

THE ECONOMY OF SALVATION: TWO PATRISTIC TRADITIONS

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IN THE ANALYSIS of the New Testament materials advanced by William Thompson and Eugene LaVerdiere, the authors of the *Matthean and Lukan* writings are understood as theologians who interpreted the life of Christ and the beginnings of the Church in a way which met the questions and problems of their own day.¹ This process of interpretation continued in other forms and is recorded in the writings of the Fathers. As the Christian community entered into conversation with and gradually dominated Mediterranean civilization, these men attempted to explain the message and significance of Christ in the language of the new culture, submitting to its demands for cosmological rather than historical explanations and drawing heavily on its philosophy, especially its anthropology. The Fathers regarded Scripture as the norm of their theology, but gradually realized that they could not be limited by the vocabulary or the explanatory categories of the Scriptures.²

The carefully constructed definitions and creeds of the ecumenical councils rather than the theological explanations of the Fathers are the normative documents from this age. Still, the writings of the Fathers attained an authority which made them resources for scholastic syntheses and Reformation debate, as well as the contemporary renewal of theology.³ The Fathers legitimated the theological process, established faith's right to seek understanding, for Christians who considered the normative Scriptures historical reports and revelations whose very language was part of their content. By attempting to transpose the gospel into explanatory language, the Fathers also established paradigms for subsequent thought. They explored the various ways of thinking about creation and fall, redemption and salvation, and indicated the implications for Christian life of one or another understanding.

My purpose in this study is neither to judge contemporary theologies by patristic standards nor to indicate the patristic anticipation of contemporary questions. I intend, rather, to extract from the patristic materials certain schemas in which they attempted to understand the Christian economy of salvation. By examining the work of representative

¹ "New Testament Communities in Transition" above.

² One finds a justification of this breaking out of scriptural categories in Athanasius' defense of the use of the term *Homoousios*.

³ One recalls not only the *Glossa ordinaria* and the *Libri sententiarum* of Lombard, but the *Catalogus testium veritatis* of Flacius, the *De theologicis dogmatibus* of Petavius, and "La nouvelle théologie" of this century.

Fathers, we can uncover the foundations, the internal logic, and the implications of certain ways of thinking about the process of salvation. Thus we may clarify the resources and limitations of each paradigm of the economy of salvation.

First I shall explain the tendencies of the Latin and Greek traditions and the categories in which I propose to analyze them. Then I shall describe the economy of salvation as it is explained by Gregory of Nyssa and Augustine. Finally I shall generalize and define two different schemas and reflect upon their value for contemporary theology.

TWO ECONOMIES OF SALVATION

In the ancient Church we find two significantly different explanations of the economy of creation and salvation. A tradition of Greek thought which began in Justin Martyr, developed in Origen, and achieved orthodox expression in Gregory of Nyssa stressed the general availability of the means of terrestrial and heavenly salvation and a developmental continuity from birth to beatitude. These theologians recognized a universal operation of Christ and found in the Church the fulness of his effective presence.⁴ Moreover, both Origen and Gregory asserted that all whom God had created would finally be saved in Christ.

The orientation of Latin theology contradicts this Greek universalism. Tertullian, Cyprian, and their Roman counterparts appear to have assumed that the salvation accomplished in Jesus Christ could be attained only through his Church. A person passes from sin to salvation by fulfilling the conditions which God imposes for participation in Christ's redemption rather than by developing the potentialities with which every one was gifted in creation. Thus one must believe the teaching of Christ, receive baptism, and belong to the communion of the proper Church in order to be freed from sin and raised to the glory of Christ.⁵ This theological tradition finds its fullest elaboration in Augustine, who carefully specified the conditions which God has set down and the reasons for their necessity.

The Greek and Latin traditions differ in their paradigms of the passage to beatitude. Origen and Gregory concentrate on the gradual development of the human soul, which is freed from bondage to earthly delights and rises to union with God.⁶ The ascetic life provides the primary analogue of the way of salvation, and Antony of Egypt's vision of

⁴ Justin, e.g., speaks of the Word as the universal source of moral reason, of Christ's teaching as the fullest expression of this reasonableness, and of Christians as the most reasonable and wisdom-loving of humans. See *1 Apology* 46, 63; *2 Apology* 8, 10, 13.

⁵ Tertullian's insistence on Montanist asceticism in obedience to the Paraclete and Cyprian's defense of rebaptism are indications of this attitude. See Cyprian, *Epp.* 69-75.

⁶ Even in the *Exhortation to Martyrdom* Origen stresses the liberation of the human spirit and the degrees of glory which correspond to the intensity of suffering and love. See chaps. 15, 42, 47.

purified souls evading the snares of Satan in their ascent to heaven symbolizes the aspirations of this culture and its theology.⁷ Both Origen and Gregory offer allegorical commentaries on the Canticle of Canticles in which they describe the soul's mystical union with God. In contrast, the Latins emphasize the definitive divine intervention which raises the faithful Christian from death and translates him to glory. The martyr who struggles in the arena to persevere in confessing Christ looks to an immediate deliverance from both his sins and his enemies by the power of his victorious Lord.⁸ Fidelity to Christ qualifies him for a glory which no human growth or effort could achieve.⁹

Gregory of Nyssa and Augustine have been chosen as representatives of their respective traditions. Gregory's assertion of universal salvation explicates the tendencies of Greek thought, just as Augustine's limitation of the availability of salvation to communicants of the Catholic Church grows out of the assumptions of Latin thought and practice.

