SOLUS, SOLA: Constructing a Christocentric faith model of the '*ordo salutis*'

Author:
Andre van Oudtshoorn[1]

Affiliation:
[1]Department of the Dean of Academics and Research, Perth Bible College, Australia

Correspondence to:
Andre van Oudtshoorn

Email:
andre@pbc.wa.edu.au

Postal address:
56 Lilburne Road, Duncraig, WA6023, Australia

This article develops a non-linear model of the *ordo salutis* with Christ at the centre. It shows that each individual event is a manifestation of what Christ has done and a call to faith in him. Faith is shown to comprise of *consensus* (agreement) and *fiducia* (trust). Through this model, the creative tension between the objective (indicative) and the subjective (imperative) dimensions of the gospel as well as the tension between God's eschatological time and our unfulfilled time are maintained in such a way that they both complement and limit each other. This tension, it is argued, is intrinsically linked to the way in which Christ continues to be present within our world as both Lord and Spirit. As Lord, Jesus is proclaimed as the One who has already overcome our broken reality; as the Spirit, Christ continues to be vulnerable to be resisted and rejected by us. As the Spirit of the risen Lord, he is nevertheless able to perform miracles and overcome our broken reality as the gospel is proclaimed. A short analysis of the way in which the Bible refers to some of the events in the *ordo salutis* confirms the legitimacy of this model.

Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications: It is argued that this model overcomes many objections against the traditional understanding of the *ordo salutis*. By challenging the underlying presuppositions of both Arminiaism and Calvinism, this article provides a unique alternative which does justice to key insights from both traditions and adds a new voice to the ongoing debate between Arian, Pelagian and semi-pelagian theologians, on the one side, and Reformed theologians, on the other side. It thus makes a significant intradisciplinary contribution to systematic theology. It also aligns the universality of salvation in Christ as the second Adam to the continuing need for a personal faith response to Christ.

Introduction

What shall we do brothers? This question, asked by the listeners in response to Peter's sermon at Pentecost (Ac 2:37) is still of theological importance for the church today. What should people do to be saved from 'this crooked generation' (Ac 2:40)? Calvin (1816) suggested that a correct response to and proper appropriation of the gospel is critical for salvation:

> First we must understand that as long as Christ remains outside of us, and we are separated from him, all that he has suffered and done for the salvation of the human race remains useless and of no value to us. (p. 278)[1]

Peter's answer to the crowd, 'Each one of you must repent of your sins and turn to God, and be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins' (Ac 2: 37–40), seems to point to specific steps that the individual can undertake to secure salvation. In reference to other scriptural passages, the idea of an *ordo salutis*[2] (order of salvation) or *via salutis* (way of salvation)

1. Calvin develops the *ordo salutis* (or *modus salutis*) extensively in Book 3 of his Institutes of Christian Religion under the title *De modo percipiendae Christi gratiae et qui inde fructus nobis proveniant, et qui effectus consequantur* [The way in which we receive the grace of Christ: What benefits come to us from it and what effects follow]. The doctrine generally deals with events such as calling, sanctification, justification, repentance, being born again and believing as well as how they inter-relate, either logically or temporally, with each other in the process of securing salvation. This article aims at using a theological or more specifically a Christological approach to the procurement of salvation. Wenger (2007:320) however argues: '… Calvin clearly never set out to establish a formal taxonomy of the logical or temporal order of salvation. Several problems ensue from this. First, the whole notion of describing "Calvin's *ordo salutis*" and in so doing comparing it with those of later generations is again anachronistic. His lack of explanation on the topic should not be read as being either for or against the possibility of such constructions; rather, it should be made clear that his concerns did not involve establishing an explicit position for debates in which he was not involved and which arose after his time. Thus his silence on the issue should demand the same from his interpreters.' According to Wenger (2007:311), 'Calvin destroys Rome's charge [*of antinomianism*] by showing that faith, in its Protestant understanding, entails a disposition to holiness without particular reference to justification, a concern for Godliness that is not to be understood only as a consequence of justification. Calvin proceeds as he does, and is free to do so, because for him the relative "ordo" or priority of justification and sanctification is indifferent theologically.' Similarly, John Piper '… is concerned primarily with maintaining the distinction between sanctification and justification. Yet he unfortunately tends to miss the redemptive-historical horizon and the social context of "righteousness" in Paul's letters' (Bird 2011:300).

2. 'The origins of the term have been traced to two Lutheran scholars, Frank Buddeus and Jakobus Karpov, writing between 1724 and 1739.' (McGowan in McCormack 2006:148). In his *Expositions of the Gospel of Mark*, chapter 10, Elowsky (2009:171) points to the use of the term by Pseudo-Jerome (7th century) who is the only patristic author to use the term. Here, he talks of the order in which the gospel is proclaimed, however, and not how it is received. The *ordo salutis* operated as a key theological concept, if not term, amongst the Puritans where it designated a broadly '… theoretical expression of a practical divinity that grounded the quest for salvation on a set of occurrences, ultimately reaching back to the eternal decree of election and the atoning death of Christ, which God had determined would be experienced in an "inseparable connexion" by each believer. Roughly the stages comprised awareness of sin and the vindictive force of divine law, intensifying sorrow and a sense of self-poverty, followed by effectual calling, faith, justification, adoption, sanctification (distinguished in the sin-abating stage of "mortification" and the "inherent holiness" of vivification) and glorification' (Parnham 2005:3).

as an ordered way of appropriating salvation was developed in Reformed theology.[3] This doctrine continues to play a vital role in Reformed and Evangelical theology and practice, as McGowan (2007) indicates:

> While the sequential steps involved in the ordo salutis in the usual technical sense may be debated at this or that point, the integrity of the gospel itself stands or falls with the ordo salutis broadly understood, equivalent to the application of salvation and distinct from its accomplishment. (p. 276)

Relevance

The doctrine of the *ordo salutis* has successfully transcended its original, narrow, Reformed context and today operates as a key theological framework by which a wide spectrum of believers understand their Christian identity and communicate their faith to non-believers.[4] Within charismatic, pietistic and evangelical theologies, terms such as *born again*, *repentance* and *sanctification* play significant roles that shape their adherents' theology. Reflecting on the *ordo salutis* remains critically important. In Australia, for instance, the term '*born again Christian*' rates a -5 amongst unbelievers whilst *practising Christian* rates it a +28.[5] The significance and relevance of this article thus extends beyond a reflection on an isolated and somewhat esoteric Reformed theological doctrine. The *ordo salutis* directly impacts on the way in which a large segment of Christians appropriate the message of salvation and communicate it to the world.

