

Salvation in Christ

Supplementing the talk by
Metropolitan Kallistos of Diokleia

‘God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself’.

2 Corinthians 5:19

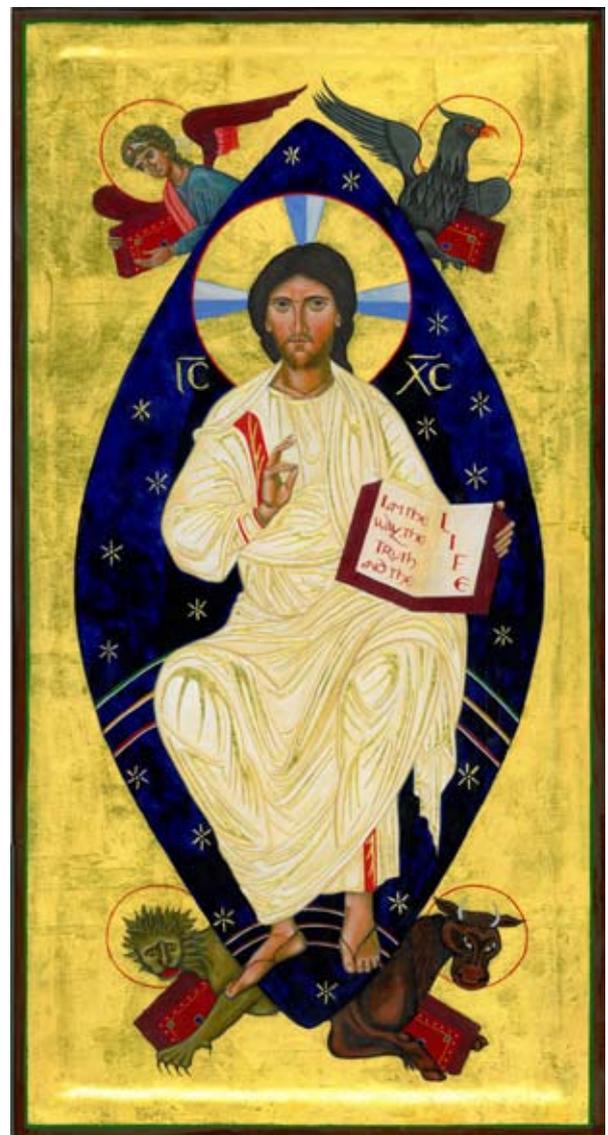
‘Are you saved?’ – How to answer?

There’s safety in numbers:

- A We have a number of ways of talking about the saving work of Christ
- B Six ways will be considered: they should be taken as a whole, not as alternatives
- C Underlying everything is the truth that we cannot save ourselves: we could not come to God, so he came to us.

Each way of talking must face four questions

- 1 Does it suggest a change in God, or in us?
 - We need changing, not God
- 2 Does it separate God from Christ?
 - Any idea that God ‘punishes’ Christ in our place must be rejected. When Christ saves us, the Father works in him
- 3 Does it isolate the Cross from the Incarnation and the Resurrection?
 - Christ’s work is a unity
- 4 Does it suggest Christ just leads us to feel differently? – Or is there a real change in our situation?



Icon of Christ in Glory
Juliet Venter (2010)
Institute for Orthodox Christian Studies

Six Ways of Understanding what Christ has Done

Model One: Christ the Teacher

Assessment:

Christ saves us by teaching truths about God and all things.

- A This model stands up well to the first three questions but not to the fourth
- B It leaves out our need to be released from sin.

Model Two: Christ as our Ransom

Assessment

We understand that Christ on the Cross pays a great price for our freedom: he gives his own life up for ours.

- A But we get into difficulties if we ask to whom the ransom is paid – If to an angry God, that means separating Christ from God (failing question 2) If to the Devil, that would imply that the Devil has some rights over us, yet we know his claims are false.
- B It is best not to push the image too far; its great strength is in meeting question 4: Christ has radically changed our situation.

Model Three: Christ as a Sacrifice for Us

Assessment

The New Testament takes up the Old Testament idea of sacrifice for sin, a voluntary offering that makes us right with God. Christ offers himself out of his love for us, to be our Paschal Lamb, so that death shall pass us over; he is ‘the atoning sacrifice for our sins’ (1 John 2:2).

But misapplied, the image has dangers:

- A It may suggest that God changes (failing question 1)
- B It may separate Christ from God (failing question 2)
- C It may isolate the Cross from the rest of our Lord’s life.

We can avoid such dangers if we

remember that God gave his Son because he loved us and Christ died because he shared that love.