Four pairs of categories will be used in this analysis of the difference between these two theologies. A process might be continuous or discontinuous, and it might be developmental or interventionist. The graces through which God works the process of salvation might be operative or co-operative. An element in the economy of salvation might be constitutive or normative. I shall define the first two pairs and then use them to clarify the distinction between the types of grace. The remaining terms, constitutive-normative, are understood according to Peter Schineller's definitions.¹⁰

A continuous process involves a series of stages in which prior states are causes or conditions for subsequent ones. In a discontinuous process the prior states are not so required. Thus certain stages may be omitted in a discontinuous process but not in a continuous one. In a developmental process the prior stages are among the efficient causes of the subsequent perfections. The causal relation between its stages makes such a process continuous. Thus, the growth of the soul in acquired knowledge or virtue is a continuous, developmental process. In an interventionist process a cause external to the subject of the process produces the subsequent stage without the active co-operation of the subject and its earlier perfections. Such a process may be discontinuous, but it will be continuous if an earlier stage of the process is a condition for

⁷ *Life of Antony* 66.

⁸ Thus, the vision of the glorious Cyprian reassures the martyr in the *Acts of Montanus and Lucius* 21. See also Cyprian's *Ep.* 58.

⁹ The Greek tradition thinks in terms of the cleansing and development of the soul, while the Latins use the resurrection of the body as their paradigm.

¹⁰ See "A Spectrum of Christologies and Ecclesiologies" in Schineller above.

the external agent's operation. The resurrection of the flesh is a discontinuous, interventionist process. The granting of forgiveness to a repentant sinner and the answering of a prayer are continuous, interventionist processes. As I have noted, the Greek tradition grounds its theology in creation, respects the integrity and continuity of natural processes, and tends to be developmental in describing the economy of salvation. In the Latin tradition, however, the redemptive intervention of Christ is foundational, nature and grace are described as discontinuous, and the process of salvation is explained as interventionist but continuous.¹¹

Neither Gregory's theology nor Augustine's is a pure type, since both theologians indicate the functioning of operative and co-operative graces. By operative grace I indicate a divine operation which produces its effect independently of the active participation of the human person it affects. By co-operative grace I indicate a divine operation which attains its effect by the active productivity of both divine and human agents. Thus, the created person is among the efficient causes of the effects of co-operative grace, but is not such a cause of the effects of operative grace. An operative grace may precede and cause the human efforts with which it then becomes co-operative.¹² A developmental process requires and admits only co-operative graces. An interventionist process requires operative graces. The two processes, of course, may be sequenced in a hybrid. Thus, a divine intervention may cause the human co-operation in a developmental process which then satisfies the condition for a subsequent operative grace. Gregory and Augustine use both kinds of grace to define such mixed processes in explaining the economy of salvation.

My procedure will be to examine the functioning of the economy of salvation as explained by Gregory of Nyssa and Augustine. Then I shall reflect on the relevance of patristic theologies for the work of contemporary ecclesiology.

GREGORY OF NYSSA

The assertion that salvation will be universally accomplished is based on Gregory's belief that the entire human race is the divine image in the creation. God intends a definite number of humans to be generated so that humanity itself will reach its proper perfection. Once this full

¹¹ This distinction between the God-creation-centered Greek tradition and the Christ-redemption-centered Latin tradition parallels the definition of the second and third of Schineller's types.

¹² In *De grat. et lib. arb.* 17, 38, Augustine describes a single grace which causes human willing and then co-operates with it in producing good works.

complement is reached, the generative process will cease and every individual will be brought to perfection. The role of humanity as the divine image requires the salvation of each and every individual.¹³

Creation and Fall

Because of his notion of the final state of humanity, Gregory distinguishes two divine intentions in its original formation. God first intends the divine image in the race as a whole and in each human person. Secondly, foreknowing the fall, in which this image will be mixed with evil, God differentiates humans sexually to provide the means of carnal generation whereby the full number of humans will be produced. Gregory seems to have thought that numerical increase would have occurred by nonsexual means had sin not entered the human race. These two phases of creation are not successive in execution. Rather, the distinction and sequence of divine intentions is used to account for the absence of sexual differentiation in the perfect state of humanity.¹⁴

Through this sexual differentiation, which remains extrinsic to the divine image in human persons, a way is opened for the dominance of the passions, the principal fault of fallen humanity.¹⁵ Passions and emotions are not evil in themselves; rather, these forces and energies are good and useful when directed by reason.¹⁶ Even in their subordinate role, however, Gregory associates the passions with the fallen state of humanity and excludes them from its final perfection.¹⁷

The fall of humanity goes undescribed, though its causes and consequences are carefully specified. Sin was an inevitable consequence neither of creation in the image of the divine freedom nor of sexual differentiation. The voluntary failure of Adam and Eve mingled evil in the human will and upset the balance between the energies of the soul and the passions of the body.¹⁸ After the fall, the passions dominate the mind and direct reason to sensual satisfactions.¹⁹ Once they rule the soul, the passions become vices.²⁰ They lead the person into illusion and desire for earthly things.²¹ They mar the divine image by overlaying it with

¹³ *De opif. hom.* 16, 22 (PG 44, 184B-D, 204C-205A); *De anim. et res.* (PG 46, 128BC); *De vita Moys.* (Gregorii Nysseni opera 7/1, 57.8-12, Jaeger edition, hereafter indicated by GNO).

¹⁴ *De opif. hom.* 16, 17 (PG 44, 184A, 189CD).

¹⁵ *De opif. hom.* 18 (PG 44, 192A-C); *Orat. cat.* 16 (PG 45, 49D).

¹⁶ *De opif. hom.* 18 (PG 44, 193BC); *De anim. et res.* (PG 61A-D, 65C-68A).

¹⁷ *De anim. et res.* (PG 46, 53C-56A, 89C-92A).

¹⁸ *Orat. cat.* (PG 45, 29C); *De orat. dom.* 4 (PG 44, 1161D-1164A).

¹⁹ *De opif. hom.* 14 (PG 44, 173D-176A).

²⁰ *Ibid.* 18 (PG 44, 192C-193A); *De beat.* 3 (PG 44, 1223BC).