Theology practised within the domain of the academy can easily isolate itself from the theology of the pew. This, however, happens at its own peril. It is the theology of the pew which drives the church and creates the framework within which people experience their faith. It is remarkable that the doctrine of the *ordo salutis*, which can be characterised as technical and obscure, continues to play such a large foundational role in popular theology. This article seeks to offer a way for the academy to engage in serious dialogue with the popular theological understanding of salvation as promulgated in the *ordo salutis*.

In this article, I plead for a new understanding of the *ordo salutis* which places Christ at the centre of salvation and maintains his centrality within each specific event of the *ordo salutis*. Each event, it will be argued, is a manifestation of what Christ has done to procure salvation, and it is also a call to faith in him. Faith is shown to comprise both *consensus* (agreement) and *fiducia* (trust). Through this model, the creative tension between the objective (indicative) and the subjective (imperative) dimensions of the gospel as well as the tension between God's eschatological time and our unfulfilled time

are both maintained in such a way that they complement and limit each other. It will be shown that this tension flows from the way in which Christ continues to be present within our world as both Lord and Spirit. As Lord, Jesus is proclaimed as the One who has already overcome our broken reality. As the Spirit, Christ continues to be vulnerable to be resisted and rejected by the world. As the Spirit of the risen Lord, the Spirit is nevertheless able to perform miracles and overcome our broken reality through the church's proclamation of the gospel message in words and deeds. This model provides a Trinitarian rather than anthropological, psychological or pneumatic-mystical approach to understanding the realisation of salvation within the world.

The model still calls for an existential and experiential appropriation of the gospel, but it firmly anchors this appropriation to the Christological indicatives contained in the gospel message. Without such anchoring, the uniquely Christian element of the Christian faith-experience may end up being replaced by an amorphous general religious experience.[6] In an interview on the religious programme Compass, for instance, Australian Quakers indicated that many people in the movement do not necessarily see themselves as distinctively Christian any more.[7] I wish to argue that Christ needs to be the ground, means, focus, goal as well as the critique of our religious experiences for those experiences to continue to qualify as Christian experiences. This model will enable the church to epistemologically ground her religious experiences as faith-experiences whilst Christ, the object of faith, remains beyond the subjectivity which marks our experiences. The issues that this article addresses are thus not abstract but grounded on the praxis of how many believers understand, appropriate and communicate their salvation. The task of theology is to critically engage with such operational theology in the light of Scripture.

Objections

The development of a theological doctrine on how Christian salvation may be appropriated in the praxis may seem innocuous enough, but a range of theological objections have been raised against it. The first of these is that the *ordo salutis* primarily reflects how an *individual* may come to salvation. Venema (2007:199) sees the *ordo salutis* as deviating from Calvin's emphasis upon the theological and Christological basis for understanding the nature of God's grace in us by limiting the work of the Spirit in salvation to what happens to and in the individual believer.[8] In this process, *anthropology* rather than *Christology* or *theology* becomes the main focus within *soteriology.*

A second objection stemming from this individualistic tack of the *ordo salutis* concerns its negative impact on

---

3. Berkhof (1996:417) sees the development of the *ordo salutis* as a distinct fruit of the Reformation.

4. There is currently a growing alliance between evangelicalism and Reformed theology in America as evident in the writings of the popular theologian John Piper and others (Hanson 2006:32). In Australia, the Sydney Diocese combine a fairly rigid Reformed theology with evangelicalism (Jenson 2012), and in South Africa, evangelical, pietistic motifs continue to operate strongly in the Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk (Coetzee 2013).

5. http://blog.mccrindle.com.au/the-mccrindle-blog/church_attendance_in_australia_infographic. The research indicates that the designations fundamentalist *Christian* was rated at -31 and *evangelical Christian* -11 whilst the terms *ordinary Christian* received a +18 rating and *practising Christian* a +28 rating.

6. This article may also hold significant implications for the inter-faith religious dialogue in which the church is more and more compelled to engage.

7. Interview on 28 September 2007, see transcript http://www.abc.net.au/compass/s955596.htm

8. He nevertheless believes that Calvin's writings already contain the seed for this later development in the *ordo salutis*.

ecclesiology. Writing from an American point of view which nevertheless reflects most current Western theologies, Work (in Wainwright *et al*. 1999) comments:

> The question of whether contemporary American evangelicals are well served by the pride of place given to the ordo salutis is another matter entirely. Whatever its original warrant and merit, in America's individualistic and pluralistic context, it reduces the church to an afterthought. Since the work of Christ is conceived of primarily in terms of the course of the salvation of individuals, the real church is the invisible one ... Ecclesiology takes a back seat to soteriology, and the church becomes merely an external instrument – perhaps even a dispensable instrument – of salvation. (p. 184)

