

Jozef Murin, "Contemporary approaches to Salvation: David Ford, David Hart and Aloysius Pieris"

This thesis uses David Tracy's version of correlation, in combination with his understanding of the three publics of theology, as a framework for discussing three contemporary soteriologies from authors from different ecclesial traditions – a Roman Catholic, Aloysius Pieris, an Anglican, David Ford, and an Orthodox, David Bentley Hart. Each of these three theologians is seen as addressing one of the publics (Ford the academy, Pieris the world, and Hart the church).

The thesis first offers an overview of a number of key metaphors of salvation. This is done adequately and addresses the most important of the ways of talking about salvation. I think that, as the later treatment of David Bentley Hart suggests, the dismissal of the meaningfulness of sacrifice is rather too simplistic, though of course that doesn't mean it is necessarily appropriate. I was also not entirely convinced by the reduction – at least on occasion – of salvation to the forgiveness of sins. Is salvation really forgiveness of sins, or is salvation also salvation from the power of sin, or overcoming the power of sin to reduce us, to make us less than we are created to be? Perhaps in this light one might also think about theosis? The thesis seems to suggest that if we choose the metaphor of theosis, we ignore language about sin and corruption. But could we not also say that the concept of theosis includes the recognition that sin and death are part of what we encounter on the road towards God, and that we can, as John Climacus realised, both rise and fall on the ladder of divine ascent?

At various points in the thesis, the author talks about theories of salvation. I am not sure that this is a very helpful turn of phrase. It depends, of course, on what one means by "theory", but I do not think any of the authors he deals with would think that they were constructing a theory of salvation. They are articulating what they see as the fundamental reality underlying the language used to talk about the experience of encountering Christ.

There are undoubtedly questions that could be asked of the three authors that are worked with. Some of these are mentioned by the student, others are not, and it might have been good to have engaged a bit more critically with them. Perhaps more importantly, I wonder to what extent he is faithful to them in his desire to assign each one to a particular role in Tracy's tri-partite division. For example, it seems to me clear that both Pieris and Ford are also speaking to the church (and this is very clearly the case for Pieris). Hart is, as even the student admits, also engaged in "fundamental theology", and his aesthetics of beauty is about the engagement with the world, as indeed is Ford's insistence on the face. It may be possible to detect in each a major starting point with the other two dimensions as minor, but I am not sure that is not forcing them into something they are not. This may point to a problem with Tracy.

One thing that struck me, first in the section on David Bentley Hart, an Orthodox theologian, was the absence of any pneumatology. This leads me to ask where the Spirit is. Does the Spirit have any role in our salvation, or do we only need the Father and the Son, which then makes the doctrine of the Trinity redundant, leaving the Spirit at best as a sort of post-salvific *Restbegriff*.

Overall, this is a very good piece of work, with good reading, well-marshalled, to produce a coherent and well-structured thesis. There are some minor linguistic errors, and less forgivably some careless slips (on one page, Colin Gunton's surname is spelt in three different ways – see p.16, Guton, Gunton and Cunton). But that does not detract from a thoughtful and interesting reflection on contemporary soteriology, which I think is on or around distinction level.

Mark: 70%