

THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE
CONCEPT OF SALVATION TODAY

THE BLACK EXPERIENCE IN THE SEARCH FOR SALVATION,
JUSTICE, AND THE MEANING OF THE
THEOLOGICAL TASK

by

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The concept of Salvation under God has been one of the central themes in the Judeo-Christian tradition. Within the Jewish tradition, the Salvation of hope in the Old Testament was, from the earliest times, eschatological. However, this does not mean that Salvation was exclusively concerned with the future and/or the end of history. Rather, Salvation was conceived as a "now" and a "not-yet" part of a total experience of faith in a God of Salvation, One who intervened in history at the Exodus. Salvation was ratified by later promises, by reaffirmations at Sinai, and continued in subsequent deliverances throughout Israel's salvation history. The greatest divine interventions occurred during the period of the Exodus and return from the Exile.

However Salvation may have been conceived in the prior Judeo-Christian tradition, we must remember that there could be no divorce or contradictions between the historical and the broad eschatological meaning of Salvation. The former, by becoming active in the present, could never be considered as a mere "past-and-gone" event. Rather, it was viewed as the matrix and type of the latter. Indeed, viewed as the eschatological event of Salvation today, ever active in the present as the "now" and the "not-yet," must have its final realization beyond history. It is the "now" of a historical redemptive process foreshadowed and promised by one who is the God of Salvation. Salvation in the past, Salvation in the present, and Salvation in the future, then, constitutes not three deliverances, but only one deliverance without any historical or future discontinuity. In this sense we address in this paper the eschatological events of Salvation today.

To establish a broad contention for the centrality of the concept of Salvation within religious tradition, we must assert that Salvation is the ultimate aim and concern of all religions, even those that do not confess or envision the need of a savior apart from man himself.¹ Even though the concept of Salvation is vastly different among religions, in some way, every religion claims to be a way of salvation. Salvation, in some sense, is the central aim of all religions. There is consensus among certain Christian and Jewish scholars that the Judeo-Christian Biblical faith may be labeled by liberal religious thinkers as merely a religion among other religions. In the broad sense,

¹Alan Richardson, "Salvation," in Vol. IV of The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, ed. by George A. Buttrick (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), p. 168.

however, there is no question that the Judeo-Christian Bible would have failed to meet the deepest need of Jewish and Christian peoples if it had failed to answer their deepest questions about the meaning of Salvation under the Judeo-Christian God of Salvation.

The Judeo-Christian Biblical faith would have been inadequate to answer humanity's deepest questions about Salvation if it had only concerned itself with asking mere surface questions about the meaning of liberation, freedom, and ultimate Salvation. Any faith is inadequate that recommends only shallow ways, methods or techniques, whether mystical or ethical, by which a narrowly concerned human Salvation may be attained. The Judeo-Christian Biblical faith has traditionally and rightly concerned itself with the proclamation of God's fact of Salvation, and this sets it apart from all other religions. The Biblical message proclaims that the God of Salvation has made possible Salvation to all who would recognize and accept its conditions. The Biblical faith proclaims that in concrete historical events, God had actually, in many times and places, saved his people from destruction. Such a Salvation is proclaimed, and thus attested to as but the foreshadowing of the "now" realizable and realized and a "not-yet" future Salvation that is always yet to come.² This is the central theme both of the Old and New Testaments. The God of the Judeo-Christian tradition is then a God of Salvation. This is the faith of both traditions. The Christian Gospel contends that God has saved his people in the past, and now, and in the future as well. Indeed, in the Judeo-Christian Bible, Salvation under God is always both a historical "now" and an eschatological "not-yet" reality.³

When the Christian Gospel contends that Salvation in the Hebrew-Christian tradition is both historical and eschatological, it means that Salvation must itself be historical. That is, it must come through events which further transform history, thus resulting finally in the healing of human beings. Were the Gospel to contend otherwise, we would then have to conceive of Salvation as something other than a historical process in which the God of Salvation acts directly upon human beings, lifting them with supernatural power out of the morass of historical evils, cleansing them, and placing them in a context to praise and adore God forever. Indeed, Salvation, rightly understood, is far from being merely the act of a God healing and saving persons whose beings are historical. Humans are redeemed by individual actions on behalf of self, actions on behalf of other human beings, and by God's divine persuasion that is seasoned with his love rather than by the violent first movement of the divine endeavor. The God of Salvation acts directly at times; at other times he acts indirectly. Indeed, he also waits in love and patience until human beings are redeemed. At other times, the God of Salvation

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

gradually comes in love's understanding to dwell within, measuring himself out to human beings according to their capacity to receive his abiding grace within the context of a "now" and a "not-yet" of history. This means that Salvation today can mean no less than a life of holiness under God. It does not involve the exchange of human existence for some other kind of life, be it spiritual, political, economic, or otherwise. Salvation today is then a quality of human existence lived under God's sovereignty. It can mean no less than the fact that we live as creatures in relationship to God and other human beings. Thus, we are under a divine mandate to help both self and others to fulfill the purpose of the Creator. Salvation in the Christian view is understood as the existence of liberated, free, though finite, creatures under a God of Salvation.

THE FUSED CONCEPTS OF LIBERATION, FREEDOM AND SALVATION IN CURRENT THEOLOGICAL DISCOURSE

Salvation is God's given. By grace it is made possible, and that possibility empowers believers to struggle against the alien powers of this world with hope for a freedom for self and a common freedom for all of God's people.

However, when we employ the use of such related current concepts or words as "liberation," "freedom" and "salvation," we must realize that they are ambiguous words or concepts often used by both conservative and radical religious thinkers, and for each they may well convey different meanings. Whether we use the word liberation, freedom, or salvation, they all have ambiguous histories and carry heavy burdens. Such was true in former times; such is still true today. The ultimate understanding of these words or concepts is related to the current and ongoing theological task, since they have such broad and related usage within the context of the current community of the people of God. Indeed, the Christian use and understanding of such words as liberation, freedom, and salvation are still accepted as though they were at one in meaning and connotation. We would accept the fact that these words are related in the sense that they are rooted in the freedom of God made known in Jesus Christ. Under God, each word has an ultimate meaning which transcends all common usage. However, we must admit the fact that the perfection of human liberation, freedom, and ultimate salvation must be seen not in the total absence of ambiguities of words, but in an openness to a solidarity with struggle on behalf of the poor, the despised, and the oppressed.

While one may further admit that existential words such as "'freedom' and 'liberation' are admittedly scarred by political terrorists on the one hand and by the apologists of self-centered

freedom in a consumer society on the other, the cross of Jesus is the abiding reminder that God's freedom is wholly other."⁴

One's understanding of today's salvation must be made intelligible in the light of who Christ is for us today and how we are to understand the salvation which is made possible to us by his advent into history. The gospel is the good news of God's liberation of those in bondage and of God's call to a freedom which was rooted in his person, work and teachings.

The attraction of salvation is such a durable one that people of faith need to take time out to view "self" and the "collective Other" in the light of what we really mean by Salvation today and how it relates to the current human conditions. We must address the question in the light of what kind of salvation, as a current aspiration can ever be fully realized.