Torrance accuses the *ordo salutis* in Western theology of being grounded on general revelation which is then interpreted in legal terms by natural reason through the *sensus moralis* [moral application]. A *moral law*, inscribed on the human heart, is presupposed as the necessary means to convict the individual of *sin*, a conviction that in turn forms the ground for *repentance* through which God's *grace* and *forgiveness* may be experienced (Torrance 1996:60). Epistemologically, this understanding presupposes the primacy of law and nature over grace. Torrance complains that Western theology depicts both revelation and reconciliation as something extrinsic to God's act of creation. By *extrinsic*, he refers to a mode of communication in which information is communicated as separate from the communicator. This has led to revelation being seen more as *communication* than *communion* (Torrance 1996:63). When the Western *ordo salutis* is meshed with such an extrinsic revelation model, Torrance (1996) argues, it must lead, amongst other things, to:

- a dichotomous interpretation of the relationship between revelation and redemption, and the introduction of a bifurcation between the being of God and God's specific redemptive acts, where the former can be described in general terms in advance of a consideration of the latter
- ... a contractual/ legalistic concept of divine purposes for humanity which fails to take account of the extent of God's primary affirmation of humanity – encouraging at best, a synergistic and, at worst, a Pelagian interpretation of human obligation and human value
- an anthropological exposition grounded in an *incurvatus in se* analysis and description of human nature – where these initial conditions determine and interpret themselves in such a way that divine endorsement of the analysis is included within it. (pp. 67–68)

Christocentric perspective

Against this negative perception, Berkouwer (1954:36) argues that the doctrine of the *via salutis*, as he prefers to call it, does not aim to simply refine and praise the logical systematisation of soteriology. Its purpose is instead '… to cut off every way in which Christ is not confessed exclusively as *the Way*'. Such a Christological grounding of the *ordo salutis* was also articulated by the Puritan John Owen. According to Ferguson, Owen saw divine election and its appropriation meet, in terms of the *ordo salutis*, in the person of Christ. 'To become a Christian is therefore to be taken into covenant

with God in Christ, by the Holy Spirit' (Ferguson 1987:36). Martin Luther (1970) in his *Freedom Tractate* uses the image of the church (but also the individual believer) being united to Christ in marriage as a way of describing salvation:

> Thus the believing soul by means of the pledge of his faith is free in Christ, its bridegroom, free from all sins, secure against death and hell, and is endowed with the eternal righteousness, life and salvation of Christ its bridegroom ... And she has a righteousness in Christ her husband of which she may boast as of her own and which she can confidently display alongside her sins in the face of death and hell and say: 'If I have sinned, yet my Christ, in whom I believe, has not sinned, all his is mine and mine is his ...' (p. 352)

Salvation is here not seen as something separate from Christ but is, instead, linked directly to his person and the inter-personal relationship of the sinner with him. Gaffin (in McGowan 2007:284) points to Calvin's presentation of the *ordo salutis* and then specifically the way in which he treats sanctification by faith before justification by faith. This can only happen, he contends, because Calvin links both doctrines intrinsically to the person of Jesus Christ. According to him, union with Christ by faith is the essence of Paul's *ordo salutis*. In his *Institutes*, Calvin (1816:3.11.6) depicts the interrelationship between sanctification and justification in terms of a metaphor in which Christ is the sun, justification its light and sanctification its heat. The sun is the source of both, and the both of them are thus always present where the sun is present. They remain different from each other – the light illumines and the heat warms, but they are both ways in which their source (the sun) presents itself. It is, however, also true that some other pronouncements of Calvin were foundational for the later development of the *ordo salutis* within Reformed Orthodoxy.

Union with God in Christ through the Holy Spirit must be, and remains at the heart of soteriology.[9] It is important to maintain the Trinitarian basis of the *ordo salutis* in this context. The danger of tri-theism in which the work of the Father and the Son are divorced from each other is ever present. This is because the work of salvation cannot be separated from the person of God as an *opus extra deum* [a work outside of or separate from, God], but it is intrinsically linked to the person of God.[10] 'God is salvation: it is not simply an action He performs; the action is an act in which one can understand His being' (Greggs 2009:3). In many Reformed systems, the *ordo salutis* is treated as part of pneumatology. However, when the work of the Spirit in salvation is separated from the work of Christ, the Spirit's work may be seen as complimentary or even supplementary to the completed work of Christ for our salvation. The question is then whether Christ has in fact *realised* salvation or does he merely provide the possibility for salvation?

Barth resisted the tension between the salvation wrought by Christ and the application of that salvation through the work of the Spirit and placed the saving event of Christ firmly at the

9.'The gift of the Son for us and that of the Spirit to us are the two great streams that derive from this, the ultimate promise that God makes of himself to be our God' (Spence 2006:101).

10.*Opera trinitatis ad extra sunt indivisa* [the external works of the trinity are inseparable] (translation AvO).

centre of soteriology. 'Conversion, justification, sanctification and calling have already occurred for every person, even if one is not subjectively aware of it' (Barth 2004b:148). Much has been made of Barth's concept of time here.[11] 'In the single event of Jesus Christ, everything of saving value has already happened, is happening and will happen' (Horton 2008:174). Barth, in his view of time, seems to assimilate the appropriation of salvation in temporal history with the eternal time of the cross (McCormack & Anderson 2011:140). Barth's dialectic between God's time for us as eternally gracious and fulfilled time and our own lost time, which he develops in *CD 1.2*, does not completely escape the suspicion that our 'lost time' is so overcome by God's fulfilled time that it is ultimately made irrelevant by it. It is true that, for Barth, God's time is characterised by God becoming present to us in our lost time – by means of the time of revelation. For Barth, however, that does not mean that God's fulfilled time is given up so that he enters and participates fully in our lost time. Whilst Christ may suffer in our lost time, he finally suffers in terms of God's eternally fulfilled time. Through the gospel, we are invited to participate in God's time (Gignilliat 2009):

