemed will be delivered from all the forces of evil and, purified from sin, will enjoy the utterly fulfilling happiness of God's loving company. Ancient and modern Christian witnesses have depicted the passage to final salvation as (a) a victorious liberation from evil, (b) the expiation of sins, and (c) the saving power of divine love.

Apropos of (a), NT and post-NT Christians understood redemption to break the curse of death and the power of sin, so that death has now been transformed into a passage from the dominion of sin into eternal, utterly satisfying life. The viciously cruel crucifixion of Jesus, while symbolizing the weakness and failure of suffering, became the means of human redemption. By dying and rising, Jesus overcame sin, evil, and their tragic consequences, and effected a new exodus from bondage. To celebrate this deliverance, Christian liturgies took over songs with which Moses and Miriam led the Jewish people in

³ See F. W. Dillstone, *The Christian Understanding of Atonement* (London: Nisbet, 1968); The Doctrine Commission of the General Synod of the Church of England, *The Mystery of Salvation* (London: Church House Publishing, 1989); C. E. Gunton, *The Actuality of the Atonement* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988); M. Hengel, *The Atonement* (London: SCM Press, 1981); A. J. Hultgren, *Christ and his Benefits: Christology and Redemption in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987); J. McIntyre, *The Shape of Soteriology* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1992); G. O'Collins, 'Salvation', in D. N. Freedman (ed.), *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 6 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1992), v. 907-14; B. Sesboué, *Jésus-Christ l'unique médiateur: Essai sur la rédemption et le salut*, 2 vols. (Paris: Desclée, 1988-91); R. Schwager, *Jesus in the Drama of Salvation: Toward a Biblical Doctrine of Redemption* (New York: Crossroad, 1999); R. Swinburne, *Responsibility and Atonement* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989).

⁴ Usually 'atonement' is used more narrowly than 'redemption' or 'salvation', and expresses the means of redemption or salvation. Christians declare: 'it is through the atoning death of Jesus that we are redeemed/saved from our sins'. One may speak of coming (and complete) redemption or salvation for human kind and the created world but not of their coming atonement. Both salvation and redemption point to an entire programme which has been, is being, and will be accomplished, and which entails explaining all that being saved/redeemed from and being saved/redeemed for includes.

praising God for their victorious liberation from slavery (Exod. 15: 1–21). While the story of the exodus from Egypt was the prototype *par excellence* of such redemptive deliverance and the new life of freedom, from the earliest times Christian writers and artists found other precedents in such OT stories as Noah and his family being delivered from the flood, Daniel from the lions' den, the three youths from the fiery furnace, Jonah from the great fish, and Susannah from the two wicked elders. So much, briefly, about (a); I return below to (b) and (c), two other major ways of interpreting the passage to salvation.

The whole process of salvation has often been summarized, especially in Eastern Christianity, as 'deification', understood to be a sharing, not in the divine substance, but in the divine life or the loving relationship of the Son to the Father in the Holy Spirit. St Athanasius (d. 373) and other ancient writers interpreted in that way the bold language of 2 Peter 1: 4. Thus the ultimate *eudaimonia* of the redeemed will be seeing God 'face to face', a 'flourishing' that goes beyond the highest happiness imagined by Aristotle or any of the other remarkable thinkers of human history.⁵ Final redemption will complete the being made 'in the image and likeness' of God (Gen. 1: 26–7). This becoming 'like God' will make redeemed men and women perfectly good, with the qualification that in this 'deification' such properties will belong to them contingently and not essentially.

With all that said about those finally redeemed, we are frustrated by our lack of direct access to their condition. We cannot answer the question: what does it feel like to be definitively redeemed and with God? At best we may point to shining examples of heroic men and women, whose lives reveal to some degree what it is like to be delivered from evil, purified from sin, and taken into the loving company of the tripersonal God. The lives of such saintly persons indicate partially and in advance what, through the whole process of redemption, we are saved from and what we are to be saved for.

⁵ See A. Kenny, *Aristotle on the Perfect Life* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992); id., *Essays on the Aristotelian Tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001), 17–46. Thomas Aquinas relates some of Aristotle's texts to the Christian doctrine of the everlasting happiness of the blessed in heaven (*ST II–II*, 2. 7). Aristotle deserved the 'compliment': in the *Eudemean Ethics* and *Nicomachean Ethics* he had linked perfect happiness to friendship and, even more, to the contemplative life of the intellect. He held that the life of the mind is the highest of which we human beings are capable.