This occasion of our coming together offers us a great opportunity to come to some kind of common agreement on the difficulty of achieving a mutual understanding of the meaning of Salvation even during our time under God.

In his Theology of Salvation, John Wesley makes his concept of ultimate perfection an issue in the call for "growth in holiness," which has not been taken with quite the seriousness as would be in keeping with the social vision which Wesley had for the people called Methodist. As a Black Christian, I wonder what Mr. Wesley would say to a Black Christian called United Methodist in search of Salvation today?

If we relate Mr. Wesley's concept of "growth in holiness" to the person's sense of living under God, the salvation quest takes on a special and particular meaning for the Black Christian in quest of Salvation today. Indeed, if Mr. Wesley were alive today, he would give full recognition to the fact that the quest for salvation is personal and the nature of the search is determined, by and large, by the social, ethical, and cultural context in which the search takes place. It is also particular and collective for both the individual and his people.

Few Black Christians, if rational in their approach to the salvation quest, would conceive of any such quest void of a struggle against the current evils which deprive Black people of life, much less such an affluent spiritual sense of a salvation state beyond liberation and freedom alone. In this sense, the Black Christian identifies with Wesley's view of the inseparable

⁴ Daniel L. Migliore, Called to Freedom (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1980), p. 16.

view of the social character of the experience of salvation. When we search for the central meaning of salvation today, if we are to understand its meaning for our lives, we must not forget the social context in which the search takes place. For the Black person of faith, then, the experience of holiness and salvation cannot be separated from the struggle for liberation, freedom and the spiritual empowerment needed to create a social climate where salvation is at all possible. What can Black religion mean if it omits the social and spiritual vision needed for the radical reconstruction and transformation of society into a new social context wherein a new humanity can dwell?

Unlike too many people today, Wesley was never silent on issues. He voiced his views against the social evils of his day. He wanted his followers to see with wide open eyes just what Christian discipleship meant.⁵

WESLEY'S LOVE ETHIC AND THE QUEST FOR AUTHENTIC BEING

If the self is a social agent, then we cannot get by with a diverted concern which would exclude the fact that salvation:

. . . in the spiritual sense, means more than anything else, the divine activities by which men are "made perfect" or growth toward maturity, in love. Thus, a sanctity which concentrates on one's own unblemished purity while forgetting one's responsibilities to other persons is inherently contradictory. Since the appropriate response to the redemptive, self-giving love of God is a human love which also gives itself for the sake of others, and since the lives of those who are called to love are inextricably involved in all manner of corporate relationships, an active ministry to them requires the vigorous endeavor to harmonize those relationships as fully as possible with the intention of God.⁶

Such is an extension of Wesley's views on the social and ethical responsibility of a person called to be in quest of "holiness." Social "holiness" in the Wesleyan tradition is not only a call to a collective struggle to make society holy in the name of God, but it also is a call to make it holy by the power of God.

⁵ Francis J. McConnell, John Wesley (New York: Abingdon Press, 1939), p. 147.

⁶ S. Paul Schilling, Methodism and Society in Theological Perspective (New York: Abingdon Press, 1960). pp. 211-32.

For Wesley, the authentic "love of self" could not exist within a solitary religion concentrating on personal perfection to the exclusion of the perfection of others. Such would pervert Wesley's contention that Salvation is social. Modern current religious thinkers, who may not agree with Wesley's total theological stance, would voice similar views.

Daniel Day Williams points out that there are three aspects of the growth of the self and its loves. Speaking of the love of God, which transcends human love and consummates in a kind of fulfillment of human love without completely destroying it, Dr. Williams argues first that there is in love the will to belong, which is the core of selfhood. Secondly, there is in love the discovery that belonging requires self-giving as well as receiving and the consequential search for an adequate object of love. Finally, there is in love the dimension of hope that the self must find as an ultimate facet of love. But we learn to love in history; we learn to love in relationship to other people. In all three of these aspects love as agape comes as the transforming fulfillment of the search for human love. "It is not that we discover the meaning of agape by going into the depths of the self, but that we discover in the depths of the self a hunger born of the self's own love, which only agape can satisfy."⁷ We love others after we know God's love for us as agape, and knowing that loves directs us to love others.

To love some and not others embodies a failing to know the full meaning of God's love for us. When John Donne said that no man is an island, he was not lecturing us to have consideration for others, he was stating a fact that constitutes a basic fact of our existence. Indeed, Donne reminds us that we are bound together in one bundle of life.⁸

We are so made that we cannot pick whom we will or will not love. If we reject one human being for any cause, in a real sense we reject all other human beings. "The self is thrown into an incomprehensibly vast creation, a world teeming with other creatures and other selves. Each self tries to find where it fits in this immense and threatening confusion."¹⁰ In this context, the primordial sense of the need to belong appears. It is both a physical and psychological need. It is the search for "athomeness," for knowing who we are as we grope for freedom to deal with our external world.

⁷ Daniel Day Williams, The Spirit and Forms of Love (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), p. 205.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

In this struggle to become a self, Williams further points out:

There is, therefore, a kind of self-giving, in the most elementary level of selfhood. It is the self-giving which offers communication to the other, and craves, waits for, and is rewarded by the response of another. We need not endow this "self-giving" with ethical quality any more than we would the craving for food or warmth. The self must participate in being with its environment and, thus, begin to belong.¹¹

Williams is suggesting that we become a self only to the degree to which we are willing to become a part of the whole. In this sense, then, to deny access to one person is to remain that much a lesser person. The self can grow only by an openness to others; it grows by overcoming fixations at any given moment of its becoming. The new self must always seek the integrity of the moment. Indeed, there can be no complete integrity void of the change. In every becoming there must be some surrender of present satisfactions, defenses, and securities to a new and higher demand. The past is not rejected. The past simply gives way for a larger fulfillment and realization of personhood. Whoever is not open to one person or a class of persons is somewhat closed to all others, for there is in the self no separateness or independence apart from the other self; it is merely and must always be apart from the other self; it is merely and must always be a part of the whole of all other persons.

What God has to say to the white, affluent oppressor surely cannot be his same word to the black, poor victims of oppression, whose main existential needs are liberation and survival. The Black man who is poor, unemployed, untrained and hopeless needs a special word from the Lord. The word of God for him must be, as Dr. J. Deotis Roberts says, his strength and salvation as he lingers in a rat-infested dwelling. Indeed, there is another word from God for the oppressor, but it is a word quite different from those intended for the oppressed. Roberts contends further:

What God unveils of his purpose to the slum dweller must be redemptive to such a man where he is first, even if it also promises deliverance, as I believe it does. . . . In the face of the reality of racism in America, the revelation of God to the Black poor is equally valid, in most cases, to the Black bourgeoisie.¹²

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² J. Deotis Roberts, Liberation and Reconciliation: A Black Theology (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1971), p. 80.

God's word to the Black individual must be both personal and social; it must be existential and political. It must be concerned with both material and spiritual needs. When God speaks to a person on earth, Heaven is made aware. God's word must be most meaningful and personal, it must relate always to human existence, and it must direct persons towards the humanization of all facets of life.