> In revelation God stands in for us entirely. And so also the time he creates for himself in revelation, the genuine present, past and future of which we have been speaking, is presented to us entirely. It should, it can, it will become our time, since He directs his Word to us; we are to become contemporary with this time of His. His genuine time takes the place of the problematic, improper time we know and have. It replaces it in that, amidst the years and ages of this time of ours, the time of Jesus Christ takes the place of our time … (p. 28)

Against this view, I want to argue that the 'great exchange' of the gospel includes an exchange of time – our time and God's time. Barth is correct in that the gospel calls us continually to exchange our unfulfilled 'not yet' or 'lost' time through faith for God's Christologically fulfilled time. However, God also does this by continuing to exchange his 'fulfilled' time for our 'not yet' and 'lost' time. As God gave himself in Christ to participate within our space and time, the Holy Spirit represents this same gift of God by continuing to be present with us in our lost time. At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit has entered into our time, and in him, God continues to participate in our time. The Spirit groans eschatologically with us for the final fulfilment of time. The presence of the Holy Spirit within our world and time as the Spirit of Christ, the eternal Son who gave up his glory and became flesh within space and time, presents God as still being directly affected by temporal events within our lost time. As the Spirit of Christ, the Holy Spirit represents the resurrected Lord who remains present as the crucified Lord. The Spirit represents Jesus as he was with us in history: able to do miracles and overcome the present reality whilst also remaining vulnerable in his loving commitment to us and thus able to be resisted within and by this reality. The presence of the Spirit within *this Age*[12] gives our time new meaning because, through its presence, God's time has entered our time. Our time is thus not annihilated

by eternity but instead accommodates God's time. What we say and do in the here and now matters to God because he participates with us in our present time.[13]

Our time and God's eternal time are thus enmeshed with each other because God is present in both. Not only is God's time in our time, but our time is also taken up in God's time. The grounding for the presence of the Holy Spirit in our time remains Christological.[14] In Christ, God has entered our time in such a way that what happened to Christ would have eternal consequences for God. The crucified Lord is designated as the eternally crucified Lamb on the basis of the unique once and for all event of his crucifixion within our time. At the cross, our 'lost time' has thus been salvaged and redeemed to become and be eternal time. Our history is not simply the bearer of revelation. Whilst it is not revelation in and of itself, it is taken up into revelation. It becomes part of God's history, and God's time for us becomes history in our history. The incarnation and glorification of Jesus are, and remain, pivotal events for both God and ourselves. Any construction of an *ordo salutis* in which God's time or eternity undoes or relativises 'lost' or human time is to be rejected.

A model of the *ordo salutis* will, therefore, have to do justice to the centrality of the historical event of salvation in Christ as well as to the continuing significance of the events taking place in the time of the 'not yet'. Many different solutions have been offered on how these seemingly diverse descriptions of 'how one is saved' interrelate. Heyns (1978:303) suggests that the *ordo salutis* is based on logical rather than chronological distinctions, but then, only a few pages on (*ibid.* 1978:307), he refers to vocation and regeneration as *the beginning* of the individual's spiritual life and repentance as the result of the progressive work of the Holy Spirit 'in, aan en oor die mens' (*ibid.* 1978:315).[15] The temporal character of the *ordo salutis* must continue to be recognised as a significant aspect of salvation and needs to be an integral part of any model of the process of salvation in such a way that (1) our temporal participation in salvation does not relativise the 'once and for all' and eternally valid character of the salvation procured by God for humanity in and through Christ and (2) the temporal dimension of salvation within the context of the 'not yet' does not get absorbed into eternity or God's time in such a way that it loses its ongoing significance.[16] I believe that

---

11. For Barth's discussion on time, see *CD.1.2* (Barth 2010:45–121).

12. In both the Old and New Testament, *this Age* stands in contrast to *the coming Age*. *This age* is marked by brokenness and sin whilst the *coming Age* represents the eschatologically transformed reality after God's judgement of the old dispensation. Cullmann's understanding of the Biblical concept of time, though disputed in some areas, still remains seminal (Cullmann 1964).

13. Describing Barth's view on the *ordo salutis,* McCormack (2006:181) states: 'The work of Christ and the work of the Spirit belongs to a single movement of God towards the creature, a movement that entails both the accomplishment of the work of Christ and the awakening of individuals to this accomplishment.' Whilst Barth is right in resisting a duality in the operation of Christ and the Spirit, one should consider where the work of the Spirit and the work of Christ coalesce in salvation. The work of the Spirit is ontologically linked to Christ but not to sinful humanity outside of and apart from him. Sinful humanity receives the Spirit through faith in Christ.

14. Kärkkäinen (2010:360) stresses the intrinsic link between Jesus and the Spirit, an aspect, he contends, that has not received due attention in theology. Just as the Spirit cannot be understood without Christ, Christ cannot be understood without the Spirit. Christ is made Messiah through the Spirit (Kärkkäinen 2010:360).

15. '*in, on and over human beings*' (translation AvO).

16. Perhaps the doctrine that most evidently distinguishes an Arminian theological framework from a Calvinist framework can be found in the *ordo salutis* - specifically in the question of whether faith precedes or follows regeneration (Warren 2009:551).

a Christocentric model, instead of a linear model of the *ordo salutis,* will fulfil these requirements more adequately.