The experience of full redemption eludes our grasp, and the tentative language we use calls for close scrutiny. Unlike the doctrine of, and terminology for, the one person of the Son of God in two natures (i.e. Christ 'in himself'), the redemption (i.e. Christ 'for us') did not provoke theological debate and teaching from the first seven general councils of the church. All parties simply took for granted that it was only through Christ that human beings could be saved, and that the purpose of everything from his incarnation to his final coming was, as the creeds stated, 'for us and for our salvation'. One enduring result of this lopsided development has been that, whereas theology and official teaching have tended to watch carefully talk about Christ 'in himself', talk about Christ 'for us' has at times suffered from harmful imprecision. Let us take some examples: first 'redemption' itself, then 'satisfaction', 'propitiation', 'sacrifice', and 'love'.⁶

THE LANGUAGE OF REDEMPTION

Two OT terms had a special role in creating a background for the NT and post-NT language of 'redemption' or 'buying back': *padhah* (to ransom or to free slaves by payment) and *ga'al* (to play the role of a relative or vindicator; to fulfil a promise or pledge). In his chapter below, Tom Wright correctly insists that the divine rescue of the Israelites from the slave-market of Egypt gave a specifically Jewish meaning to the language of redemption when used by Paul. The manumission of slaves and the ransoming of prisoners of war (out of captivity by a purchasing agent) also helped to shape the cultural setting in which NT Christians proclaimed Christ as 'redeeming', 'buying', 'ransoming', 'freeing', or 'liberating' 'us', 'you', 'his people', 'Israel', 'many', or 'all'. In a fictitious purchase by some divinity, owners would come with slaves to a temple, sell them to a god, and from the temple treasury receive money which the slaves had

⁶ On 'redemption', 'sacrifice', and 'love', see A. Hastings, A. Mason, and H. Pyper (eds.), *The Oxford Companion to Christian Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). Ibid. for such related terms as 'anger', 'atonement, theories of', 'covenant', 'creation', 'cross and crucifixion', 'death', 'devil', 'evil, problem of', 'fall', 'grace', 'Holy Spirit', 'humanity', 'justification', 'priesthood', 'punishment', 'reconciliation', 'resurrection', 'sacrifice', 'salvation', 'sanctification', and 'sin'. See also two issues of *Interpretation*: 'Atonement and Scripture', 52/1 (1998) and 'Atonement and the Church', 53/1 (1999).

previously deposited there out of their savings. Freed from their previous masters, the slaves became the 'property' of the god. At the temple of Apollo in Delphi and elsewhere inscriptions record how 'so and so [the slave being named] was sold to Apollo at the price of [the sum being specified] for freedom'. Christians knew themselves to be redeemed *from* the slavery of sin and purchased *for* God, so that they might become his 'slaves' or free children.

This kind of language could still have provided a lively image in the thought world of such early Christian communities as that in Corinth, while being more or less a dead metaphor in centres where few or no slaves and/or ex-slaves belonged to the community. St Paul writes of the human race being, along with the whole creation, 'in bondage to decay' and 'groaning' for 'redemption' (Rom. 8: 18–23), of Jews being slaves to the law (Gal. 4: 1–7; 5: 1), and of Gentiles being enslaved to 'gods' and 'elemental spirits' (Gal. 4: 8, 9). Christ has actually and not just fictitiously 'redeemed' or 'bought' us (Gal. 3: 13; 4: 4). At times the New Testament authors speak of Christ 'buying' us at 'a price' (1 Cor. 6: 20; 7: 23), 'ransoming' us with his 'precious blood' (1 Pet. 1: 18–19), 'giving himself to ransom/free us' (Tit. 2: 14), and 'giving his life as a ransom (*lutron* or *antilutron*) for many' (Mark 10: 45; 1 Tim. 2: 6). But nowhere does the NT speak of this 'price' or 'ransom' being paid to someone (e.g. God) or to something (e.g. the law).

In the first millennium and later, some Christians expanded the content of this metaphor⁷, taking 'ransom' as if it described literally some kind of transaction, even a specific price paid to someone. They correctly recognized the hopelessly enslaved situation of sinful human beings, who were set free only by Christ's atrocious death. But in treating the metaphor literally and failing to observe its limits, they even spoke of human beings as being in the possession of devil, whose 'rights' of ownership were 'respected' by the price of Jesus'

⁷ As Gordon Fee illustrates in his chapter, along with the primary language of 'redemption' Paul uses other such metaphors as expiation and self-sacrificing love to express the saving effects of the Christ-event; for a full list of Paul's version of these effects, see J. A. Fitzmyer, *Romans* (The Anchor Bible, 33; New York: Doubleday, 1993), 116–24. The use of metaphorical language suggests how problematic it is to express redemption in literal speech: the use of a plurality of metaphors indicates how no metaphor by itself is even minimally adequate. The role of paradoxes in Paul's letters (see J.-N. Aletti's chapter below) reveals the difficulty the Apostle felt in stating God's redemptive activity in any speech.

blood being paid to release them from bondage.⁸ For the NT, however, the act of redemption was 'costly', in the sense that it cost Christ his life. The beneficiaries of this redeeming action became 'free' (e.g. Gal. 5: 1) or, by coming under Christ's sovereignty, 'slaves' to him (e.g. Rom. 1: 1; 1 Cor. 7: 22). Nowhere does the NT accept or imply that Satan has any rights over human beings. The metaphor of 'redemption' represents Christ as effecting a deliverance but not as literally paying a price to anyone. In developing his logically structured theory or fully worked out understanding of redemption, St Anselm of Canterbury (d. 1109) vigorously opposed any talk of the devil's 'rights'. Through *Cur Deus Homo?* Anselm established 'satisfaction' as an enduringly standard term for Christ's redemptive work when understood as expiation.