God's word must be a revelation to the whole person in all of his conditional relations. It must reach the Black person in the depths of personal life, but God's word is also directed to the natural context in which the individual lives. This word must judge those environmental conditions which develop or impede his ultimate fulfillment. God's word to the despised and the rejected is aimed at restoring the dignity of those made in his likeness. Revelation to the Black person is a revelation of Black power which includes clear ethical and theological reflections. It must bring God's word and the human situation together in order that a person may be able to find an ethical understanding of self in relation to God's word.

To affirm their personhood, Black people must affirm the goodness of creation. However, the need to affirm the goodness of creation is so strong in the Black community that some religious groups have done so at the cost of rejecting a doctrine of eschatology altogether. The "pie in the sky" futuristic hope of heaven has often been abandoned totally in favor of a this-worldly, realized eschatology. In order to believe, Blacks must be sustained by the presence and the acts of a God who is at the center of the struggle for life here in this earthly situation.

Theologian John Macquarrie rightly states:

An authentic self is a unitary, stable and relatively abiding structure in which the polarities are held in balance and its potentialities are brought to fulfillment. The expression "self" should not mislead us into thinking of the solitary individual, for authentic selfhood is possible only in a community of selves.¹³

If we conclude that salvation is related to the process of becoming, then it must be related to the basic will to be. However, before we can develop a full discussion of the quest for personal fulfillment, in one sense of the word, we must relate such a discussion to the personal and social aspects of the person seeking salvation, the nature of the quest, and the social context of the quest.

¹³ John Macquarrie, Principles of Christian Theology (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1966), p. 64.

If we are to conclude that Salvation is, in some sense, social, and thus historical, clearly there are many facets to the problem of Salvation--whether viewed in its historical or eschatological dimensions. Let us now turn to some problems in the human quest for Salvation under God.

First of all, we are reminded that, if God's sovereignty itself is to be fully confirmed and ultimately established, it must in no way be weakened or threatened by an easy solution to the quest for an adequate and complete Salvation. Unless Salvation be of God, no human establishment or ideal utopian society, however conceived, will meet the yearnings that are inherent within the human quest for an ultimate future. Indeed, as Gordon D. Kaufman puts it:

The central problem of salvation . . . is that man has turned away from God and toward himself; instead of pursuing God's will, he seeks his own selfish interests. In consequence, man has exchanged the possibility of a harmonious and creative community of love on earth, in which each self could find freedom and fulfillment--the kingdom of God--for a war of all against all; and the life of man has become as Hobbes put it in a classic phrase, 'solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short.'¹⁴

Secondly, Salvation today can mean no less than the fact that there must be created a social contextual climate for genuine human love, human justice, and a desire for self-giving among persons. Such a climate or condition must become the characteristic historical actualities of all human and divine intercourse.

The way of Salvation is now and always was a struggle, and if one conducts a realistic search, s/he must recognize that the powers holding human beings in slavery are sufficiently strong so that to achieve Salvation, in any degree, is difficult work, even for the God of Salvation himself.

In order for us to fix on the clear "now" responsibilities of human beings in their quest for Salvation, we must deal forthrightly with both the subjective and objective aspects of the Salvation process under God. We recall that a person is pre-eminently a historical being who also is a product of a personal history, and who also makes a history. Thus human beings make and remake themselves. This is the subjective aspect of every human being's inner responsibility for Salvation. The choices made, the response to other human beings, and ultimately this subjective aspect depends on how one responds to God as a creature under his rule. Indeed, all of nature is externally created by the historical process. Human beings alone take a subjective

¹⁴ Gordon D. Kaufman, Systematic Theology: A Historicist Perspective (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1968), p. 390.

part in their own respective creations in history. If such is the case, then we must conclude that Salvation, whether conceived in relation to the spiritual, the social, the political, or the economic meaning, has profoundly different subjective implications for human beings, especially if they are Black.

We thus conclude that to acquire a sense of Salvation is first, and above all, a state of the mind-set that is both rational and beyond the mere rational. If we assume that Salvation is, in any sense, subjective, then it can require no less than that the saved person exists within himself or herself; that s/he has within "self" a personal quality of being that is without correlations that are external to the self. Being, for the Black person who has acquired a sense of Salvation, is not related to any "otherness" that is external or over and against the self. Truly, then, Salvation requires that a person acquire an attitudinal "mind-set" that refuses to accept any external restraints which would deny the ultimate right of being. Indeed, a person is human only to the extent to which s/he imposes her/his existence on another in order to be recognized.¹⁵ Then, it follows that to be liberated, free, and ultimately saved requires a person first to assume the attitude of a liberated person. To assume such an attitude means that a person will accept no external conditions of servitude imposed by other persons or external conditions. In an attitudinal, ontological sense, then, to be liberated is to assert a selfhood that is reinforced by the weight of a self-affirmation that must be respected, matters not what the context. Such a selfhood must accept no exceptions. It must have within itself the courage to be. It must have an inner acquired sense of being which asserts its ontological self at the growing edge of becoming. It must possess the will to self-assertion against all external odds. A person who has acquired such an attitude of liberation will refuse to be treated as an object and will assert the right to be because he has the courage to be a "self" in company with or against all other selves. As Paul Tillich puts it:

. . . the courage to be is the ethical act in which man affirms his being in spite of those elements of his existence which conflict with his essential self-affirmation.¹⁶

The "courage to be," then is the courage to affirm one's being by transcending any fear of any dehumanizing forces which threaten that being.¹⁷

¹⁵Frantz Fanon, Black Skins, White Masks, trans. C. L. Markmann (New York: Grove Press, 1967), p. 216.

¹⁶Paul Tillich, The Courage To Be (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1952), p. 3.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 66.

To acquire a sense of Salvation is . . . to become conscious of the real "core self," and once a person acquires a full knowledge of his or her core self-identity, once a person knows who he or she is separate and totally unrelated to what others may have falsely defined him or her to be; from that point on he or she is a liberated person. He or she has known, at last, the truth of being a person, of being a self, and that truth has set the true self free.¹⁸

Each human being, then, is a contributor to the Salvation process; first of all because human beings enter into the subjective process of creating themselves and others. Obviously, in a literal sense, people do not create themselves, but each person does participate in the process of transforming the self in time. This is to speak of the person's role in the subjective process of making decisions and acting responsibly. Indeed, the ability to decide is also the ability to determine, within certain limits, what type of person one is to become and what kind of future one is to have. Thus, when a human being is at his or her best, being responsible, exercising the free will to act, in a real sense, the individual then becomes a part of the process for of charting the future course of history in which s/he is to be involved. This is the subjective level, then, by which human beings enter into the process of creating themselves. This is subject role which one plays in the Salvation process. Such a sense of Salvation then leads one always to a radical personal stance within the human context.

Third, in quite another sense, human beings create each other. Humanity is a "shared humanity." One is, in many respects, also created by one's contemporaries: the decisions and the actions of others affect the person as an individual within context. This is the objective aspect of Salvation. From the time parents make decisions for their children, to the point of adulthood, parental decisions affect children in every dimension of their existence; the food they eat, the values they cherish, the prejudices they have, even their friends. Selves are surely not independent and isolate human selves; they are what they are largely because of their social context. They are a part of the surrounding culture. They are relational realities, deriving the form and substance of being through the process of a reciprocal give-and-take between themselves and other selves.