Constructing a non-linear Christocentric model

'Salvation in Christ – this is the centre from which the lines are drawn to every point on the way of salvation. The lines themselves may be called faith' (Berkouwer 1954:29). The model that I presuppose does justice to Berkouwer's insight by moving away from a linear to a Christocentric model of the *ordo salutis.*[17] Such a non-linear model needs to do justice to the competing realities in which the gospel is proclaimed, namely between the New Age inaugurated in and through Christ (Rm 5; 1 Cor 15) and the continuation of the Old Age of sin and death, and be able to accommodate the various events in the *ordo salutis* within this tension. This means the following:

- A Christocentric model of the *ordo salutis* does not signify a timeless understanding of God's work for our salvation and the appropriation of this salvation. God's fulfilled *eschatological* time and our broken '*not yet*' time are both present simultaneously in the proclamation of the gospel. They only exist in relation to each other and thus always imply each other. The gospel without the demand for immediate appropriation and transformation of this world is not the gospel. In the same way, the demand for appropriation and transformation without the proclamation of the new reality already wrought by Christ is also not the gospel.
- The individual *subjective* and existential dimensions implicit in the imperative of the gospel and the transformational presence of the Holy Spirit in the church and with the proclamation of the gospel need to be seen in a creative tension with the corporate, *objective* and eschatological dimensions of the gospel message that in Christ God has acted *outside of us*, *apart from us*, *despite us*, and also *with us* to bring salvation *to us.*
- The same holds true for the *Lordship* of Christ which should be seen to be in tension with the presence of Christ in the world through the *Holy Spirit*. Until the return of Jesus in glory and the final transformation (new birth) of the world, the Lordship of Christ is relativised by the continuation of a world in enmity against God. The Holy Spirit continues the presence of Jesus in the world as the loving, vulnerable One. In and through the Spirit, Christ the crucified continues to suffer for the world by being able to be rejected, resisted and ignored. The Holy Spirit as the Spirit of the risen Lord, however, is also able to overcome this world in love and point people to the Kingdom of God which has already been inaugurated through the work of Christ.
- The various events within the *ordo salutis* should signify both an eschatological, historically and Christologically fulfilled dimension and an unfulfilled dimension within this broken reality that can be proclaimed as an urgent imperative in order to challenge this broken reality in the
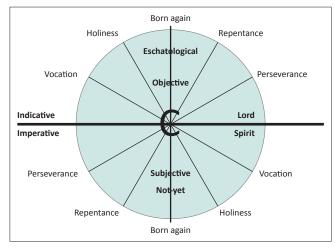

FIGURE 1: Christocentric faith model.

light of gospel about what Christ has done. There should be evidence that this is how the Bible utilises these events as descriptors of the salvation wrought in Christ and its appropriation by believers. Rainbow (2012) contends:

> To isolate justification from sanctification is one way to erect a safeguard against works-righteousness, to be sure. But it goes too far and renders the 'faith alone' doctrine susceptible to an inherent ethical groundlessness. If justification be wholly independent of sanctification, then the requirement of sanctification becomes an add-on, and does not arise from the very nature of God's gift of righteousness. On that hypothesis, the imperative to do good does not arise out of the fact that good behaviour is part and parcel of righteousness itself, but from a different principle and collection of scriptural texts. (p. xix)

- The indicative and the imperatives of the gospel, however, need to be brought into such a relationship where justification is not absorbed into sanctification or vice versa.

According to this model, all the different events of the *ordo salutis* are seen as essentially expressing the same reality: the breaking in of the restored and thereby constantly right relationship between God and humanity in and through the person and work of Jesus Christ. The figure 'C' at the centre of the circle thus refers to Christ. Reflecting Berkouwer's thought, the lines drawn between the events and the person of Christ represent faith. The circle is divided into two parts. The top half is designated 'indicative' and refers to the eschatological, once and for all completed, act of salvation in and through Christ that is now joyfully being announced to all of the world through the proclamation of the gospel. The different events of the *ordo salutis* that are indicated within the sphere of the 'indicative' are thus seen as expressing, in their own unique ways, God's decisive event of salvation for the world in Christ that happened without us and apart from us.[18] Each event of the *ordo salutis* is connected to the person of Christ as an expression of faith that this particular event has been fully realised and fulfilled in and through the Christ event.

---

17. I did not initially develop this model as a direct response to Berkouwer although it may have played a sub-conscious part in the construction of the model.

18. This semi-sphere is designated as 'eschatological' to reflect the *once and for all* significance of the Christ event.

Faith here takes on the form of *assensus*: To believe is to agree with and/or accept the salvation which is proclaimed as having already been realised for us in Christ and is now given to us.[19] Faith is not grounded in itself and does not refer back to itself – faith is only Christian faith on the basis of the object it refers to, namely Christ, who is outside of faith. Moreover, faith's content, that which it confesses, undermines any attempt to turn faith into something that we do or possess. To agree that there is nothing that we can do to procure salvation but that Christ has done it all for us links faith inseparably to God's free gift of salvation. Faith can only confess the message of the grace of God (*sola gratia – grace alone*) and itself as an out-flowing of that work of grace.

The bottom section of the circle is designated by the term 'imperative', and the same events of the *ordo salutis* are indicated as belonging there. The imperative is to trust in Jesus in the light of the good news that is being proclaimed within this broken time. Just as the top half reflects how our 'regeneration' has been realised in Christ, so the imperative demands that our *regeneration in Christ* should be realised in us within our time and context.[20] In this section, faith takes on the dimension of *fiducia* (trust) which manifests itself as *obedience* to the gospel. It demands existential trust because the salvation that God offers is not some *thing* or some *event* that relates solely to restoring broken humanity's condition and context, but it is the event by which God gives *himself* to humanity to reconcile it to himself and to set it up within an existential loving relationship to himself. In salvation, humanity encounters the God who loves them and invites them to love him in return. And this gift of God-self comes to humanity through the presence of the Holy Spirit who encounters it in, with and through the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the risen Lord.[21]

The indicative of the gospel demands trusting submission and obedience to the God who has saved us (Mk 16:16; Jn 3:16; 5:24; Ac 8:37; 16:31; Rm. 9:32–33; 3:22; 10:9; 1 Cor. 1:21; Heb 11:16 etc.). To refuse to trust God is to sin. Referring to John 16:9, Berkouwer (1971) states:

> Especially that text has demanded attention because the intimate relation it draws between sin and unbelief. We are told that the Spirit convicts the world of sin – but he does so because of unbelief in Jesus Christ. We do not read of a variety of sins but only of a single all-inclusive unbelief … Now that he (Jesus) has come, salvation and condemnation can only be seen in relation to him. 'He who has the Son has eternal life; he who does not obey the Son shall not see eternal life, but the wrath of God rests upon him.' (p. 223)

In this model, the indicatives (with faith as *assensus – agreement*) and imperatives (with faith as *fiducia – trust*)

together constitute the gospel message. This message refers to the new reality in Christ in which we participate by faith and which, in turn, demands the transformation of our still-existing old reality through the presence and work of the Spirit with and within those who believe. The different events of the *ordo salutis* thus have two dimensions: an objective indicative dimension and a subjective imperative dimension which cannot be separated from each other. A cursory look at the way in which the Bible speaks of these events confirms this view.

Born again

This term appears in Paul's writing in Titus 3:5. In the context, it refers to 'the significance of God's coming (epiphany) in Christ (v. 4; cf. 2:11), which put an end to the "once" of the time before Christ (v. 3)' (Ridderbos 1997:226). Note also the eschatological terminology of verse 6. In this passage, 'being born again' thus refers to the eschatological in-breaking of the Kingdom of God in Christ. Paul's thoughts in Galatians 4:21–33 and his reference to a 'new creation' (Gl 6:16) both point to the same objective work of Christ for salvation whilst 2 Corinthians 5:17 links the *new creation* to the technical term *in Christ* which Paul uses about 164 times in his writings. According to Ridderbos (1997:59), Paul uses *in Christ* to point to 'the church's objective state of salvation'.[22]

The use of the term in 1 Peter 1:23 incorporates the same eschatological emphasis. 'Wiedergeburt ist kein begrif für dass, wass im Inneren des Menschen for sich geht, sondern ein Ausdrück für den Anteil an der neuen Welt (Matth. 19:28)'[23] (Weber 1959:666).

The use of '*anothen*' in John 3, which is often translated as 'again', also carries the idea of being born '*from above*'.[24] According to Schnackenburg (1994), it points to:

> … the divine and heavenly world by whose powers man must be renewed … Jesus was speaking of an event brought about by God's grace. Prior to all human effort to attain the Kingdom of God, God himself must create the basis of a new being in man, which will also make a new way of life possible. (p. 368)

John's use thus correlates with the other Biblical usages of the term in that it too refers to the new creation that is linked to the external reality of God and his work outside of us and that we encounter in Christ alone – the one who came 'from above' (Jn 3:13).

We can conclude the following:

- The term 'born again' refers to the 'new creation' or 'human being' that has come about objectively in Christ through his death and resurrection.

---

19. Barth is often accused of fostering such a forensic epistemological understanding of salvation that excludes the personal and subjective dimension of appropriating salvation. This is a caricature of Barth's position. In *CD IV/1* (Barth 2004:108), he states: '"How do I lay hold of a gracious God?" is not the only question to be asked in Christian soteriology, but it is an inescapable one.'

20. This part is designated as 'not yet' referring to the time of the eschatological expectation of the return of Christ which is still characterised by sin and brokenness.

21. Wesley's theology is sometimes characterised as a movement from faith as *assensus* in his earlier period to faith as *fiducia* in 1738 and faith as *fiducia* grounded on objective experience in 1740 where 'where objective implies that it is not self-generated' (Ayers 2002:272).

22. This also term corresponds to the term *with Christ* (see Rm 6:3ff.; Gl 2:19; Eph 2:6; Col 3:1–4) and functions theologically against the background of Paul's depiction of Christ as the *second Adam* (Rm 5:12–20; 1 Cor 15:22, 45ff.) which points to the cosmic and universal dimension of the work of Christ. In these texts, Christ and Adam function as 'universal personalities … construed cosmically and eschatologically' (Oepke in Kittel, Bromiley & Friedrich 1976:II 541–542) '… who comprehend within themselves all the numbers of the generations of men pertaining to them' (Ridderbos 1997:61).

23. '*Born again* is not a concept pertaining to that which takes place within people, but an expression of participation in the new creation' (translation AvO).

24. The Greek term *palin* would have been used to express 'again'.

- As such, it carries the connotation of *sola gratia* [grace alone]. The new creation is constituted by God apart from us.
- It also functions as an imperative (Jn 3:1–13) as we can see in the link that Paul makes between being a *new human being* and baptism.

Perseverance

This term points firstly to the Christian's total dependence on God rather than a mere ethical virtue, according to Berkouwer (1958):

> The Greek virtue of constancy, therefore, is quite different form the Biblical perseverance. They are opposites, no matter how much they resemble each other as regards constancy. The contexts in which they stand are poles apart. The Greek steadfastness appears to be stronger, more manly, more heroic. It does not look for consolation, it is self-sufficient. But Biblical perseverance feeds on the power, the blessing, and the preservation of Someone Else, in whom the secret of perseverance resides. (p. 201)

Perseverance is linked to the future via hope (Rm 5:3ff.; 1 Th 1:3). Hope, in turn, is however firmly anchored in the objective, historically inaugurated salvation in Christ. The believer can persevere in the race:

> … by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith. Because of the joy awaiting him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame. Now he is seated in the place of honor beside God's throne. (Heb 12:2)

The imperative for believers to persevere in their faith thus only functions against the backdrop of Christ's perseverance on behalf of them. As Berkouwer (1958:203) points out, the Bible refers to perseverance in such a way that it brings consolation because the meaning and the possibility of this doctrine reside exclusively in *being preserved*'. God's commitment to preserve the faith of his people comes out in verses such as Jn 10:28; 6:39; Rm 8:35, 39; 1 Th 3:13; 5:23; 11 Th 3:5; Phlp 1:6; Heb 7:25; 1 Pt 1:4; 1 Jn 2:1.