'Every sin,' Anselm argues, 'must be followed either by satisfaction or by punishment' (*Cur Deus Homo?*, 1. 15). God does not wish to punish but to see the good project of creation 'completed' (2. 5). Satisfaction, Anselm insists, requires from human beings not only that they should stop sinning and seek pardon but also that they do something over and above existing obligations: namely, a work of supererogation that will satisfy for the offence. However, since all sin offends the honour of the infinite God, the reparation must have infinite value—something of which finite human beings are incapable. Moreover, they have nothing extra to offer God, since they already owe God everything. Thus Anselm concludes to the 'necessity' of the incarnation. Only the *God-man* can offer something of infinite value; the hypostatic union confers such value on the human acts of Christ. Only the *God-man* has something to offer; being without sin, Christ is exempt from the need to undergo death and hence can freely offer the gift of his life as a work of reparation for the whole human race.

Anselm laid a fresh stress on the humanity and human freedom of Christ, who spontaneously acts as our representative and in no way is to be construed as a penal substitute who passively endured sufferings to appease the anger of a 'vindictive' God. Anselm's theology of satisfaction has often been criticized for being juridical and 'Roman'. In fact, its cultural roots were found rather in monasticism

⁸ St Gregory of Nazianzus vigorously protested against the whole idea of divine redemption as a ransom paid to the devil (*Oratio* 45. 22), but his protests failed to carry the day.

and the feudal society of northern Europe. So far from being a legal or private matter, the 'honourable' service owed by monks to their abbots and vassals to their lords was a religious and social factor that guaranteed order, peace, and freedom. Denying the honour due to superiors meant chaos. Anselm's thoroughly logical version of redemption may be vulnerable on other grounds,⁹ and one may prefer other language for interpreting the 'expiatory' aspect of redemption. But such preferences can never be an excuse for misrepresenting his theology of satisfaction, which still retains its grandeur and fascination.¹⁰

The expiatory dimension of redemption has, from the start of Christianity, been expressed in terms of Christ the great high priest and victim offering a unique *sacrifice* that once and for all expiated sins (Heb. 2: 17–18) and brought a new and final covenant relationship between God and human beings. Some Christians, especially from the late Middle Ages, have interpreted this to mean that Jesus was a *penal substitute* who was personally burdened with the sins of humanity, judged, condemned, and deservedly punished in our place: through his death he satisfied the divine justice and *propitiated* an angry God. Anselm's theory about Jesus offering satisfaction to meet the requirements of commutative justice and set right a moral order damaged by sin acquired, quite contrary to Anselm's explicit statements, elements of punishment and vindictive justice. Such penal additions to Anselm's theology of satisfaction turn up in the Council of Trent's teaching on the sacrifice of the mass (from its twenty-third session of 1562) and, even more, in the writings of Martin Luther and John Calvin. Such Catholic preachers as J. B. Bossuet (d. 1704) and L. Bourdaloue (d. 1704) also spoke of God's vengeance and anger being appeased at the expense of his crucified Son. As a victim of divine justice, Christ was even held to suffer the pains of the damned. Themes from this penal substitutionary view linger on in the works of Hans Urs von Balthasar, Wolfhart Pannenberg, and some other twentieth-century theologians¹¹

Many Christian thinkers reject this language as entailing an unacceptable vision of God, supported by misinterpretations of the

⁹ See G. O'Collins, *Christology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 200–1.

¹⁰ See P. Gilbert, H. Kohlenberger, and E. Salmann (eds.), *Cur Deus Homo* (Studia Anselmiana, 128; Rome: S. Anselmo, 1999); Sesboué, *Jésus-Christ l'unique médiateur*, 328–45.

¹¹ See Sesboué, *Jésus-Christ l'unique médiateur*, 67–79; 360–5.

scapegoat ceremony on the Jewish Day of Expiation, of the fourth suffering servant song (Isa. 52: 13–53: 12), of Jesus' cry of abandonment on the cross, and of some dramatic passages from Paul's letters (e.g. 2 Cor. 5: 21; Gal. 3: 13).¹² Victimized by human violence and not by a vindictive God, the non-violent Christ, through his self-sacrificing death as our representative (not penal substitute), removed the defilement of sin and restored a disturbed moral order. In developing his ideas on cultures and Christ as the non-violent victim of collective violence, René Girard has rightly drawn attention to some processes involved in human sin and violence.¹³ Nevertheless, one must insist that the NT never speaks of redemption altering God's attitudes towards human beings and reconciling God to the world. The sending or coming of God's Son and the Spirit presupposes God's loving forgiveness. Through Christ and the Spirit, God brings about redemptive reconciliation by renewing us; it is our resistance to God that needs to be changed. Both John (e.g. John 3: 16; 1 John 4: 10) and Paul (e.g. Rom. 8: 6–11; 2 Cor. 5: 18–21) bear eloquent witness to the loving initiative of God the Father in the whole story of the redemptive reconciliation of human beings and their world. Years before Paul and John wrote, Jesus summed up his vision of God in the parable of the prodigal son, better called the parable of the merciful father (Luke 15: 11–32). Any penal substitution seems incompatible with the central message of that parable. But to argue this in detail would require examination of a full range of NT texts.