Fourthly, human beings are created by their history. Whenever a person makes a decision to do or to be, then the act of deciding and the act of becoming constitute a determination of what one will become within history; thus, one's personal history is made. To be sure, decisions, acts, and one's ability to implement action is conditioned both by culture and context.

Finally, humans are always beings in process, coming from a distant past and moving towards a hidden and not-too-clear future. Largely, whatever a person is now has largely been shaped by the

past; the personal decisions in the "now" and the "not-yet" experiences which have together shaped the future. Salvation can be experienced only by that person whose being is at once dynamic and conscious; finding meaning in existence because s/he reposes at the conscious level with a two-fold reference. The individual reposes first on a past that has been produced by personal decisions and by actions that have created a personhood which exists within the context of an external world. It is a selfhood that is now intelligible only to the degree that those personal and social decisions were good. Secondly, as a person, one acquires Salvation in the future only to the degree that s/he is conscious and present.

All current actions, either positive or negative, will find meaning, completion, and ultimate fulfillment only under God in the "now" and the "not-yet" of the future.

In a real sense, the God of Salvation today calls one who conceptualizes its meaning and implications for his/her life without exceptions, to a new kind of quality commitment, to a quality being and becoming. Within history, such a commitment under God must be seen in relation to one's understanding of Salvation today, especially its historical relevancy. A Salvation concept which has no "this-world" meaning for life within history is void of meaning or value for the Christian life. So, it is fitting that we turn now to an assessment of the content meaning of Salvation today within a historical context.

For Wesley, Salvation was a process, and the doorway was conceived as but the beginning. A doorway fails in its purpose if one only stands, as it were, in it instead of passing through the doorway to growth by Christian experience, ever in the direction of perfection. For Wesley:

. . . even the most vivid experience of God's pardoning love received in faith falls short of fulfillment, if it does not lead to holiness of heart and life. Salvation is to be lived. Faith must bear fruit in righteousness.¹⁸

Indeed,

Salvation is a stewardship . . . Salvation is realized within a community, and in this sense is social. Solitary religion is not to be found in the Gospel . . . The Gospel of Christ knows no religion but social; no holiness, but social holiness.¹⁹

¹⁸"An Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion," 4 Works, VIII, pp. 3-4. Sermon, "The Good Steward."

¹⁹The Poetical Works of John and Charles Wesley, ed. G. Osborne (London: Wesley Methodist Conference Office, 1868), I, xxii.

These references show John Wesley's concern for social commitment. They lead us to conclude this section by noting that Wesley was committed to social responsibility and social justice. For Wesley, religion could not be indifferent to the social issues of his time.

This observation leads us to some concern for foundational justice in the salvation quest. In this context, then, we may conclude that the current Wesley scholars are collective in their call for the "rehabilitation of the idea of holiness and a full exploration of its broader social meaning." Dr. Albert C. Outler espouses a like view when he declares that historic Christianity seeks both "the highest and fullest development of human selves" and "the fulfillment of God's design in human life and history."²⁰

With such a reference to Wesley's view of the social nature of religion, we come now to a brief consideration of justice as foundational to the quest for salvation.

FOUNDATIONAL JUSTICE AND THE QUEST FOR SALVATION TODAY

The multiplicity of current concepts of justice make it hard to fix on any one to the exclusion of others. However, this multiplicity is valuable because it makes us conceptually aware of the ambiguity of the views of justice as espoused today. Therefore, let us simply state that the positive function of justice is to provide the structural conditions for the fulfillment of human aspirations. It enables individuals to know what sort of conduct they may expect from one another. Without structures of justice, the freedom of each individual to make his/her own rules may threaten the common good of other persons in society. In this context, it is impossible to speak of social justice without reminding oneself that the ends sought by social justice are somewhat the same as thought sought by Christian love. Justice cannot be separated from the Christian's obligation and responsibility to others. Indeed, the ultimate aim of social justice and love are the same, and they point directly to the collective good of the group and indirectly to the particular aims of any one individual in the group. If we were to make a distinction between the two, we may cite George Thomas who says that:

The distinction between ideal social justice and love is simply that justice establishes the general conditions for the good life of a group and represents the demand of love

²⁰Albert C. Outler, Psychotherapy and the Christian Message (New York: Harper and Row, 1954), pp. 76-77.

for all the persons of the group while love also seeks to fulfill the special needs of each person.²¹

For love, there can be no distinctions between one individual and the other. There is an objective application on the one hand and a subjective application on the other. However, each person is considered in order that the needs of each individual are fulfilled. Justice defined in simple terms might be: First, each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive basic liberty compatible with a similar liberty for others. Second, social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are reasonable expected to be to everyone's advantage.

While the search for Salvation may well begin within the human context, it is from the human vantage point that one must find God's will for one's own life. "Being" in relation to any conception of salvation, must be seen as a kind of "shared humanity" in that there can be no self-fulfillment outside of a human context, and such a human context presupposes shared human experiences which bring one into being. The social order presupposing such an achievement of being must be a just social order.

It would surely be a misinterpretation of John Wesley's thought to make too much of the subjective nature of justice, except to say that both justice as an abstract concept and justice as a subjective experience must be connected to the Christian life.

Dr. Daniel C. Maguire argues that one's anthropology (or concept of personhood) first shines through in the explanation one offers for justice. The definition of three forms of justice will show this to be so:

Commutative justice renders what is due in relationships between individual persons, or between discernible individual social entities such as nations, states or corporations. Distributive justice directs the fair distribution of goods and burdens to the citizens by those who are representative officials of the state. It moves from the social whole to the individual. Legal justice represents the debts of the individual citizen to the social whole or the common good. Justice, therefore, either moves

²¹George F. Thomas, Christian Ethics and Moral Philosophy (New York: Charles Scribners' Sons, 1955), pp. 256-57.

between individuals (commutative), from society to the individual (distributive), or from the private individual to the society (legal).²²

These forms of justice that Dr. Maguire defines exist in the total concept of justice, and one point cannot be stressed to the total repression of the other. All three serve in concert to create the basis for moral existence and the establishment of one's view of the total concept of justice as translated into human conduct.

Were John Wesley alive today, one can be sure that he would speak out on the social ills of our times. One of the social ills which he would surely address would be that of expressed racism throughout the structures of Western cultures. Wesley spoke so cogently against the evils of his day, including slavery and all its associated evils, until we could not expect him to be silent on racism, as too many Christians are today. To bring such a question into focus naturally leads us to ask: What would Wesley have to say to the people called Methodists on the tendency toward persistent racism?

Indeed, what do you suppose he would say to a Black person called United Methodist seeking Salvation within a society in which a problem exists "just being Black under God." In almost any place in the world today, to be Black is to have a radically difference experiednce in whatever one may aspire to be. The "planned Black experience" within what Black United Methodist Professor C. Eric Lincoln perceptively calls the "host culture" leads its victims to be

. . . debarred from certain significant experiences, and to have those experiences which are available filtered through an alternative set of screens which may determine a different perception and registration of a reality from that common to the larger society.²³

Lincoln further argues that the dominant host culture extends its control further by codifying its appraisal of minorities, and such appraisals become fixed until they become formative.