²¹ *De inst. christ.* (GNO 8/1, 40.11-41.2).

corruption.²² Their disorder is communicated in humanity by the process of generation.²³

Purification

Salvation involves a double process of purification and growth. The growth of the soul in knowledge and love of God is grounded in the creation of the human person in the image of God. Rather than being originally gifted with a static state of perfection, humanity was created to advance unceasingly in union with the infinite God. Because of the fall, however, a purification from passion and vice must precede and prepare for the spiritual development. The cleansing of the body from passion and of the soul from vice are distinct processes which shall be considered in turn.

Physical death can be considered a consequence of sin, but it functions as a means of salvation. In the fall, the human body was mixed with evil by the breaking out of its passions. As composed of elements, however, the flesh can be dissolved into its constituents and then reconstituted in its original purity. Gregory uses the analogy of a clay pot in which some metal has hardened. The vessel is broken away from the metal and the clay made into a paste from which the artisan reshapes the original pot. So God cleanses the polluted flesh by dissolving and forming it anew.²⁴ By taking humanity upon Himself, the Word of God sustained its elements through the dissolution of death and reunited body and soul inseparably. Just as the death of Adam affects all, so does the resurrection of Christ extend to all by reason of the common humanity. Christ established a process which purifies the flesh of each person who shares humanity with him.²⁵ This purification is completed at the end of the process of generation and death, when Christ will raise all to a new and unending life.²⁶

The full purification of the body from passion is achieved in the resurrection by an operative grace, the work of Christ. The cleansing of the soul from vice, however, is by co-operative grace, which requires the effort of the human person to attain its goal. God respects the freedom which He created in human persons: sin and its purification are necessarily voluntary. The human soul must overcome its dominating

²² *De opif. hom.* 18 (PG 44, 193C); *De beat.* 1 (PG 44, 1197B); *De virg.* 12 (GNO 8/1, 297.10-302.26).

²³ *De beat.* 6 (PG 44, 1273AB); *Orat. cat.* 13 (PG 45, 45A); *De orat. dom.* 5 (PG 44, 1184B-1185A).

²⁴ *Orat. cat.* 8, 16 (PG 45, 33A-36B, 52BC).

²⁵ *Ibid.* 16, 32 (PG 45, 52CD, 80BC); *De inst. christ.* (GNO 8/1, 205.22-206.9).

²⁶ *De anim. et res.* (PG 46, 148BC); *De opif. hom.* 17 (PG 44, 188CD).

passions and attain a state of *apatheia*, of freedom from passion, in which the divine image is restored to serve as the foundation for a process of growth in union with God.²⁷ After the resurrection, Gregory explains, Christ will judge the state of each soul. For those whom he finds still bound by passion and thus unable to progress in union with God, he will prescribe a cleansing by fire.²⁸ Drawing the soul to good, Christ gradually forces it to separate from evil. The process is described as torturous, but Gregory insists that it is not punitive.²⁹ He does not explain its voluntary character. The souls of infants who die before an evil life has overlaid the divine image with corruption require no cleansing in the resurrection.³⁰

This purification of the soul may also be achieved in this world by the voluntary asceticism of a Christian life. In baptism a person symbolically anticipates death and resurrection in Christ and commits himself to free his soul from vice and passion.³¹ In the Eucharist Christ continues the work of purifying the body from passion which he will complete in the resurrection.³² The goal of ascetical practice is purity of soul, the restoration of the divine image in the spirit.³³ Gregory cautions against a preoccupation with bodily exercises which would distract the soul from its proper task.³⁴ One takes a stone to the soul, removes the rust and corruption from the divine image, and thereby reveals the true human vocation.³⁵ The state of *apatheia* places one on the road of ascent to God. Asceticism continues to free and focus the energies of the soul on the upward journey to God.³⁶ The guidance of Christ's teaching, the inspiration of his suffering and death, and the grace of the Holy Spirit provide the assistance and direction necessary for this voluntary asceticism.³⁷

The process of purgation has both its operative and its co-operative moments. An operative grace purifies the body from passion either in death and resurrection or in the sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist.³⁸ This process is interventionist and discontinuous. In contrast to this, the cleansing of the soul is described as a continuous, devel-

²⁷ *De vita Moys.* (GNO 7/1, 39.21-40.12, 82.17-83.22); *De orat. dom.* 4 (PG 44, 1168D); *De anim. et res.* (PG 46, 160C).

²⁸ *De anim. et res.* (PG 46, 157B-160C); *Orat. cat.* 8 (PG 45, 36CD).

²⁹ *De anim. et res.* (PG 46, 97C-100C, 101B-104C).

³⁰ *De infant.* (PG 46, 177A-181A).

³¹ *De vita Moys.* (GNO 7/1, 72.7-17); *Orat. cat.* 35 (PG 45, 85D-89C).

³² *Orat. cat.* 37 (PG 45, 93A-96B).

³³ *De virg.* 5, 11 (GNO 8/1, 277.7-278.11, 294.7-295.26).

³⁴ *Ibid.* 22 (GNO 8/1, 330.20-333.10).

³⁵ *De beat.* 6 (PG 44, 1269B-1272B).

³⁶ *Ibid.* 1, 8 (PG 44, 1208A-C, 1297BC); *De virg.* 8 (GNO 8/1, 284.21-286.8).

³⁷ *De inst. christ.* (GNO 8/1, 41.2-9, 47.23-49.20, 53.15-54.19); *De vita Moys.* (GNO 7/1, 81.3-82.3, 126.11-128.13).

³⁸ See nn. 31 and 32 above.

opmental process which is achieved through co-operative graces. During earthly life the human effort which complements divine grace is fully voluntary. In the cleansing by fire, however, the action of Christ produces the necessary human co-operation. The work of Christ is constitutive of the entire process of restoration of humanity to the perfection in which it was originally created.

Growth in Union with God

The second stage in the economy of salvation, spiritual growth in union with God, begins when the soul is purified and the divine image restored to prominence in it. Gregory shares the supposition of his tradition that stable and unchanging existence belongs to the divine. That which comes into being by change cannot attain or maintain a stable condition.³⁹ He values this change, however, as the opportunity for unlimited growth. Gregory distinguishes two forms of change, one repetitious and the other progressive.