Some writers (as we saw above) and communities still maintain the language of God's 'anger' being propitiated and 'appeased' by Christ our 'penal substitute'.¹⁴ Thus the New International Version, after translating *hilasterion* in Romans 3: 25 as 'a sacrifice of atonement', adds in a note an alternate translation: 'as the one

¹² In his chapter, J.-N. Aletti warns against using 2 Cor. 5: 21 to support the idea of a real transfer of sin and curse to Christ. By itself that verse does not represent fully Paul's soteriology, and its paradoxical nature defies straightforward exegesis. Tom Wright, however, argues on the basis of Rom. 2: 17–3: 9 and Gal. 3: 10–13 that Paul held that Jesus took 'Israel's curse on himself'. With reference to Rom. 8: 3, Wright understands Paul to say that God punished sin and did so in the flesh of Jesus.

¹³ For a bibliography on Girard, see R. Schwager, *Must there Be Scapegoats? Violence and Redemption in the Bible* (Leominster: Gracewing, 2nd edn., 2000); J. G. Williams (ed.), *The Girard Reader* (New York: Continuum, 1997), 295–302.

¹⁴ In his chapter, Gordon Fee marshals the difficulties against the view that 'God's wrath against sin' is propitiated, and places the language of 'wrath' correctly. Those who transgress the law become guilty, are therefore 'destined for wrath', but are forgiven by God.

who would turn aside his wrath, taking away sin'. The NIV seems guided by doctrinal convictions when thus using twelve words (in what looks like a commentary) to translate a single Greek term, which is normally rendered 'means of expiation'. Not surprisingly the NIV study edition takes 'the fuller meaning' of the Greek *hilasmos* in 1 John 2: 2 to be 'the one who turns aside God's wrath' and adds: 'God's holiness demands punishment for man's sin. God, therefore, out of love (1 John 4: 10; John 3: 16), sent his Son to make substitutionary atonement for the believer's sin. In this way the Father's wrath is propitiated (satisfied, appeased); his wrath against the Christian's sin has been turned away and directed toward Christ.' Undoubtedly the NIV and the Christian traditions it represents are right in taking seriously the terrible evil of human sin. But attributing to the NT the notion of God's anger being 'propitiated' or 'appeased' by that anger being directed against his Son does not express what Paul and John write. In Romans 3, it is *God* who lovingly provides the *hilasterion* or means of expiating the corruption of sin and destroying its power. In *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* James Dunn distances himself from talk of appeasement and propitiation of divine anger, but rightly shows how that does not involve dropping the language of 'sacrifice',¹⁵ as Ernst Käsemann asserted.¹⁶ Sacrificial language may be open to abuse, but it should not therefore be abandoned.¹⁷

The language of sacrifice expresses the costly self-giving of Christ who let himself be victimized by the powers of this world. Over and over again, the Synoptic Gospels show us how he valued every individual, and not simply the socially advantaged (e.g. Mark 10: 21), as unique and irreplaceable. Through love Christ made himself vulnerable, and his loving self-sacrifice produced life and growth; this sacrifice brought a renewed communion between human beings and the tripersonal God.¹⁸ Through a sacrifice which comprises Christ's death and resurrection, along with the coming of the Holy Spirit, human beings were made fit to enter a new and loving fellowship

¹⁵ (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998), 212–33.

¹⁶ In *Jesus Means Freedom* 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' (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970), 114.

¹⁷ See the Doctrine Commission, *Mystery of Salvation*, 114–17.

¹⁸ In expounding Christ's passion as a 'meritorious sacrifice', Thomas Aquinas stresses how, from beginning to end, it was inspired by love (*ST* 3. 48. 3 *resp.*).

with the all-holy God. Here the root of a term proves illuminating: by Christ's *sacri-ficium* or 'holy making', men and women have been made holy. His 'sacri-fice' enables them to join him in entering the very sanctuary of God (Heb. 9: 11–12, 24) and enjoy the heavenly 'banquet' (e.g. Matt. 8: 11). With this support for (loving self-)sacri-fice, we move from the language of redemption to the Redeemer.