²²Daniel C. Maguire, The Moral Choice (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1978), p. 97.

²³C. Eric Lincoln, "The Black Family, the Black Church and the Transformation of Values," Religion in Life, Vol. XLVII, No. 4 (Winter, 1978), p. 488.

Blacks have a problem with an attempted external control by a host culture that seeks to alter one's very subjective experiences. Then, either knowingly or unknowingly, a Black person has trouble being Black under God. Such a special problem translates into a quest for Salvation. It may even translate into a larger crisis in faith.

THE PROBLEM OF BLACKNESS AND THE SEARCH FOR SALVATION

If the religious Black person is required to relate a concept of God to a historical existential situation in such a way as to engage God in related search for salvation, s/he has several basic problems. The Black person's greatest problem is to translate faith in God into some ordered patterns which will make the God of Salvation's activities in the world meaningful and intelligible. Thus, the Black person's first problem is with the concept of God as an ontological being--an ontological entity quite apart from individual selfhood as a being. How, and in what sense, one conceives God's being will determine to a greater degree how the individual conceives ontological selfhood as a being under God.

Secondly, how the Black person sees him- or herself is dependent on how s/he sees God. If God does not exist, then the Black person's view of selfhood falls far short of being adequate. Ethically speaking, how can a person be good without God? For whom will he be good? To whom will he be thankful? To whom will he sing hymns? To know God, it would seem, is to know oneself in relation to one's knowledge of God.

The third problem which the Black person faces by being Black under God is the problem of knowing what God's message of Salvation is concerning ethical obligations to self, others, and ultimately to God.

Finally, what a person conceives oneself to be and the message of God for one's existential situation are special problems of a unique ethical imperative for Black people. For every Black individual, there is a sense of what s/he should do as a Black person. All persons are addressed by God as they are and where they are. His word for every person must be understood and appropriated in the light of that understanding. God's relation to the moral imperative and the ethical incentive can only be understood in relation to one's concept of God. For Black people the sense of "what ought I to do?" is unique under God. Salvation today, for the Black person, is an additional problem under God.

Indeed, the essential question for the average Black person living in a pro-White society is not: Does God exist? Rather, it is: Does God care? However hard one may try, s/he comes back

to the fact that God is a being which must be conceived as an ontological entity that is the ultimate of all being. God is, and must always be, the "Holy Being," transcending any anthropomorphic elements which may be assigned to him by man--even in attempts to make him more intelligible and relevant to an existential condition. We must speak of God ontologically within this context, because there are abroad in the world, and especially in the Black community, alien concepts that challenge a clear understanding of the idea of God as a Holy Being. The concept of God, according to John Macquarrie, has a two-fold meaning: "An ontological meaning insofar as it expresses an attitude of commitment to, or faith in, being. . . . These two meanings belong together in the word 'God' and are inseparable." The word God, in this pure sense of a Holy Being, expresses the basic religious conviction. Macquarrie makes it still clearer when he points out: "The assertion that 'God exists' may be expressed in another way as meaning that being 'is' not alien or neutral over against us, but that it both demands and sustains us, so that through faith in being, we can, ourselves, advance into a fullness of being and fulfill the higher potentialities of selfhood."²⁴

The concept of God as a Holy Being must be kept free of mere human elements, even if used in an attempt to make the concept of God clearer. To equate the concept of the Holy Being of God with any lesser anthropomorphic concept, even in the name of intelligibility, is reductionism. Yet, because of the added burden of Blackness, and the restrictions placed upon a person merely because of color, the Black individual is currently engaged in an extensive reassessment of the Christian faith from a black religious frame of reference. Indeed, to relate this tendency to the concept of a Holy Being, some consideration needs to be given to such a tendency. This assessment does not argue that the current tendency is bad. Rather, it says that the tendency should not become reductionistic or more confusing.

THE SEARCH FOR A USABLE SALVATION CHRISTIAN SOCIAL STRATEGY:

WESLEY AND THE FUTURE

In order to address the continuing theological task, one cannot escape the fact that John Wesley addressed, by both concern and action, most of the major social issues of his time. One would agree that:

If salvation is to be social, the holiness of life which fulfills it cannot stop with the individual, but must extend

²⁴ John Macquarrie, *Principles of Christian Theology* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1966), p. 110.

to all aspects of society. Unfortunately, John Wesley, in spite of his strong insistence on sanctification and perfection as normative goals for the individual Christian, never developed the social implications of his doctrine.²⁵

Having concluded as much, however, one cannot fail to see in Wesley's sermons and writings his belief that faith always works by means of love to produce both an "inward and an outward holiness." Wesley's full contention was that one cannot separate works from faith. With Martin Luther, Wesley probably would have added that "We work because we are saved and not in order to be saved." However, in all matter of works:

Wesley rules out any notion of authentic self-acceptance from the perception of faith. We are who we are because God made us so, because God keeps us so, and because it is God, not we, who holds open the future for our destiny--all of it by grace, unmerited, prevenient, justifying, sanctifying.²⁶

As we gather here in this worldwide theological collection of persons who are fixing on Wesley's meaning for today and the future, we must not forget that the man whose thoughts we have come to assess was a man who was contemporary for almost the whole of a century. He made his thoughts on what it means to be a Christian visible in his own historical setting. We live in a world where resistance to any change in attitudes and ways of life are almost impossible to come by. This is a time when the Christian's hope is tested. However, let us be mindful that hope has never known "success," but then hope has also never known "defeat" or complete "despair." Rather, it is a hope beyond hope, a hope in a God who alone gives new life to the dead and calls into existence things that are not.

In this sense, the quest for Salvation is not only a function of life, an expression of its ultimate aspirations. It is also the place where life meets the God of Salvation and receives Him as the conqueror of all the ambiguities of existence. Indeed, God's being is "a becoming peculiar" to his own being. God "becomes" by reaching out to us in self-expending love that

²⁵S. Paul Schilling, Methodism and Society in Theological Perspective, pp. 230-31.

²⁶Albert C. Outler, Evangelism in the Wesleyan Spirit (Nashville: Tidings, 1971), p. 45.

liberates. This historical "becoming" of God does not contradict, but reliably expresses God's eternal way of being.²⁷

In the quest for salvation, a sense of its means is found where the divine and human are joined. Therefore, it is the sphere in which the quest for the "New Being" under God, the ultimate of Salvation's example, appears over against the split between the essential and existential being. Pure despair--the mind or the person without hope--is unable to seek beyond self. A person so afflicted cannot conceive the "possible" because of a preoccupation with the impossible. The question of the "New Being" under God presupposes the presence of, or the awareness of, a "New Being" as exemplified in Jesus Christ. Such is so, because the search for truth presupposes the existence of an ever larger conceptualized Truth. An openness to God's Being, which "lets be," has implications for both individual and collective Salvation today.

One of the problems in the quest for justice and salvation has to do with human relations and the quality of free association. Let us now turn to a consideration of some of the problems involved in human relations.