Repetition characterizes the life of the senses. A need or desire arises and is satisfied. The satiety brings an end both to appetite and to the peculiar pleasure of satisfying it. One enjoys food and beverage, for example, only as long as hunger and thirst persist. Once satiety is reached, the satisfaction disappears and the objects of appetite become repugnant. The satiety soon passes and the desire eventually arises again. The process of sense life is compared to filling a leaky cask, which never stays full; to using a brick mold, which must be emptied as soon as it is filled; and finally to climbing a sand dune, when the size and speed of one's steps produce no advance. This form of change is simply repetitious because the limitations of sense desire exclude cumulative progress.⁴⁰

The life of the soul, however, allows an unlimited and cumulative change which is truly progressive. The fulfilment of one goal opens the person to a fresh experience of desire rather than bringing satiety. Satisfaction whets one's appetite for still higher goals, and the pursuit of these further goods actually stabilizes the soul in those it already possesses. Gregory compares spiritual growth to a ladder or stairway in which each stage opens the way to the next one. Moreover, the freshness and increase of desire prevent the tedium associated with a homogeneous process such as Origen describes.⁴¹ The progress of the soul is unlimited as well as cumulative. The created soul cannot stop changing, and the divine object of desire cannot be exhausted. A human soul must

³⁹ *Orat. cat.* 6, 21 (PG 45, 28D, 57D-60A).

⁴⁰ *De vita Moys.* (GNO 7/1, 50.3-51.5, 118.13-17); *De beat.* 4 (PG 44, 1244B).

⁴¹ *De vita Moys.* (GNO 7/1, 112.7-113.9, 114.5-116.24); *De beat.* 2, 4 (PG 44, 1208D, 1245AB); Origen, *De princip.* 2, 9, 2.

eventually exhaust the limited potentialities of evil, but its growth in good can have no term.⁴²

Gregory locates the proper development of humanity not in the meaningless repetition of the senses and passions but in an unlimited and ever-accelerating progress in knowledge and love of God. The mystical ascent begins when a person attains *apatheia* and discovers the image of God in his soul. The unknowable God is first perceived in this created image. Then one passes beyond all human concepts to a higher experience of the divine whose stages Gregory characterizes by a feeling of vertigo and entrance into a luminous darkness. Each stage is limited, but each opens to a higher. The process is unending, accelerating, and cumulative.⁴³ The ascetic may enter the way of mystical union during his earthly life once his soul is purified. Those who die as infants begin to progress in the resurrection, while those adults in whose souls the image is still obscured by passion must first be cleansed by fire.⁴⁴

The elements of Gregory's analysis of spiritual growth, the infinite divine nature and its image in the soul, belong to the original order of creation, which is restored by the work of Christ. The process is continuous, developmental, and achieved by co-operative graces. The work of Christ seems to be limited to the purification of humanity in preparation for its growth into union with God.

Christ and the Church

The role of Christ and the Church in the process of salvation can now be specified. Christ's primary influence appears to be in the purification of the body and soul, which opens the way to growth in knowledge and love of God. Christ accomplishes the purification of the body by an operative grace through his death and resurrection. Without the restoration of the original harmony of the human person, the soul cannot grow. Christ's grace has a major role in the voluntary cleansing of the soul. No one undertakes or successfully completes a program of asceticism apart from the operative grace of baptism and the Eucharist and the co-operative grace of Christ's teaching. Further, Christ governs and directs the cleansing by fire through an operation which causes human co-operation. Finally, Christ breaks Satan's power over sinners. He alone destroys the dominion of evil and sets all persons free.⁴⁵ Thus Christ establishes the order in which human efforts can be efficacious.

⁴² *De vita Moys.* (GNO 7/1, 3.12-4.18, 116.21-23); *De opif. hom.* 21 (PG 44, 201BC); *De inst. christ.* (GNO 8/1, 213.17-214.6).

⁴³ *De vita Moys.* (GNO 7/1, 83.23-84.20, 86.11-88.12, 89.10-14); *De beat.* 6 (PG 44, 1264B-1265A, 1268B-1269A).

⁴⁴ *De beat.* 6 (PG 44, 1273AB); *De infant.* (PG 46, 177A-180D).

⁴⁵ *Orat. cat.* 22, 23 (PG 45, 60C-64B).

Gregory does not describe a role for Christ in the process of growth in union with God. He does specify his general theory of co-operation between divine grace and human efforts by asserting that the Holy Spirit sustains the growth of the soul in knowledge of God.⁴⁶

The emphasis on universal resurrection and subsequent cleansing by fire excludes an assertion that the Church is a constitutive element of the general process of salvation. Still, only those adults who die and rise in baptism and live its commitment to asceticism anticipate the process of purification and gain access to knowledge and love of God in this life. Because of the nature of the fall, in which the passions lead the mind into error and direct the soul's energies to sensual satisfactions, the teaching and exemplary roles of Christ, which are mediated by the Church, have a major significance. Unless a person grasps the true perfection of humanity through the intervention of Christ, he simply will not direct his ascetical efforts properly and will not attend to the divine image in his soul. Without Christ's initial cleansing of the flesh in baptism and guiding of the efforts of the soul, which are both mediated by the Church, a person either continues to satisfy the repetitious demands of the passions or becomes mired in a fruitless campaign to deny and destroy sensual life altogether.⁴⁷

Because the Church is the sole mediator of the grace of Christ to humans during their earthly life, it is a constitutive element in this limited functioning of the economy of salvation. Moreover, precisely as anticipating the general purification which will be accomplished by death and fire, the Church has a normative role as well. Those saved during this life reach purification in the Church; those saved in the next life repeat the pattern set in the Church.