THE REDEEMER

While never giving Christ the title 'Redeemer', the NT calls him 'our redemption (*apolutrosis*)' (1 Cor. 1: 30) and sixteen times names him 'Saviour' (e.g. Luke 2: 11). Redemptive activity, to be summarized as deliverance from evil, expiating or cleansing from sin, and changing and reconciling through love, marks the whole story of Jesus from his incarnation through to his resurrection from the dead and coming of the Spirit. Christian writers, in particular the Greek Fathers, have associated Christ's redemptive work with the incarnation, the 'becoming flesh' of the Son of God, from whose fullness we receive 'grace upon grace' (John 1: 14, 16). In an *admirabile commercium* or 'wonderful exchange', first formulated by St Irenaeus (d. c.200), 'God (or the Son of God or the Word) became human, in order that we humans might become God (or be divinized).' Later Western devotional practices and writers, from Anselm of Canterbury, the Protestant Reformers, and beyond, have in various ways linked deliverance from the power of sin and death with Christ's crucifixion. Eastern Christians normally go beyond the crucifixion to insist as well on the redemptive impact of Christ's descent to the dead, his resurrection, and the coming of the Holy Spirit.

Whenever the treatment of Christ's redemptive work skips straight from the incarnation to his death and resurrection, we miss the historical mindset of the Redeemer himself—something which can be gleaned from a discerning and critical use of the Gospels. First of all, during his ministry Jesus presented his activity in the service of the present and coming divine kingdom as the victorious conflict with satanic powers (e.g. Mark 3: 27). He taught his followers to pray for deliverance 'from the evil one' (Matt. 6: 13; Mark 14: 38; Luke 11: 4). Jesus knew his redemptive work to involve liberation from sin and evil. Second, at the Last Supper he initiated the way of interpreting his death and resurrection as expiating sin which defiles human

beings and damages their relationship with God. His words, 'this is my body for you' and 'this is the blood of the covenant poured out for many' (1 Cor. 11: 24; Mark 14: 24), and his prophetic gestures in breaking the bread and sharing the cup signalled, among other things, a cleansing from the defilement of evil and a new communion of life with God (1 Cor. 10: 14–17). Paul's words about Christ 'expiating sins in his blood' (Rom. 3: 25) rightly express what Jesus had already intended and done at the Last Supper.

Third, many of the actions and words of Jesus during his ministry remain almost unintelligible unless we acknowledge his redemptive love. Thus the longest and most beautiful parable, which shows a father dealing so compassionately with the painful difficulties created by the sinfulness of his two sons, never mentions love explicitly, but points transparently to the divine love at work through Jesus (Luke 15: 11–32). He presents himself as the teacher who wants to found a new family by turning his disciples into his brothers and sisters (Mark 3: 35). Such a project expresses the divine love effectively revealed in Christ. Through his loving solidarity with those to whom he ministers, he shows himself to be the merciful 'doctor' who sits at table with the sinful 'sick' (Mark 2: 15–17). He repeatedly pictures the goal of redemption as a joyful banquet which will never end, a feast of love when all will rejoice together in the kingdom of God. In short, what we know from the ministry of Jesus clearly reveals his redemptive mindset, and underpins the teaching about redemption developed by Paul and his successors. The Christian theology of redemption originated with the earthly Jesus and was not simply a post-resurrection development.¹⁹ Two further items need to be added.

First, Tom Wright has convincingly expounded what Jesus' coming to the Jerusalem Temple implied: the 'cleansing' of the Temple and the words about the 'new Temple' to come let us glimpse Jesus' redeeming intentions. He was dramatically enacting God's promised coming to save his people.²⁰

Second, apropos of the redeeming intentions of Jesus, one should recall the interesting discussion that featured such exegetes and

¹⁹ For further details on the redemptive intentions of the earthly Jesus, see O'Collins, *Christology*, 54–62, 67–80.

²⁰ See N. T. Wright, 'Jesus' Self-Understanding', in S. T. Davis, D. Kendall, and G. O'Collins (eds.), *The Incarnation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 47–61.

theologians as H. U. von Balthasar, M. Hengel, J. Jeremias, W. Kasper, H. Küng, X. Léon-Dufour, R. Pesch, E. Schillebeeckx, H. Schürmann, A. Vögtle, and others. The maximalist views of Pesch and the minimalist views of Vögtle marked the two extremes.²¹ But all agreed that Jesus not only anticipated his violent death but also, to some extent, interpreted in advance its redemptive value. What I missed in that protracted and interesting debate was the recognition that the value of actions can and frequently does go beyond the conscious intentions of the agent in question. Other agents, the circumstances, and the subsequent course of events often enhance the valuable effects of the agent's deed beyond, even far beyond, the good results he or she intended. The saving outcome of Jesus' death could and, I would argue, did go beyond what he intended and clearly imagined in his human mind. This brings us to the significance for redemption of his being human and divine.