It is thus only in the light of the security that *God keeps us* that the urgent demand for us to 'continue in the faith' operates. We are urged to continue to rest in what God has done for us in Christ, once and for all, and not to depend on any other means of being in the right relationship with God.

Sanctification

Christian sanctification is by definition grounded on the forensic-historical saving work of Christ, as Berkouwer (1952) states:

> The renewal is not a mere supplement, and appendage, to the salvation given in justification. The heart of sanctification is the life which feeds on this justification … The fact that Christ is our sanctification is not exclusive of, but inclusive of, a faith which clings to Him alone in all of life. (p. 93)

According to Barth (2004a:15), 'faith means sanctification'. In the Bible, such sanctification implies the execution of a choice – of particular places, times, events or historical sequences.

Only where such sanctification occurs is God known. In Christ, God has chosen to act in history once and for all to sanctify humanity and allow them to know him and share in his glory. 'Sanctification (for Barth) is thus a Christological and eschatological event' (Higton & McDowell 2004:84). Sanctification is only available to us by faith in Christ who is and remains *extra nos* [outside of us]. Whilst the Holy Spirit works *in nobis* [in us], he works to point us away from ourselves and towards Christ, in whom we have been made holy. Sanctification thus keeps us dependent on Christ alone and, thereby, on grace alone.

A short analysis of Romans 6:1–11 is an example of how sanctification is grounded on the eschatological work of Christ. In this passage, Paul links the idea that it is impossible for believers to continue unchanged in sin with the fact that they *know* (indicative) that they have been incorporated into the death of Christ (v. 6), to which baptism testifies as a forensic sign (vv. 3, 4) and through which the power of sin had been broken (vv. 6, 7). They also share in Christ's resurrection (vv. 5, 8) through which they are able to live a new life for God (v. 4). It is only on the basis of this knowledge that the imperative in verse 11 follows: 'So you also should consider yourselves to be dead to the power of sin and alive to God through Christ Jesus.'

Repentance

Whilst repentance appears mainly to function in terms of an imperative in the Bible, it should not be interpreted anthropologically to place humanity in the centre. The call to repent encounters us in our lost state, affects us, addresses us, demands remorse from us about our sins (2 Cor 7:9) and requires a radical turning away from them (Mt 3:8) towards God (Ac 26:20; 2 Cor 3:16) – in other words, a radically new life (Ac 3:19; 26:20; Heb 6:1). It is even the condition for participation in the Kingdom of God! (Mk 1:15; 2:17; Lk 13:1–9) but then only on the basis of Jesus' claim that, in him, the love of God is realised towards those who repent (Jeremias 2004:132). The call to repent is intrinsically linked to the coming of the Kingdom in Jesus as a gift from God (Mt 4:17; Lk 12:32). Repentance is not our choice for God, but a turning towards God in acknowledgement of his choice for, and turning towards, us. Barth (2004a) puts it thus:

> What happens throughout the Word of God is the history of this choice and sanctification. It is this history we recount and our faith only comes into play in so far as we keep to this history. (p. 15)

God's history with Israel and the world, culminating in the giving of himself in Christ, continues to call us to turn away from our own choices and to rest on God's choice for us – thus to Christ and faith in God's grace in him alone.

Vocation

Vocation correlates *externally* to the proclamation of the salvation of the world that has occurred in Christ within our space and time (Jn 3:16; 4:42; Rm 5:18; 2 Cor 5:19; Col 1:20;

1 Tm 4:10; Tt 2:11; 1 Jn 2:2; 4:14). The *internal* vocation by which humans may feel themselves addressed by the Holy Spirit can only be separated from the proclamation of this gospel at the cost of it ceasing to be a Christian calling. It is only through the proclamation of the gospel that people can believe (Rm 10:1–15). The urgent existential call of God (2 Cor 5:20) functions within the context of 'God who was making the whole human race his friends through Christ' (2 Cor 5:19).

The imperative to believe the gospel stands at the heart of God's calling. The Holy Spirit whom Christ has given to be with the church, empowering it to witness to salvation in him, is only received when and where the gospel is believed (Eph 1:13). The work of the Holy Spirit is never independent from the work of Christ and the proclamation of the transformed reality in which we may participate in and through him.

Conclusion

It is thus clear that all the various events of the *ordo salutis* carry both an indicative and an imperative dimension. At the heart of the *ordo salutis* is the Christ event which represents the way in which humanity has been placed in the right relationship with God (justification). All the other 'events' are thus not true 'events' in and of themselves but instead function as different aspects or implications of the one final event of justification in Christ. They are to be seen as ways in which the richness and depth of this one event unfolds for us within our world.

In this article, I developed a Christocentric model of the *ordo salutis* which combines the indicative and imperative dimensions of the gospel in such a way that:

- faith can take up the qualities of both *trust*, as a subjective response to the imperatives of the gospel, and *belief*, in response to the objective indicatives of the gospel
- the temporality of both the 'not yet' of *this Age* and the eschatological *New Age* in Christ is maintained
- both the Lordship of Christ and his vulnerable presence through the Holy Spirit are recognised
- the various events within the *ordo salutis* are shown to have both an objective, Christological, supra-personal dimension as well as a subjective personal and individual dithe indicative and imperative dimensions of the gospel are both fully maintained.