Conclusion

Gregory's explanation of the salvation of all human beings may be analyzed in the categories of continuity and discontinuity, development and intervention. He emphasizes the continuity of the entire process by setting the purification of body and soul as a foundational condition for growth in union with God. The purification of the body is through a discontinuous process, constituted by the operative intervention of Christ. The cleansing of the soul, however, is described as a continuous, developmental process in which the co-operative grace of Christ is constitutive. Finally, the growth of the soul in union with God is a continuous developmental process in which some assistance of the Holy Spirit co-operates with human desires.

⁴⁶ *De inst. christ.* (GNO 8/1, 45.18-47.22, 53.15-54.19); *De orat. dom.* 4 (PG 44, 1165A).

⁴⁷ *De vita Moys.* (GNO 7/1, 83.7-22); *De inst. christ.* (GNO 8/1, 41.2-9, 47.23-49.20); *De virg.* 22 (GNO 8/1, 330.20-333.10).

The economy of spiritual growth into union with God was established in creation. Christ appears to be neither constitutive nor normative in this order. Instead, his work constitutes an economy of purification through which the original order is restored after the fall. His grace operates in the purification of the body and co-operates in the cleansing of the soul. In the cleansing by fire, he causes human co-operation with his grace.

Gregory does not assign the Church a constitutive role in either the establishment or the operation of the universal economy of purification and growth. The Church does have a constitutive position in the functioning of the economy of purification on earth, because it is the sole mediator of the graces of this economy. It has a normative role in the universal economy of purification, since its life indicates the way of cleansing in the *eschaton*. Like Christ, the Church appears to have neither a constitutive nor a normative role in the economy of growth in union with God.

AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO

Augustine's writings of the period immediately after his conversion betray a perspective on creation and salvation not unlike that of the Greek tradition found in Gregory of Nyssa. While admitting certain debilitating consequences of the fall of humanity, notably mortality, he emphasizes the residual capacity of the human spirit to overcome the obstacles placed in its way by the infirmity of the flesh and to attain a certain peace in this life and beatitude in the next.⁴⁸ As he was integrated into the African Church and began to study the Pauline writings more closely, Augustine's thought took on the characteristics peculiar to the Latin tradition. These include an emphasis on discontinuity and divine intervention and the assumption that salvation is available only through the faith and sacraments of the Church.⁴⁹

Foundations of Particularism

The Greek tradition grounds the economy of salvation in the divine creative will and explains the role of Christ as a restorer of the original order. Latin theology, however, begins with the salvific events of the life of Christ and constructs an explanation of creation and fall on the foundational assertion that Christ is the sole Savior. The schismatics in Rome and Africa and their Catholic counterparts in the third and fourth centuries insisted that salvation could be attained only through baptism

⁴⁸ This attitude is manifest in *De lib. arb.* 1 and in *De vera relig.*

⁴⁹ Augustine commented on Paul about 394-96. The new attitude begins to appear in *De lib. arb.* 3 and is clearest in *Ad Simpl.* 1.

and membership in the true communion of Christ.⁵⁰ Martin of Tours, according to the report of Sulpicius Severus, raised a catechumen from the dead and received his report of the judgment and condemnation awaiting the unbaptized.⁵¹ Cyprian refused to recognize the martyrdom of Christians who had separated themselves from the Catholic communion.⁵² Baptism and proper communion were thought absolutely necessary for salvation.

Augustine assumed the prejudices of Latin Christianity and worked them into a coherent whole which became the foundation for subsequent Western theology. He assigned a double function to Christ: he liberates from the guilt of sin, and he gives the Holy Spirit, whose charity enables a person to do the works of justice. The historical life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ are the foundation of the economy of salvation.⁵³ Moreover, the human mediation which brings a person into contact with these events in faith and the sacraments is also a constitutive element of the economy. To attain the forgiveness of sins, one must believe and be baptized in the death and resurrection of Christ.⁵⁴ To receive and retain the Holy Spirit, one must adhere to the Catholic communion.⁵⁵

These exclusivist claims for Christ and the Church create a tension between creation and salvation. Augustine uses the doctrine of an original guilt transmitted from Adam to justify the eternal condemnation of those who have no opportunity to be joined to Christ in faith and baptism.⁵⁶ He asserts the moral impotence of human nature in order to establish that outside the sphere of the influence of the Holy Spirit no good or meritorious action can be performed.⁵⁷ Without the help available only from Christ through the Church, human persons cannot avoid sin and condemnation.

⁵⁰ Thus, Tertullian in *De pudicitia* 21, 22; Hippolytus in *Philosophumena* 9, 8; Cyprian in *Ep.* 4, 4 and *Ep.* 36, 2. The Novatianists and Donatists insisted that their converts be rebaptized, thus denying all salvific power to the rival communion.

⁵¹ *Life of Martin* 7. In contrast, a story from the Greek tradition about Macarius' raising a man from death shows no interest in his lack of baptism; he is sent back to sleep until Christ comes. See Cassian, *Conferences* 15, 3.

⁵² *Ep.* 60, 4.

⁵³ This is the major point of Augustine's controversy with Pelagius. See *De pecc. mer.* 3, 4, 7; *De nat. et grat.* 39, 46.

⁵⁴ *Conf.* 5, 9, 16; *De pecc. mer.* 2, 29, 47; *De pecc. orig.* 24, 28; 25, 29.

⁵⁵ This is said of Cornelius in *De bapt.* 1, 8, 10; see also *De bapt.* 3, 16, 21; *C. litt. Pet.* 2, 77, 172; *Ep.* 185, 9, 42, and 10, 46.

⁵⁶ *De nat. et grat.* 2, 2; 4, 4; 8, 9; 9, 10; *De pecc. mer.* 1, 28, 55-56; 3, 4, 7-8; *De pecc. orig.* 24, 28; 26, 31; 29, 34.

⁵⁷ Explicitly in *De nat. et grat.* 39, 46. Actually, the theory of anonymous Christianity accepts this premise but asserts that good works do occur outside the Church. This, in turn, grounds the assertion of the universal operation of the Holy Spirit.

