

SALVATION IN THE CONTEMPORARY CONTEXT

Branko MURIĆ

Catholic Faculty of Theology, University of Zagreb
Vlaška 38, p.p. 5, HR-10 000 Zagreb
branko.muric@kbf.unizg.hr
bmuric@gmail.com

Does the contemporary man need salvation? Does the discussion of salvation still make sense for the contemporary man? The discourse on salvation is a central theme of Christian theology as it refers to God's intervention with the world and man. Therefore, the theme of salvation concerns the understanding of God and man and the understanding of their relationship. This touches on the very core of the Christian message, as witnessed by the Second Vatican Council in the dogmatic constitution on divine revelation *Dei verbum*: »In His goodness and wisdom, God chose to reveal Himself and to make known to us the hidden purpose of His will (see Eph. 1:9) by which through Christ, the Word made flesh, a man might in the Holy Spirit have access to the Father and come to share in the divine nature (see Eph. 2:18; 2 Peter 1:4). Through this revelation, therefore, the invisible God (see Col. 1; 15, 1 Team. 1:17) out of the abundance of His love speaks to men as friends (see Ex. 33:11; John 15:14-15) and lives among them (see Bar. 3:38), so that He may invite and take them into fellowship with Himself« (DV 2). Throughout history, various theological models and expressions have developed to explain why God had to become man and how to understand his action, as reparation, as ransom, as liberation. The quoted conciliar text points to a changed paradigm of understanding revelation, a category that theologically fundamentally describes God's self-revelation act in history, which brings back to the centre not only objective (that is, the doctrine), but also the personal, intersubjective, communicative, and participatory characteristics of revelation as experienced by the first Christian reflection in scriptural witness and apostolic proclamation and tradition.

Recognising the importance revealed in the purpose of God's revelation »to share in the divine nature«, »the invisible God out of the abundance of His love speaks to men as friends and lives among them, so that He may invite and take them into fellowship with Himself«, this calls theology, particularly salvation theology, to a new actualisation and evaluation of the category of salvation. Certainly, this hermeneutical intervention should also consider the speech of freedom as a fundamental concept of modernity, and where Christian theology certainly has something to say. As early as 1985, the German theologian Thomas Pröpper called for a new systematisation of theological discourse on salvation, linking it with the modern question of freedom; this, as he had already showed at the time, does not diminish, but liberates, theological discourse to be renewed through the Gospel message of freedom, liberation, and salvific act in dialogue with the context of the life of the modern man.¹ Furthermore, as it emerges from the conciliar theology of the understanding of God's self-revelation, freedom manifests itself as a revealing love for man. Therefore, the history of salvation is also understood as a history of freedom and liberation. By dwelling in the stimulating key to the interpretation of salvation as freedom, as Pröpper did, without neglecting the theological critical reflection on the theory of the emancipation of man through the important reflections of H. Peukert and J. B. Metz, we can also understand our horizon of reflection on salvation as a dialogic point in which the Christian message with its relevance still proves crucial even in those of conflicting (late) modern reflections on freedom.² In other words, should not the Christian message of salvation find the inner evangelical motive of relevance despite and precisely because of the contradictions that arise in man's attempts to think of himself, the reality around him, and his own conception of freedom? Is it not a core that constantly encourages deeper insights and always guarantees a new freshness to the Gospel? Can we allow the understanding of God's salvation to be just a »patch« for our ignorance of man and his situation today? Or should we, by engaging in the problems of the contemporary man, rethink the core of the Gospel message of salvation, and which speaks relevantly today? Although salvation is the central message of Christianity, it also speaks of God's

¹ Cf. Thomas PRÖPPER, *Erlösungsglaube und Freiheitsgeschichte. Eine Skizze zur Soteriologie*, München 1985.

² Extensive fundamental-theological insight and critical reviews, putting these authors in correlation with other important philosophers and theologians of the 20th century and bringing further literature related to this issue, have recently been made by Gianluigi PASQUALE – Branko MURIĆ, *Teologia fondamentale. Il Lógos tra comprendere e credere*, Roma 2021.

relationship and action toward mankind. The contemporary context, as well as our responsibility, given the seriousness of the Christian message, prompts and necessitates rethinking of its fundamental message and models in order to make it understandable and acceptable to the modern man and his situation.

Different models and concepts of salvation have been developed throughout the history of philosophy, theology, religion, and spirituality, depending on the concepts of God and the ways in which people understood themselves, the meaning, and purpose of their lives, both personal and social, subjective, and intersubjective. The contemporary Western culture presents a significant challenge for the actualised speech of salvation: a (post-) secularized worldview and its various interpretations and implementations, the advancement of science and technology, various and numerous causes of loss of meaning in life (disorientation), carelessness, and ignorance of the need for salvation, or shallowness in an understanding of salvation as the attainment of health or well-being, including the growth of science and technology.

The task of philosophy and theology is to clarify the old concepts of salvation and discover new ways of connecting God's action with the concrete situation of mankind and society. Furthermore, both are invited to consider the presence of salvation in the earthly life, without losing sight of its transcendent orientation or heavenly completion. Finally, while both analyse multiple positive trends in humanity's advancement as well as its apocalyptic and dystopian threats, they also critically evaluate and make a critical departure (eschatological adherence) without conforming to any ideological systems and pointing to the necessity of connecting with God's salvation.

The 45th International Symposium of Philosophy and Theology Professors, organized this year by the Catholic Faculty of Theology of the University of Zagreb, in co-organization with the Catholic Theological Faculty of the University of Graz, the Faculty of Theology of the University of Ljubljana, the Catholic Faculty of Theology of the University of Sarajevo and the Catholic Faculty of Theology in Đakovo of the Josip Juraj Strossmayer University in Osijek, took place in Trakošćan from 13 to 15 April 2023. This is the inaugural Symposium organized in this new composition, and this is where its great value lies. This was an opportunity to look at the topic not only from different angles of philosophical and theological disciplines, but also from the diversity of the cultural context of the lives of philosophers and theologians in four so different but still so close European countries. Half of the lectures from the Symposium are now published in this issue of the *Bogoslovska smotra* and it is

an opportunity for readers to get acquainted with a part of the topics we were preoccupied with during the Symposium.

I take the opportunity to personally thank the deans and vice deans of theological faculties for their persistent support and for making this Symposium see the light of day. Given that this project came true directly in the aftermath of one of the greatest health crisis that had engulfed the global world, inevitably bringing about crisis and challenging both man's freedom and the question of God and his actions in this world, the issue of salvation has once again proved to be the central theme in all its breadth, along with the experience of suffering and death, closure and limitation. Therefore, it was truly necessary to begin our philosophical and theological gatherings around a topic that, as we had said at the beginning, is the fundamental theme and message of Christianity and which constantly requires purification and actualization.

The exhibitors at the Symposium also made their outstanding contribution in giving new insights and new incentives to those who participated in the Symposium, and I hereby thank them all on behalf of the Organising and Programme Committee of the Symposium. Finally, we thank those who wrote scientific papers and enrich this issue of *Bogoslovska smotra*, thus contributing to the written dissemination of the question: What is salvation?