A. The Problem of the Enemy: The One on One

One of the oldest ethical problems facing mankind is what to do with the person who has injured or mistreated us. For the Black individual, as for ever other human being, the search has been a historically difficult one.

The mandate of the second mile, the ethical requirement to love the enemy, and the admonition to turn the other cheek may offer us the best clue to solve the black-white problem in America. For, as Dr. Vincent Harding rightly asks, does not a man simply become a slave to the other man's initiative rather than his own when he feels obligated to answer his opponent on the opponent's terms? Is there not, perhaps, a certain kind of bondage involved when men are so anxious to keep themselves alive that they are ready to take the lives of others to prevent that occurrence?²⁸ Who is the master if one does not have the inner strength to go the second mile or to turn the other cheek? Perhaps it is the abnormal thing to hate those who hate you and to do injury to the person who injures you. Indeed, is the person not stronger who has the inner strength to forgive the one who

²⁷Daniel L. Maquire, Called to Freedom, p. 75.

²⁸Vincent Harding, "The Religion of Black Power," The Religious Situation, ed. Donald R. Cutler (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968), p. 20.

wrongs him, to love the one who hates him? Is it not true that the person who has the strength to love stands taller than the one who hates? Does it not take more strength to love the one who has wronged you? the one who has injured you? To love the one who hates you is surely not to be in bondage to the other's initiative. Neither the slave nor the master can be free as long as they hate each other, or treat each other as master and slave. As long as they do, both are what they are--merely slave and master. They are each tied to the other. One or the other or both must act differently to break the reciprocal spell that keeps them master and slave. Such actions would be revolutionary in our time. Yet such is the call of God today.

B. The Call to a Common Humanity: The Future in Black and White

As we have recalled above, the history of the black-white question in America was confused by early attempts of white Christians to reduce Black people to the status of things, regarding them as property and not as human "others" with whom they were ethically compelled to be in covenant relationships. Here, covenant, as Paul Ramsey points out, is more than a contract or bargain by which an individual agrees to put himself into some measure of responsible relation with and for his fellowman, arbitrarily or accordingly, as it is in his own best interest to do so. Indeed, this is a mistaken view of how human beings are related within God's creation. Paul Ramsey further observes that:

A man is never without his fellow man in any such fashion, nor does he reach his neighbor only by choice or contract from which he can as easily withdraw. Instead, because his creatureliness is from the beginning in the form of fellow humanity and because the creation in him is an order to covenant, and because this means he has real being only by being with and for fellow man, we have to reckon with this in everything that is said about justice and about the rights of man. His rights have their being in, with and for covenant. The rights of man are the rights of the fellow humanity of those who bear them.²⁹

To exchange humans for things is to obscure forever the insights and the sharp line of separation of which Ramsey so cogently speaks. In a covenant there can be no master/slave

²⁹ Paul Ramsey, Christian Ethics and the Sit-in (New York: Association Press, 1961). p. 31.

relation because the covenant is not a relationship with disappearing terms. It is not a pure internal relation with no irreducibly different beings to be related to each other. There is a distance in the relation, and the relatedness is in the distance. Thus, the ideal of the covenant bond stands between persons and must forever be kept.

And yet, in quite another ethical sense, a person is a person only in saying "thou" to the otherness of the person with whom he is in covenant. One is a self only as s/he has acquired his/her very being in humanity in covenant relationship with other selves. However, taken to its ultimate, one wonders how there can be real relations between persons without the loss of the distinctiveness of each, especially if one is a master and the other a slave. Tillich asks how one may have the courage to accomplish the movement in existence of being apart and have at the same time the courage to accomplish the movement of being a part. There can never be a mutual relation between black and white people until they each recognize that basic rights are inalienable and are connected with the very stuff of human nature. Within such a bond, rights must be whatever is necessary for each to have and be a self with and for each other. If one has an inalienable right, it must be a natural right to life simply because one is human. This must be so because the right to life is the single most basic precondition to human existence in covenant. In covenant, one only has freedom for self as the self is free to give itself to be for and with another; it matters not who the other is, as long as s/he meets the human criteria. Whether s/he meets such criteria is not for one or the other to say; such has already been said by God in creation. Indeed, the source of the right to life is to be found in the fact that God summons us all into being from nothingness, into an existence in covenant as a self with others.

C. Humanity Beyond the Human Particulars: The Higher Mandate of the Way of Love

Ultimately, man, be he slave or master, is called to an even higher relationship. Above the covenant relationship of being, with and for the other, there is a mandate to love--which is a much more difficult order to fill. To be in covenant is to give room to the self and the other to be in a high objective relationship so that there is a yearning for the ideal good and a quest for mutual self-realization. Indeed, there must be the selfless devotion to the good of the other, but such a covenant relation cannot be achieved without foundational love. Love, as *agape*, introduces a new dimension in the relationship that was not present simply in mere covenant relation. Love is the conditional affirmation of the other, with a complete disregard for self. It is a mutual concern for the other that commits one beyond the boundary of his own existence. Love, as was exemplified

in Jesus, is the empowering disposition to serve another without thought of any good accruing to oneself. To be loved as a self is to love the other as a self. Only by loving the other as a self can one know and experience God's ultimate love. This is the mandate of all humans, be they master or slave, for only through mutual love can they both meet the conditions of mutual redemption. This also means that one self may love another self at the level of redemption and meet redemptive conditions, while the other self may not meet such conditions because of not responding in love to the other who loved him/her. It is this commanding and demanding condition for mutuality that transforms one from the unlovable person into the lovable person. Love makes this irresistible demand on anyone who gives himself to loving another, whether the other is lovable or unlovable. One can be in covenant without this higher dimension of love, but one cannot love without first being in covenant. However, to be an ethical incentive, James M. Gustafson has suggested that love needs to be an intention, a purpose, and a norm. Gustafson further points out that by intention he is suggesting a basic direction of activity, an articulation of what such a direction is and should be. Love is a purposive orientation for one's life. Gustafson also would insist that "intention suggests cognition; one has knowledge of what his intentions are, or at least he or she is not ignorant of them."³⁰ It is here that love, given purpose, becomes a part of the moral norm needed to govern our highest actions, even toward the enemy who has wronged us. Moral actions informed by love are governed in part by the intentions of the actors, by their thoughts about the purposes they seek to fulfill, and by the ultimate ends they seek to achieve. In this sense, the Black person is an actor; s/he is an intending actor, not merely an automatic reactor to external events. If the individual is an ethical actor, s/he will then seek to act only in the direction of those goals believed to be worthy of achieving. If adhering to the way of love, an individual acts out of a conviction about what ought to be achieved. Thus, the ultimate motive will be to achieve a mutual understanding by means of Christian love. Such a love, in the New Testament sense, will be a love that is deeply communal. Love will issue or manifest itself in a relationship, even to the enemy, in which the separation of the "I" and the "Thou" is overcome in a sense of oneness. To be sure, the one who loves another in this way may be unappreciated and rejected by the person loved. But, in loving, one still seeks to eliminate the barrier which isolates one from the other. We identify our interest, our purpose, and our very self with the other so that s/he already thinks "we" even while rejected.

³⁰ James M. Gustafson, Christ and the Moral Life (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), p. 256.