Fall and Redemption

God originally created human persons in His image, with the capacity to discern and prefer the good.⁵⁸ Had Adam and Eve submitted to the divine command, the predetermined fulness of humanity would have been attained through sexual, though dispassionate, generation.⁵⁹ Instead, the first humans loved their created perfection more than the divine goodness and sinned in pride and disobedience. They subjected themselves and the whole of humanity in them to condemnation and to the dominion of Satan. Consequently, all their offspring are born guilty of sin and condemned to eternal punishment.⁶⁰

God decided to rescue the number of humans necessary to fill up the places in heaven vacated by the fall of the angels.⁶¹ To accomplish this, Augustine explains, God had to free his chosen ones from the power of these fallen angels. Humanity had freely subjected itself to Satan by sinning. Instead of destroying this evil dominion by an act of power, God arranged for Satan to overstep the bounds of his "right." Because he was born and lived without sin, Christ was not subject to the dominion which Satan exercises through death. Thus, in attacking and killing the innocent Christ, Satan exceeded the limits of his domain. By submitting to an undeserved death, Christ gained a right over Satan: he frees from sin and bondage all those united to him by faith in his victorious death and rising. Belief in Christ, therefore, brings the forgiveness of sins. Those who are not so united to Christ are held by Satan in eternal death.⁶² Thus even the saints of the Old Testament were saved only through faith in the prophetic announcements of the life and death of Christ.⁶³

Salvation in Christ

Faith in Christ earns the believer not only the forgiveness of sins but also the gift of the Holy Spirit, the charity by which one loves God for His own sake and delights in His commandments. Augustine establishes the necessity of this charity by three different arguments. The concupiscence of the flesh which follows upon the punishment for original sin can be restrained and overcome only if one loves the commanded good for its own sake. In the absence of such delight, one simply will not persevere in resisting carnal pleasure.⁶⁴ Next, he argues that unless one chooses the

⁵⁸ *De corrept. et grat.* 11, 31-12, 38; *De civ. Dei* 14, 11.

⁵⁹ *De civ. Dei* 14, 10; *De pecc. orig.* 30, 40.

⁶⁰ *De pecc. mer.* 3, 7, 14; *De pecc. orig.* 38, 43; *De corrept. et grat.* 10, 28.

⁶¹ *De civ. Dei* 22, 1.

⁶² The principal exposition of the theory of redemption is in *De trin.* 13, 10-15.

⁶³ *De bapt.* 1, 15, 24; *De civ. Dei* 10, 25. Augustine recognizes no anonymous salvation.

⁶⁴ This argument begins in *Propp. ex ep. ad Rom.* 40, 2; *Exp. ep. ad Gal.* 46, 4-5. It is present in *De pecc. mer.* 2, 17, 26; *De grat. Chr.* 26, 27.

good for its own sake, the willing is not truly good. The person who only seeks to avoid punishment actually prefers evil and would do it if he could escape God's justice. Charity, therefore, is necessary not only to insure performance but also to make it truly good.⁶⁶ Finally, he asserts that human nature, even in its original state, can actually choose and perform the good only with the assistance of divine grace.⁶⁶ God endowed humanity with a desire for good and even with a power to choose it. The exercise of this capacity must, however, be attributed to the divine mercy rather than to human autonomy. Augustine insists that the human person may not claim for himself the perfecting of the original divine gift.⁶⁷ The created person actually wills and performs just works only under the influence of the Holy Spirit.

Augustine explains the way in which individuals are liberated from condemnation and brought to eternal life within this framework. In his natal state, a child of Adam follows the desires of the flesh and adds personal sins to the guilt he has inherited. The enlightenment of his reason or the revelation of the law clarifies the divine command to live justly and makes him aware of his sinfulness and of the condemnation threatening him. To such an individual the gospel of Jesus Christ offers the forgiveness of sins and the assistance of the Holy Spirit for fulfilling the precepts of the law. The act of faith joins a person to Christ and frees him from guilt and the dominion of Satan. It also merits the grace of the Spirit whereby one loves God and neighbor. By giving delight in justice, charity also strengthens the will to do the works of the law. Good works, then, earn the reward of eternal glory. By faith one merits charity, and by living in charity he merits eternal life.⁶⁸

Mediation of the Church

The Church has a constitutive role in both faith and charity. The faith which Augustine describes responds to the Church's preaching of the gospel. Only those who are reborn of water and the Spirit can enter the kingdom of God.⁶⁹ Finally, charity can be received and maintained only in the communion of the Church.

In his controversial writings against the Donatists, Augustine established membership in the Catholic communion as a condition for the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in charity and for the forgiveness of sins.

⁶⁶ *De spir. et litt.* 8, 13; 14, 26; 32, 55; *De nat. et grat.* 57, 67.

⁶⁶ *De nat. et grat.* 26, 29; 48, 56; *De gest. Pel.* 3, 7; *Ep.* 186, 10, 35 and 11, 37; *De civ. Dei* 14, 27.

⁶⁷ *De nat. et grat.* 60, 70; *De spir. et litt.* 7, 11; *De pecc. mer.* 2, 18, 30; *De grat. Chr.* 26, 27.

⁶⁸ See *De div. quaest.* 66; *Propp. ex ep. ad Rom.* 12; *De spir. et litt.* 30, 52.

⁶⁹ As early as *Ad Simpl.* 1, 2, 2, Augustine asserted that Cornelius needed baptism to make his faith salvific.