Ever since Paul stressed the obedience of 'the man' Jesus in effecting justification, grace, and life (Rom. 5: 12–21), Christian teachers have acknowledged that redemption came through an agent who was not only divine but also truly one with us human beings. After Irenaeus insisted that deliverance from the forces of evil called for the union of divinity and humanity in Christ, Tertullian (d. c.220), Origen (d. c.254), St Gregory of Nazianzus (d. 389), and others endorsed the same conviction. St Basil of Caesarea (d. 379) wrote of Christ needing to take on true humanity if he were to destroy the power of sin and death (*Epistola* 261. 2). In the next century St Leo the Great (d. 461) emphasized that, unless Christ had truly assumed our humanity, the redemptive 'battle' would have 'been fought outside our nature' and we would not have experienced what we have experienced, deliverance from the power of evil (*Epistola* 31. 2). The Third Council of Constantinople (680–1), by insisting on the distinction between Christ's human and divine wills and operations, provided the doctrinal basis for acknowledging that redemption has come 'from the inside' or from one who is truly human, as well as 'from the outside' or from one who is truly divine. The mediator of redemption belonged and belongs both on God's side and on our side.²²

²¹ See O'Collins, *Christology*, 67–81.

²² The chapter by Brian Daley demonstrates how, for both the Eastern and the Western Fathers of the church, our redemption depends on the identity of Jesus as divine as well as human.

But how is the relationship between the Redeemer and the redeemed to be understood?²³ Christ acted 'for us' in the sense of acting not only for our benefit and to our advantage but also 'in our place'. By acting for our sake and in our place, was he our substitute or our representative? Without always being mutually exclusive, these two ways of envisaging the relationship reveal major differences. For instance, a substitute may be passively or even violently put in the place of another person or of other persons. One thinks of hostages executed in the place of escaped prisoners of war. The escapees do not wish for this substitution to take place, and in the event they may never even learn about it. Yet such wartime episodes yield examples of those who actively chose to be substitutes and in a self-sacrificing way took the place of someone condemned to death—as St Maximilian Kolbe did at Auschwitz in 1941. Kolbe volunteered to be his fellow-prisoner's substitute, but could not be described as his representative.²⁴

Representation is willed by both those represented and the representative, is normally restricted to specific matters, and may well last for only a relatively brief period. Christ freely represented human beings to God and before God; on their side they are invited to agree to this redemptive representation. Christ's activity brings deliverance but does not constitute an 'unrestricted' representation: human beings may not, for example, simply hand over to him their duty to praise and thank God. At the same time, this redemptive representation is no relatively brief affair but lasts forever. The representative role of the Redeemer leads naturally to the further question about the scope of this representation: is Christ the one Redeemer of all people?

UNIQUE AND UNIVERSAL REDEEMER?

From the time of the NT (Rom. 6: 1–11; Col. 2: 12–13), believers understood themselves to re-enact sacramentally the historical

²³ As Caroline Walker Bynum indicates in her chapter, Christian theology might be better served by abandoning debates over representation versus substitution and retrieving medieval notions of communion with or incorporation in Christ's suffering and death.

²⁴ These examples qualify Wright's example below: a Member of Parliament represents a constituency and votes in its place. The substitution created by such representation is limited in scope and lasts for only a specified term—unlike the case of Kolbe, where substitution meant the end of his entire life.

redemption effected by Christ's life, death, and resurrection. Baptism meant their symbolic dying and being buried with Christ, so as to be freed from sin and rise to a new life. But is this redemption available not only for Christian believers but also for everyone? Does the saving 'work' of Jesus reach beyond the ranks of the baptized? Who is covered by the 'for us and for our salvation' of the ancient creeds? Paul insists that Christ died 'for all' (2 Cor. 5: 14–15), without introducing any exception. Hence he can say that 'God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself' (2 Cor. 5: 19). In sharp contrast with the collective figure of Adam who brought sin and death to all human beings, the obedient Christ leads all to justification and life. The NT and the credal claim about Christ's unique and universal redemptive role may well seem arrogant and even outrageous to those who do not share this faith. Yet this common faith of Christians, even if never spelt out by a general council of the church, formed part of the basis for the formation of the World Council of Churches in 1948. The redemption of all comes only through the mediation of Jesus Christ (1 Tim. 2: 5); there is no plurality of redeemers. In the first centuries of Christianity and then in modern times, theologians have struggled to interpret and explain how and why Christ functions as the one Redeemer for all men and women of all times and places. How can he be 'the expiation for the sins of the whole world' (1 John 2: 2) and the only 'name under heaven' by which human beings can be saved (Acts 4: 12), even for those who may consciously reject his representative role on their behalf?²⁵

The issue may be phrased in terms of the tension between Christ as the one way to the Father (John 14: 6), on the one hand, and the fact of the divine will to save all people (1 Tim. 2: 4), on the other. God offers to all the possibility of sharing in the saving grace brought by Christ's dying and rising, as the Second Vatican Council put it in its 1965 pastoral constitution on the church in the modern world (*Gaudium et Spes*, 22). Some contemporary writers such as John Hick (b. 1922) destroy this tension by abandoning claims to Jesus' unique status. They accept a multiplicity of saviours or mediators of redemption, who differ in degree but not in kind.²⁶ Others such as John Paul II and Jacques Dupuis maintain that Jesus is the unique

²⁵ See O'Collins, *Christology*, 296–305.

²⁶ See e.g. J. Hick, *A Christian Theology of Religions: The Rainbow of Faiths* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox, 1995).