This is not (it cannot be) simply a human love with a motive that is selfish. Rather, it is a selfless love without pride or arrogance. It seeks only good for the other, because the other is the object of concern. Whenever genuine love for the other is experienced, it brings more than an active willing and working for the other's well-being. It also issues in a needed desire to share some of life's values with the other in order for him/her to experience the deeper joy of being for others. When love reaches its highest level of maturity in agape, it becomes an approach to sharing God with the other. Love is, then, as Dr. L. Harold DeWolf has suggested, less a matter of feeling than of intention, less of glandular activity than of purpose. It is a "set" or a state of dominant eagerness to share God's gratefully received gifts with God himself and with other persons in a community of experience.³¹

One cannot conceive that a love of any less depth could heal or again perfect the bond of brokenness that now exists between America's ex-slave and America's ex-master.

To be aware that such a healing possibility is open to both Black and white Christians will require of them both the kind of openness that is suggested by Paul Lehmann when he writes that the difference between the Christian believer and the unbeliever "is defined by imaginative and behavioral sensitivity to what God is doing in the world to make and keep human life human, to achieve the maturity of men."³² To plead for such an ultimate maturity in this contemporary world of imperfection is to plead for no less than the way of love as exemplified in the life and teachings of Jesus Christ.

One of the inner imperatives of God's will is that human beings should love him without reservation and one's neighbors without self-interest. People of God are called to a life of holiness in both faith and work. In response to God's gift of grace, his call is not to a sanctimonious pride and social irresponsibility. Indeed, if one has been with the God of salvation, if one has had a sense of God's call, one will want to give of one's total self in selfless humility, in a self-forgetful regard for others, and in a constant reliance on the inner incentive to live as holy under God. Such is the impelling mandate of God's prevenient grace, it is God's requirement

³¹ L. Harold DeWolf, Responsible Freedom: Guideline for Christian Action (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), p. 109.

³² Paul Lehmann, Ethics in a Christian Context (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), p. 117.

of all human beings. It is living, always aware that one is under orders from a God whose call is always to a more perfect being.

It is so easy to espouse a way of love to the exclusion of its relation to Wesley's understanding of the social nature of love, from which justice cannot be separate and apart. In quite another context, Dr. James H. Cone reminds us that the wrath of God (the justice of God) cannot be separated from the love of God, as too many modern-day theologians would seem to do. He rightly reminds us that it is not "possible to understand what God's love means for the oppressed without making wrath an essential ingredient of that love . . . Most theological treatments of God's love fails to place the proper emphasis on God's wrath, suggesting that love is complete self-giving without any demand for obedience."³³

Cone further contends that:

A God minus wrath seems to be a God who is basically not against anybody. All we have to do is to behave nicely, and everything will work out all right. But such a view of God leaves us in doubt about God's role in the black-white struggle . . .³⁴

. . . Black people want to know what or whose side God is on, and what kind of decision he is making about the Black Revolution.³⁵

Cone insists on the even application of God's love and God's wrath, but he is not too clear just how God's love would apply to the black-white situation if God's love and God's wrath were fused. The justice of God, or the wrath of God, fused with the love of God, are never to be separated; they are both equally as exacting in their opposition to wrong. Indeed, God loves even those against whom he would direct his wrathful activities in divine justice. Both the wrath of God and the love of God, in this sense, are parts of the redemptive work of God.

By calling for a new solidarity with those who struggle against alien evils which deprive them of the ultimate fulfillment

³³James H. Cone, A Black Theology of Liberation (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1970), pp. 230-31.

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Ibid.

that a social salvation would suggest, love is but calling us to join in the struggle needed to create a space wherein salvation is at all possible.

D. The Futility of the Way of Hate

We were reminded by Wesley of old that love is the only way to a more human society; love, rather than hate, is the attitude which we should have toward the person who has injured us. There were many reasons why Jesus chose the love attitude over against an attitude of hate, retaliation, and revenge.

First of all, the love response is superior because of what hate can do to a person. Hate is an evil and dangerous force, and those who adhere to the way of hate subject themselves to irreparable damage void and totally independent of any reference to others who may be the object of one's hate. Hate scars the soul and distorts the personality. Like an unchecked cancer, hate corrodes the personhood and eats away at the very stuff of being itself. Hate destroys the mind and renders it incapable of objectivity. One who hates cannot recognize beauty, and he too often tends to confuse truth with what is false.

Second, love is superior because of what hate cannot do. The late Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., has suggested this in a moving passage.

Returning hate for hate multiplies hate, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars. Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that. Hate multiplies hate, violence multiplies violence, and toughness multiplies toughness in a descending spiral of destruction.³⁶

Third, love is suggested because hate is negating; it can only destroy and dehumanize those who hate as well as those who are hated. Oglesby was right when he reminded us that: "hatred and resentment--a legitimate desire for revenge--cannot sustain a war of liberation."³⁷ Hate, contrary to what many would contend, is the abnormal way persons relate to each other. We were made for love because it is a positive relation which contributes

³⁶Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Strength to Love (New York: Harper and Row, 1959), p. 37.

³⁷Barbara Deminger, "On Revolution and Equilibrium," The Wall Within: Violence or Non-violence in the Black Revolution (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1971), pp. 150ff. Quoted from Richard Scull and Carl Oglesby, Containment and Change (New York: Crowell-Collier, Macmillan, 1967).

a part of each person who loves to the person loved; so both find their humanity in the reciprocal relationship.

Fourth, love is suggested because hate destroys the significance of the other, so that, as an object of hate, he cannot at the same time be a subject of worth--hence worthy of love. Hate is the kind of relation the white man has traditionally had for the Black man in America. Traditionally, the Black man has not been recognized; therefore, he has not been an object of love because he has not been deemed worthy. Man is human and deemed worthy of love only to the extent to which he is recognized as a being of worth. He has only one single right: that is the ultimate right to act humanly toward the other and to demand that the other act humanly toward him. As Fanon reminds us in his *Black Skins, White Masks*, we should all do battle for the creation of a human world; that is, a world of reciprocal recognition, a world wherein every person is deemed worthy of recognition as an equal being within the human family.

Finally, love is suggested because becoming a self is transcending hate. To become a mature self requires full recognition of one's selfhood within history. In this sense, the self is always a becoming self, it is not a fixed entity. If the self is a becoming self, then the full meaning of selfhood lies in a personal history, not in a given complete self-structure. To be a self, in this sense, is to move forever toward a fuller being. However, all being must presuppose growth toward self-realization, and all self-fulfillment is reached in relation to other selves.

A USABLE REINTERPRETATION OF SALVATION TODAY:

THE FUTURE THEOLOGICAL TASK

No quest for salvation can be unrelated to the realities of the evils confronting the very existence of the human race. Righteousness in historical existence is not possible in the quest for a useable future. We talk about Salvation at a time when there is a worldwide crisis of confidence in specific sources of moral and ethical authority. Sexual and ethical morality are concerns of yesteryears. The social turbulence of political unrest, wars and rumors of wars, and economic uncertainty call us to a note of unforgotten reality with which we may close.