The Holy Spirit gives both love of God and the inseparable love of neighbor. The bond of peace in the unity of the Christian community manifests His presence and action. Consequently, Augustine argues, anyone who rejects the love of this communion and goes into schism violates charity and abandons the Holy Spirit.⁷⁰ The schismatic may believe in Christ and follow the commandments, but none of his works are good and salvific without the grace of the Spirit.⁷¹ In the words of Christ, moreover, the reception of the Holy Spirit gives the power to forgive sins. Hence only the loving communion in which the Spirit dwells has the power to forgive sins. Its charity covers and forgives the sins of all those who adhere to it.⁷² Although a person may receive baptism outside the Church, the forgiveness and charity of the sacrament are received and retained only within the Catholic communion.⁷³

Augustine assigns the Church a type of constitutive role in the economy of salvation which is foreign to the Greek tradition. The Christian community not only mediates forgiveness and charity through preaching and the sacraments, but is itself a community of salvation in which the Spirit dwells.⁷⁴ Although neither faith and baptism nor Church membership are sufficient for salvation, they are constitutive of the economy in which a person receives the forgiveness and retains the charity which qualify him for God's beatifying intervention.

Conclusion

In explaining the economy of salvation, Augustine describes a process which is both continuous and discontinuous, developmental and interventionist. In its natal state, humanity seeks only sinful actions and lacks all resources to initiate the process of salvation. The divine intervention which terrifies by imposing the law constitutes the first discontinuity.⁷⁵ Thereafter, a continuous series of divine operations and human co-operative responses establishes a person in a state of salvation. When the person is properly terrified, God intervenes a second time in the preaching of the gospel and gives the operative grace of faith. The faithful person prays for charity, and the Holy Spirit is sent into his heart. This operative grace, which makes a person good, then co-operates in his good works and his prayer for perseverance.⁷⁶ God again intervenes with an operative grace to maintain His elect in innocence and love until

⁷⁰ *De bapt.* 1, 8, 10; 1, 9, 12; 3, 16, 21; 5, 4, 4; 5, 23, 33; *C. litt. Pet.* 2, 32, 74; 2, 77, 172; *Ep.* 185, 9, 42, and 10, 46.

⁷¹ *De bapt.* 1, 9 12; 3, 16, 21; 4, 17, 24.

⁷² *Ibid.* 3, 17, 22; 3, 18, 23; 5, 21, 29; 6, 3, 5; 6, 4, 6; 6, 14, 23; *C. Cresc.* 2, 13, 16; 4, 11, 13.

⁷³ *De bapt.* 1, 5, 7; 1, 14, 22; *C. Cresc.* 2, 13, 16; 2, 19, 19.

⁷⁴ Gregory recognized the mediatory role of the Church but did not describe the community as the place of encounter with the saving grace of the Holy Spirit.

⁷⁵ *Propp. ex ep. ad Rom.* 12.

⁷⁶ *Ep.* 186, 2, 4—3, 10; *Ep.* 194, 4, 16—18; *De grat. et lib. arb.* 17, 33.

death.⁷⁷ Finally, an operative grace raises and transforms the flesh and bestows on the soul the fulness of charity in the vision of God.⁷⁸

Although Augustine insists on divine interventions which give love, faith, charity, perseverance, and beatitude, he describes the subsequent processes of seeking liberation, praying for the Spirit, and growing in charity as co-operative and developmental. Moreover, the process is continuous, because each divine gift and human response prepares for the subsequent divine intervention. The merit-reward connection expresses the continuity between the stages in the process.

Discontinuity is marked at two points, the first intervention in law and gospel and the penultimate gift of perseverance. No one, Augustine asserts, merits the divine grace which moves him to pray for charity. Nor can any good works merit the grace of perseverance which prevents a lapse into sin. A person can grow in charity but cannot stabilize himself in it. One notices, moreover, that the divine operations cause and sustain all subsequent human co-operation. Augustine uses the salvation of dying infants through the operative grace of baptism as paradigmatic of the divine sovereignty over human freedom in the process of salvation.⁷⁹ Thus he excludes all grounds for human glory and gives all praise to God.⁸⁰ These two discontinuities and the role of operative grace in Augustine's economy of salvation force the developmental aspects of the process into a marginal and even dispensable role.

Developmental continuity is central not to the salvation of individuals but to the elaboration of the City of God. This company of elect angelic and human persons has had members in every age since the creation.⁸¹ In the time between the resurrection and coming of Christ, the society of the saints within the Catholic communion constitutes the earthly part of this City, the kingdom of God on earth. Since the saints are the place where the Spirit dwells in the Church, they communicate both the forgiveness of sins and the unitive charity to those joining their communion.⁸² Thus the City of God is a cause of its own growth by mediating the grace of the Spirit. The charity which unites the saints on earth to the angels and the blessed in heaven establishes the continuity of the City of God into the *eschaton*.

The society of saints is the nucleus of the Catholic communion. Both as establishing the kingdom of God on earth and as mediating the grace

⁷⁷ *De grat. et lib. arb.* 6, 13.

⁷⁸ *De spir. et litt.* 36, 64; *De nat. et grat.* 38, 45; *De perf. just. hom.* 6, 14.

⁷⁹ *De gest. Pel.* 2, 4; *Ep.* 194, 7, 31; *De grat. et lib. arb.* 23, 45; *De corrept. et grat.* 8, 18.

⁸⁰ *Ep.* 194, 5, 19; *C. epp. Pel.* 2, 10, 23. The discontinuity of the process of salvation is designed to protect the absolute gratuity of grace which Augustine grounds on the text of Rom 9:16. See *Ad Simpl.* 1, 2, 12-13; *De grat. et lib. arb.* 7, 16.

⁸¹ *De civ. Dei* 10, 7, 32; 10, 12, 1; 10, 19, 7.