(i.e. only one of his kind) and universal Redeemer, while acknowledging the 'spiritual riches' to be found in non-Christian religions and the positive role of those religions in the salvation of their adherents.²⁷

CREATION AND REDEMPTION

Any adequate reflection on Christ's redemptive role inevitably examines the relationship between the order of redemption and that of creation. While not saying much on the creation of human beings and the world, the NT did add one highly significant item to the OT teaching. Creation, and not merely redemption, occurred through the mediation of the Son of God, who is personally identical with Jesus Christ (e.g. John 1: 3, 10; 1 Cor. 8: 6; Col. 1: 16; Heb. 1: 1–2). In the late second century, with his theology of Christ as the new or final Adam 'recapitulating' all human history, Irenaeus offered a synthesis. He saw redemption as one great drama reaching from creation, through the incarnation and the Easter story, and on to the final coming at the end of time. He developed in fuller detail the Pauline view of what Christ has already effected (Rom. 4: 25–5: 11) and of our being saved 'in hope' (Rom. 8: 24) for the full and final redemption that has not yet come. The biblical vision of Irenaeus held together the entire order of creation with that of redemption as two distinguishable but interconnected moments in God's one, saving plan for all humanity and the whole cosmos. Maximus the Confessor (d. 622),²⁸ John Duns Scotus (d. 1308), Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (d. 1955), and others maintained this unity between God's creative and redemptive work—a unity challenged by the view of Thomas Aquinas and others—according to which, if human beings had not sinned, the second person of the Trinity would not have become incarnate in our world. At least implicitly, the view of Irenaeus enjoys the backing of the Second Vatican Council, which

²⁷ See John Paul II's 1990 encyclical, *Redemptoris Missio*, 55; J. Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1997); id., *Christianity and the Religions: From Confrontation to Dialogue* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2002).

²⁸ Apropos of the incarnation, Maximus wrote: 'This is the great and hidden mystery; this is the blessed end on account of which all things were created. This is the divine purpose foreknown prior to the beginning of created things' (*To Thalassius* 60).

linked creation and redemption by interpreting redemption as God's renewal of creation, and presenting Christ as being actively present in the whole, universal work of salvation—from creation to the end (*Gaudium et Spes*, 9, 45).

A striking advantage in Irenaeus' vision of the link between creation and redemption, one which he never imagined, comes from its obvious power to inculcate our stewardship for the environment. Since God's redemptive plan includes the whole created world and ordains it to share in the final consummation of all things,²⁹ the gift of Christ's saving grace entails our moral responsibility for the rest of creation. This entailment presupposes a response to the question: how is that saving grace mediated and appropriated?

THE GRACE OF JUSTIFICATION

For those who agree that Christ brought deliverance from evil, expiation for sins, and loving reconciliation with God, the question remains: how is all that redemptive grace mediated to people now? How are sinners justified (and sanctified)? Here we reach the question posed by Martin Luther which formed the heart of the sixteenth-century religious debate: where do I find a gracious God? Or, as the Council of Trent (1545–63) put the question: how does justification through Christ's grace save and change human beings?

Both the Catholics and the Reformers agreed that all saving grace comes only through the mediation of Christ. But does God merely 'impute' the justice or saving work of Christ and judge repentant sinners to be righteous? Or does that grace make people righteous, as Catholics (and Orthodox) held and hold? From the late twentieth century, dialogues between Catholics, Lutherans, and other Protestants have studied intensely the question: how is the past redemption effected by Christ appropriated now? Even though many secondary difficulties remain to be resolved, the 'imputation of righteousness' and 'making righteous' are now widely seen as in many aspects complementary rather than mutually exclusive teachings.³⁰ Hence

²⁹ In her chapter Marguerite Shuster examines the success and failure of four classic and forty-six contemporary sermons which take up Rom. 8: 18–25 and expound the redemption God intends for the whole created order.

³⁰ In an unpublished work, Thomas Torrance, a leading Protestant theologian of the 20th century, recognized that justification is to be understood 'not just in terms of

the 1997 'Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification', prepared by the international Catholic–Lutheran Dialogue, was officially accepted by the Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation.³¹

In the sixteenth century, the Catholics and the Reformers presupposed that on the visible level the church's preaching and sacraments, especially baptism and the eucharist, mediated Christ's saving grace. But the 1492 discovery of the New World, where millions of people had lived for many centuries without the slightest chance of responding in faith to Christ's message, put severe pressure on the traditional conviction, *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* (outside the church no salvation). What was and is the role of the visible church in mediating (in subordination to Christ) redemption? How does Christ's saving activity extend to those who have not professed faith in him or even heard of him?