Speaking of Black religion's sense of historical reality, Olin P. Moyd contends that:

Although Black religion grounds salvation in history and refuses to accept any view of sanctification that substitutes inward piety for social justice, there is also an

eschatological vision included in salvation. It is important to emphasize that this vision in black religion is derived from Scripture and is not in any sense a rejection of history. To reject history in salvation leads to passivity and religion then becomes the opiate of the people. Black religion, while accepting history, does not limit salvation to history. As long as people are bound to history, they are bound to law and thus to death. If death is the ultimate power and life has no future beyond this world, then the heads of the state who control the military are ruling in the place of God. They have the future in their hands and the oppressed can be made to obey the law of injustice.³⁸

The oppressed, though living in history, may envision a just society open to all and based on principles of love and justice. These principles are to apply to the basic structures of society and provide the criteria governing the quest for a particular type of Salvation peculiar to a specific people. If they are to apply equally to all peoples, matters not who they may be, then we can see that the kind of Salvation one can seek, or is free to seek, will differ from person to person, and from one ethnic group to another--to say nothing of culture.

Olin P. Moyd speaks of this particular view in salvation, arguing that:

When the Black folks testify that "I've been saved and sanctified; I'm on my way to heaven, and I wouldn't take 'nothing' for my journey," such a statement has far-reaching implications for Black theology. "Being saved" means that one has had an experience or assurance that one has been justified by the Creator. "Been sanctified" means that through Christ one has reorganized this life and is in the continual process of reorganizing one's life in ways which are in accordance with the will of him who has seen fit to justify one. "On my way to heaven and wouldn't take 'nothing' for my journey" means that both justification and the process of sanctification are understood in the light of the eschatological hope. Justification and sanctification have eschatological meanings.³⁹

The central concern of this paper on Salvation today has been to state afresh a point of view somewhat counter to current Protestant theology, a theology too largely dominated by philosophical existentialism and its concept of "historicity."

³⁸ Olin P. Moyd, *Redemption in Black Theology* (Valley Forge, Pa.: Judson Press, 1979), p. 171.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 172.

In stating the essence of new Protestant faith, this current theological attitude feels compelled to eliminate salvation history by viewing it as secondary "objectification" of a "word-event" which in reality concerns only the "self-understanding" of a less than true existence.⁴⁰

I would agree with Dr. Oscar Cullman "that it is wrong to contract Christian existence and Salvation history as opposites."⁴¹ Indeed, was not the New Testament Christian certain that he too was continuing the work of God begun when he called Israel to salvation fulfilled in Christ, which God unfolds in the present and which he will complete at the end of history.⁴²

Current theologians will not be quite happy with any "Salvation today" concept, because they make little attempt to preserve it by reinterpretation and restatement with reference to a needed eschatology. It is true, as contemporary theologians have suggested, that the word has something disreputable about it, for in the history of theology, it has acquired a pietistic, or even apologetic significance. Understandably, there is fear that to take a positive stand on Salvation-history is to fall into bad theological company. However, rightly conceived, Salvation today is a necessary, and yet, all but forgotten note in much of current theology that is in need of recovery. In their quest for Salvation, Black people have been frustrated, and many times they would have had too little to live for, except for the fact that they were aware of the value God sets on human beings. Out of many, many prior bitter experiences, it was the God of Salvation himself who came to deliver them from a state of aimlessness. The same God helped them deal with their frustrations by putting his Spirit into their lives and personalities and making them his ambassadors, agents entrusted with the furtherance of his cause in a hostile world. How else could Black people have survived this world's ills, had they not been sure that it was God who intervened for a people, who were thought by others to be unworthy and unlovely, and delivered them from oppressors over into the possession of God. Nothing less than a Black theology of Salvation is adequate in scope and relevancy for this hour in history. It is time for a new phase in theological reflection and that new phase, if it is to be adequate, must be a theology about the "now." However, it must also be a theology about the future and how the future "calls out" the

⁴⁰ Oscar Cullman, Salvation in History (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), pp. 11ff.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid., p. 13.

past and the present. Salvation is eschatological and only a theology of the "now" and "not-yet" is sufficient to see Black people into the future. An adequate Salvation theology must be a theology that is not "stayed" and dead. Friedrich Gogarten is instructive at this point. He speaks of the God of Salvation as the "coming one," the "beyond in our midst"⁴³ or "the future present with us." God is the eschatological Being, the One who stands at the end of the way and draws us on until history is finally fully consummated in Him. Such a vision of the future probes us and keeps us alive and open to expectations and change. Indeed, the quest for Salvation must rest upon a view of the future, for Salvation theology must proclaim a faith that makes one sure that the order of life should not be controlled by the imposition of an alien power. Any person in quest of Salvation must recognize that there is no salvation except under God, and only as one moves toward God in such a quest can s/he experience the freedom needed to give up the long-held "this-world" presumptions of a once-meaningful existence, old and senile with time. Indeed, the Salvation of man must depend on the reality of God. It is useless and meaningless to talk of Salvation without God, or to presuppose a need to speak of a Salvation quest without conceptualizing a future wherein Salvation could be fully realized. In this sense, one cannot conceptualize a meaningful future without God, for without God, there is no meaningful future, nor are there reasons to hope for one.

If there is to be a meaningful future, then we should reconceptualize the future and fix only on the "nowness" of all experience. Such a reconceptualization would erase hope and replace it with a void; it would fix on the "now" and erase future expectations; it would make man the "end" and this earth or history, the one dimension and scope of his total existence. It would narrow the scope of human aspirations to the level of merely human, and fundamental humanness would be the end of human aspirations. Without God, Salvation is a limited concept, void of a conceptualized future. Indeed, if man does not hope and strive for a future that is related to God, then what sense does it make to seek a Salvation related to a future wherein there will not be a more nearly complete fulfillment?

If there is no felt need in man and his world which still cries out for fulfillment, or if all needs can be adequately filled by man, then either God has become obsolete or any quest

⁴³ For a larger view of Friedrich Gogarten, see Larry Shriener's The Secularization of History: An Introduction to the Theology of Friedrich Gogarten (New York: Abingdon Press, 1966).

for Salvation is void of meaning. In some sense, when man reaches such a state of existence, Salvation has already come, though it may not be conceived as God's promised kingdom of total fulfillment. However, does not such a state of mind rule out even the question of God and his work in history? This is why God is such an inseparable part of the Salvation quest. Black theologians, knowledgeable of the Black religious tradition, cannot talk about God, while at the same time alleging that their God-talk is unrelated to needs in the world of Black people. Black theology rejects Bonhoeffer's "God of the gaps" warning. Rather, it must reaffirm the fact that God is the One in whom the final destiny of Black people and the ultimate future of all reality are represented. From God alone can Salvation be derived. God is not other than his promise of the future; God is the reality of the future that cannot be separated from the Salvation quest. God must be conceived as a part of that reality. Salvation faith must see God, first, in the form of a promise, finally as a fulfillment. Indeed, in a real sense, God is Salvation, for Salvation cannot be derived apart from God. This must be the faith of the true seeker after a Salvation adequate for the future Black religious experience. Without this faith we must ever hunger and ever thirst, and salvation will lie in a future ever unrealized.