This model, I believe, steers the *via salutis* away from any individualistic, anthropological, religio-psychological or pneumatological-mystical approaches. It also forges a stronger soteriological link between the work of Christ and the work of the Spirit and continues to place the person of Christ at the centre of salvation instead of the so called 'benefits' of salvation. Christ is and must always remain the centre of the gospel, the centre of our salvation, the centre of our understanding of God, the centre of our faith. And it is by faith that we acknowledge him as the centre and that we are saved. *Solus Christus*. *Sola Fide. Solus, Sola*.[25]

Acknowledgements

Competing interests

References

Ayers, J., 2002, 'John Wesley's therapeutic understanding of salvation', *Encounter* 63(3), 263–297.

Barth, K., 2010, *Church dogmatics, vol. 1.2, sections 13–15: The doctrine of the Word of God, study edn. 3*, 22nd edn., T&T Clark, New York, NY.

Barth, K., 2004a, *Church dogmatics*, vol. 2.1, Continuum International Publishing Group, New York, NY.

Barth, K., 2004b, *Church dogmatics*, vol. 4.1, Continuum International Publishing Group, New York, NY.

Berkhof, L., 1996, *Systematic theology*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI.

Bird, M.F., 2011, 'What is there between Minneapolis and St. Andrews?: A third way in the Piper-Wright debate', *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 54(2), 299–309.

Berkouwer, G.C., 1952, *Faith and sanctification*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI.

Berkouwer, G.C., 1954, *Faith and justification*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI.

Berkouwer, G.C., 1958, *Faith and perseverance*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI.

Berkouwer, G.C., 1971, *Sin*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI.

Calvin, J., 1816, *Institutes of the Christian religion*, Mac Donald Publishing, Florida, FA.

Coetzee, M., 2013, 'Eertydse Nederduitse Gereformeerde teologiese denkstrome ten grondslag van Beyers Naudé se kritiek op apartheid : Algemeen', *Nederduitse Gereformeerde Teologiese Tydskrif* 54(3,4), 154–68.

Cullmann, O., 1964, *Christ and time: The primitive Christian conception of time and history,* John Knox Press, Louisville, KY.

Elowsky, J.C., 2009, *We believe in the Holy Spirit*, InterVarsity Press, Downer's Grove, IL.

Ferguson, S.B., 1987, *John Owen on the Christian life*, Banner of Truth Trust, London.

Gignilliat, M.S., 2009, *Karl Barth and the Fifth Gospel: Barth's theological exegesis of Isaiah*, Ashgate Publishing, Farhham, Surrey, UK.

Greggs, T., 2009, *Barth, Origen, and universal salvation: Restoring particularity*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, UK. http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199560486.001.0001

Hanson, C., 2006, 'Young, restless, reformed', *Christianity Today* 50(9), 2–42.

Heyns, J.A., 1978, *Dogmatiek*, N.G. Kerkboekhandel, Pretoria.

Higton, M. & McDowell, J.C., 2004, *Conversing with Barth*, Ashgate Publishing, Farhham, Surrey, UK.

Horton, M.S., 2008, *People and place: A covenant ecclesiology*, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, KY.

Jenson, P., 2012, 'Indomitable Sydney? The challenge of Sydney Anglicanism', Opinion ABC Broadcasting Corporation, *Religion and Ethics Report*, 29 November, viewed 03 November 2012, from http://www.abc.net.au/religion/articles/2012/11/29/3643726.htm

Jeremias, J., 2004, *The parables of Jesus*, SCM, Norwich, UK.

Kärkkäinen, V-M., 2010, *Holy Spirit and salvation: The sources of Christian theology,* Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, KY.

Kittel, G., Bromiley, G.W. & Friedrich, G., 1976, *Theological dictionary of the New Testament,* Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI.

Luther, M., 1970, *Three treatises*, Fortress, Minneapolis, MN.

McCormack, B.L., 2006, *Justification in perspective: Historical developments and contemporary challenges,* Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, MI.

McCormack, B.L. & Anderson, C.B., 2011, *Karl Barth and American evangelicalism*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI.

McGowan, A.T.B., 2007, *Always reforming: Explorations in systematic theology*, InterVarsity Press, Downer's Grove, IL.

Parnham, D., 2005, 'The humbling of "high presumption": Tobias Crisp dismantles the Puritan ordo salutis', *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 56(1), 50–74. http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0022046904002143

Rainbow, P.A., 2012, *The way of salvation: The role of Christian obedience in justification*, Wipf & Stock Publishers, Eugene, OR.

Ridderbos, H.N., 1997, *Paul: An outline of his theology*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI.

25.Christ only. Faith only. *Solus Sola* in the title plays on the two uses of 'only' before Christ and faith.

Schnackenburg, R., 1994, *The gospel according to St. John*, Search Pr Ltd, Petaluma, CA.

Spence, A., 2006, *The promise of peace: A unified theory of atonement*, Continuum International Publishing Group, New York, NY.

Torrance, A.J., 1996, *Persons in communion: An essay on trinitarian description and human participation, with special reference to volume one of Karl Barth's Church Dogmatics*, Continuum International Publishing Group, New York, NY.

Venema, C.P., 2007, *Accepted and renewed in Christ: The twofold grace of God and the interpretation of Calvin's theology*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Bristol, CT.

Wainwright, G., Cunningham, D.S., Del Colle, R. & Lamadrid, L., 1999, *Ecumenical theology in worship, doctrine, and life: Essays presented to Geoffrey Wainwright on his sixtieth birthday*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, UK.

Warren, S.C., 2009, 'Ability and desire: Reframing debates surrounding freedom and responsibility', *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 52(3), 551–567.

Weber, O., 1959, *Grundlagen der Dogmatik,* Verl. der Buchh. des Erziehungsvereins, Düsseldorf, GDR.

Wenger, T.L., 2007, 'The new perspective on Calvin: Responding to recent Calvin interpretations', *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 50(2), 311–328.