This question has fuelled recent writing by Jacques Dupuis, Frank Sullivan,³² and many other theologians. It clearly troubled Pope John Paul II, who at times suggested replacing the problematic 'extra' and speaking of 'sine ecclesia' (apart from the church) no salvation.³³ Is it enough to hold that all salvation implies some 'ordering' towards the church, even if such an ordering is never actuated in the case of innumerable people who live and die as honest adherents of other faiths? Then there are questions to be faced about the role of Christian believers in the salvation of others. Is it enough to recognize the 'moral' causality exercised by their public and private prayers for the salvation of all humankind? Or should theologians try to indicate how believers, in subordination to Christ, exercise some 'efficient' causality for the salvation of others?

imputed righteousness but in terms of a participation in the righteousness of Christ which is transferred to us through union with him' ('The Distinctive Character of the Reformed Tradition', 6). Precise Pauline scholarship, exemplified by the chapters of Aletti, Fee, and Wright (below), has contributed to theological restatements of the doctrine of justification.

³¹ In his chapter below, Stephen Evans explores the significance of disagreements and common ground over the doctrine of justification. On the issues involved in the Joint Declaration, see A. N. S. Lane, *Justification by Faith in Catholic–Protestant Dialogue: An Evangelical Assessment* (London: T. & T. Clark, 2002); T. Schneider and G. Wenz (eds.), *Gerecht und Sünder zugleich? Ökumenische Klärungen* (Freiburg: Herder, 2001), and J. Wicks, 'Justification in a Broader Horizon', *Pro Ecclesia* 12 (2003), 473–91.

³² See F. A. Sullivan, *Salvation Outside the Church?* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1992).

³³ For details see Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, 205–6, 209.

Much depends here on one's view of the 'power' of prayer and refusal to play down this power by talk of 'merely moral' causality. However one evaluates the contribution of the September 2000 document from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Dominus Iesus*, it took seriously not only the universal, unique work of Christ as Redeemer but also the subordinate role of the church in mediating salvation.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Such then are seven crucial issues for any theology of the redemption: (1) the universal need for redemption; (2) the nature of redemption as deliverance, expiation, and saving love; (3) the proper language for redemption and some dubious expressions; (4) the role of Christ as divine-human Redeemer in his incarnation, ministry, death, and resurrection (with the coming of the Holy Spirit); (5) Christ the unique and universal Redeemer; (6) the link between redemption and creation; (7) the appropriation of redemption through justification, along with the church's subordinate role in mediating redemption.

This list raises two questions: its order and its completeness. There could be a case for treating in second place creation and its link with redemption, before moving to the nature of redemption and the other issues just listed. Furthermore, many other significant questions can be raised. There is, to begin with, the question of relating Christ's redemptive and revealing roles. How far might we interpret his saving work as that of revealing the truth of God and human beings? Does he, to some or even a great extent, perform his redemptive role by delivering us from ignorance and showing us the truth of ultimate reality (see Daley's chapter below)? Second, there is the issue highlighted by liberation theology: what political implications does Christ's redemptive activity entail? Apropos of his own 'fresh perspective' on Paul, Wright remarks that 'the coming together of soteriology and "political theology" may indeed be the most important proposal' of his chapter (see details below). Third, the gender question: how can women acknowledge a male saviour? Undoubtedly the Christian tradition has often tied the saving significance of Christ too closely to the masculinity of Jesus and forgotten that we are redeemed through the full humanity assumed by the Word at the

incarnation. How can this misleading view which still persists be remedied?³⁴ Fourth, the chapters to follow by David Brown and Robert Kiely could trigger a broad enquiry: do we find the richest witness to redemption in liturgy, art, music, literature, and the best films? What educational 'tools' could we discover and develop in the creative arts to heal the collective memories of atrocious crimes that encourage seemingly endless hatred, violence, and injustice? Fifth, how does a Christian view of redemption or salvation resemble and how does it differ from versions of redemption or salvation to be found elsewhere? All the great religions of the world offer their answer to the human quest for meaning and salvation. Where does the Christian answer converge and where does it diverge from those other answers? Sixth, does the chapter below by Peter Ochs establish the peremptory need to approach our central issue through prayer? Will prayer to and with the Redeemer enlighten us best about the nature and tasks of redemption? Seventh, the chapter to follow by Eleonore Stump raises the further question: what might redeem the suffering of those who have perpetrated horrendous evil?

The sheer complexity of these seven further questions and even other questions which may be put testifies to the inexhaustible richness of the deep truth of redemption. In the proper sense of a religious mystery, the redemption effected by Christ remains at the heart of Christian faith as the truth which can never be adequately explored, let alone comprehended.³⁵

³⁴ See A. Carr, *Transforming Grace: Christian Tradition and Women's Experience* (New York: HarperCollins, 1988); S. Coakley, *Powers and Submissions: Spirituality, Philosophy, and Gender* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002); J. M. Soskice, 'Blood and Defilement: Reflections on Jesus and the Symbolics of Sex', in D. Kendall and S. T. Davis (eds.), *The Convergence of Theology* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2001), 285–303.

³⁵ For some valuable criticisms and comments on this chapter, I want to thank David Brown, Caroline Walker Bynum, Sarah Coakley, Stephen Davis, Peter Ochs, and Alan Padgett.