Model Three (1): Christ as Satisfaction

Assessment

The medieval theologian Anselm saw Christ’s sacrifice as a satisfaction given to God’s honour, violated by human sin. The popularity of this teaching, east and west, is because it satisfies question 4: our situation is radically improved.

But there are problems:

- A It suggests our salvation was a legal deal, not an act of divine love
- B It brings in medieval notions of honour not found in the Bible.

Model Three (2): Christ as Substitute

Assessment

This understanding is fully scriptural: Christ, like the sacrificial scapegoat, carries away our sins (see Leviticus 16:7-10); he is the ‘suffering servant’, the ‘lamb led to the slaughter’ (Isaiah 53:4-7; Acts 8:30-35).

But this model risks:

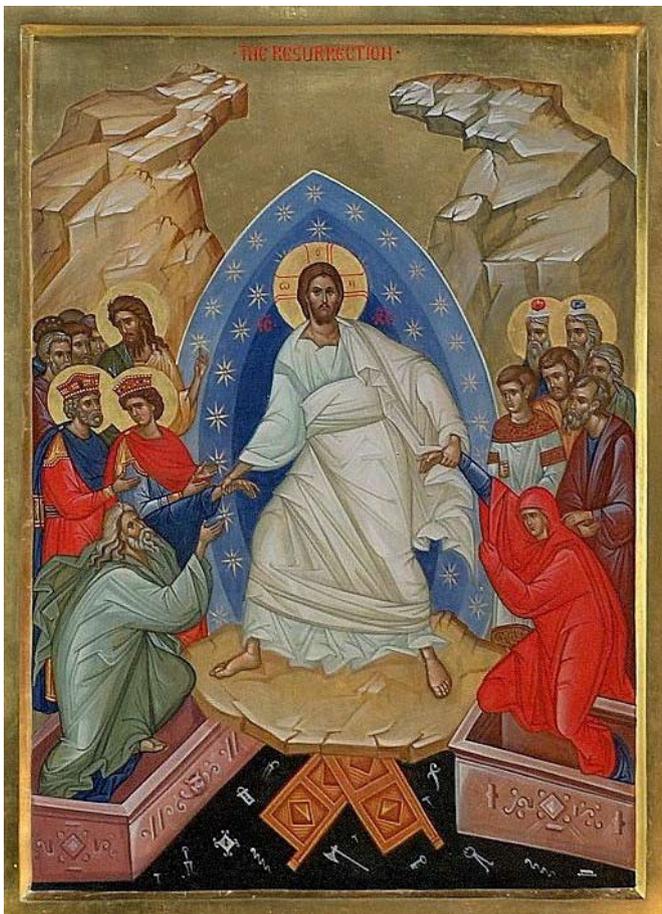
- A separating Christ from God (failing question 2)
- B presenting Christ’s suffering as something done apart from us.

Christ dwells in us and we must make his sacrifice our own.



The Bound Lamb

Francisco de Zubarán (c.1635-40),
Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid



Icon of the Anastasis (2004)
Nikolay and Natalia Bogdanov (2004)
St Ephraim's Church, Cambridge

Model Four: Christ's Victory

Assessment

This is the triumph we celebrate at Pascha: Christ 'trampling down death by death', victor in a cosmic battle over evil and darkness, over sin, despair and death, over the world, the flesh and the devil.

The great advantage of this model is that it holds together the Cross and the Resurrection.

- A A danger is that the victory may sound militaristic, a conquest fuelled by aggression.

But this is victory not by superior force but in weakness, by one who surrenders power and position, acting only in the power of love.

Model Five: Christ as Example

Assessment

This model, popular today, sees Christ as the supreme example of love in action. It meets well the first three questions: it presents God as unchanging love, it does not separate God from Christ, it relates the Cross to the Incarnation and the Resurrection, and it avoids legal and militaristic images.

- A But it treats Christ as an example to be followed through our own efforts, not someone who changes our nature and our situation.
- B The model fails to grasp the objective force of Christ's love, a dynamic and transforming power that gives us meaning and hope.

Model Six: Salvation as an Exchange of Gifts

Assessment

This model is comprehensive, it holds all of Christ's life in unity, and is fully objective.

At Christmas, God exchanged gifts with Man: he took our humanity – our gift to Him, offered through the Virgin Mary – and in exchange he heals us and enables us to be like him.

- A Salvation is mutual sharing
- B Salvation is theosis, participation in the divine life.



Adoration of the Kings (detail),
Jan Gossaert (c. 1502), National Gallery, London