⁸² *De bapt.* 5, 27, 38; 6, 3, 5-5, 7; *C. litt. Pet.* 2, 108, 247; *C. Cresc.* 2, 21, 26.

of the Holy Spirit, this society makes the Church a constitutive element in the economy of salvation. The position of the Church is derivative from that of Christ, whose grace it dispenses. Christ alone has the right to liberate the descendants of Adam from eternal condemnation. He alone sends the Holy Spirit, who gives the love of God and neighbor. Christ and his saints are united not in their common humanity but in the bond of the Spirit's charity. The Church is the Body of Christ.⁸³

REFLECTIONS

A number of significantly different suppositions distinguish the systems of Gregory of Nyssa and Augustine from the problematic of contemporary Christian theology. Each of the Fathers valued this world primarily as a means to overcome the effects of sin and to attain an otherworldly beatitude. Without denying that the fulness of humanity transcends the limitations of corporeal existence, contemporary Christian theology attempts to understand that perfection which is proper to earthly life. The process of history has been given a significance which is foreign to the perspectives of Gregory, Augustine, and the pre-Enlightenment world in general.

Secondly, on the basis of his understanding of the Creator's purpose, Gregory asserts that all human and angelic persons will be saved. On the basis of his understanding of the Savior's role, Augustine denies that all can be saved. Most contemporary theologians deny Augustine's conclusion without asserting Gregory's. Rather, they affirm that salvation is universally available and that all human persons have the opportunity to be saved.⁸⁴

Thirdly, Gregory and Augustine assumed that certain individuals and groups occupy a privileged position in the economy of salvation. They agree that only Christians have the opportunity for salvation in this world, although Gregory asserted universal salvation in the *eschaton*.⁸⁵ Many contemporary theologians find such privilege and divine election incompatible with divine justice and assert an egalitarian economy in which salvation is both universally and equally available to all.⁸⁶

Finally, Gregory and Augustine elaborated detailed explanations of the functioning of the economy of salvation. Because they had to account for the success of a restricted group—Christians—and because they did not

⁸³ Gregory developed no such communitarian model of the economy of salvation.

⁸⁴ This group would include such diverse theologians as Karl Barth and Karl Rahner.

⁸⁵ Gregory offered various explanations for the delay and limited extent of Christianity: *Orat. cat.* 29–32 (PG 45, 73D–84A). In the Pelagian controversy Augustine finally faced this question and decided for divine election: *De nat. et grat.* 4, 4.

⁸⁶ This assumption is most clearly expressed in the fourth of Schineller's types, though it can operate in the thought of those who hold the second and third types as well.

recognize subjective salvific acts without their public and explicitly Christian forms such as the hearing of the gospel, the reception of the sacraments, the practice of asceticism, and the performance of commanded works, they could offer definite expositions of the way a person reaches beatitude. Contemporary theologians must deal with an economy which reaches to all human persons and involves an unlimited variety of mediations and expressions of saving grace. They must attempt to explain how the subjective aspects of salvation can be mediated in different religious and secular structures. Their properly theological definitions of salvific self-transcendence are informed by the major symbols in which the Fathers specified the functioning of the economy, but involve neither the explicitly Christian forms nor the public verifiability which Gregory and Augustine defined.⁸⁷

Despite the differences in suppositions and concerns of patristic and contemporary theology, the economies of salvation developed in the Greek and Latin traditions and presented by Gregory and Augustine are relevant for judging modern soteriological and historical assumptions and for elaborating a contemporary ecclesiology. From these two theologies and the traditions they represent we can generalize to two types of salvation theory which have different resources and limitations. These types can be recognized in modern ecclesiology, either in their pure forms or in various combinations.⁸⁸ By working out the inner logic of these types, we shall be able to account for the failure of some approaches to understanding the nature and mission of the Church and to indicate resources for alternatives.

To facilitate the analysis of these two patristic schemas, I shall deal with the interventionist and developmental models in their pure forms, excluding foreign elements which are present in Gregory and Augustine's own theologies. For example, Gregory's use of operative grace in sacramental theology and Augustine's explanation of purgatory cannot be integrated into the explanatory schemas they adopt.⁸⁹ The generalized interventionist schema is characterized by operative grace. It admits continuity by specifying certain human actions or states as conditional or meritorious for divine intervention. The generalized developmental schema allows only co-operative graces and requires the efficacy of human efforts in every stage of the process which leads to beatitude. It

⁸⁷ These theologically defined concepts of self-transcendence must be distinguished from those grounded only in psychology. Still, contemporary theologians cannot specify such publicly verifiable conditions for salvation as Gregory and Augustine did. Even in the Fathers such objective conditions were recognized as necessary but insufficient.

⁸⁸ The Augustinian interventionist schema is so deeply imbedded in Western theology that most theologians simply assume it.

⁸⁹ See *Orat. cat.* 33-37 (*PG* 45, 84A-93C) and *De civ. Dei* 21, 24-27.

excludes both discontinuity and operative grace, even in the final transition to beatitude. Since the resurrection of the flesh involves an operative grace, the developmental schema in this pure form can describe only the spiritual aspect of the process of salvation.⁹⁰ I now proceed to universalize these schemas and to examine their adequacy to explain the general and equal availability of salvation to all human persons.

Interventionist Schema

Universalizing the interventionist schema seems to involve severing all connections between the economy of salvation and those factors which differentiate one particular form of human existence from another. If no conditions must be fulfilled to qualify for divine operation, then the process is completely discontinuous and independent of the forms of human life.⁹¹ If continuity is asserted, then the conditions must be such that they can be fulfilled in any human situation. Moreover, the equal probability of any person's attaining beatitude excludes salvific significance from any particular form of human growth. All those factors which distinguish the life situation of one person from that of another must be irrelevant for attaining salvation. Such an egalitarian economy would restrict salvific significance to that human growth which involves only aids and means which are universally and equally available. In devaluing the particularities of human environments, this theory excludes from the economy of salvation social institutions which promote human development and cause cultural differentiation. All religious traditions, not only the Christian Church, are thus excluded from significant roles.

Further, in any interventionist schema the divine action is both necessary and sufficient to produce the full perfection of human existence regardless of the prior development of the human person. In such a schema those forms of human growth which are not relevant for the fulfilment of a condition for divine operation are deprived of ultimate religious significance. The divine action which produces the beatifying perfection of the saved person will supply any fulfilment not achieved during earthly life. Social institutions which promote the advancement of individuals and the race in the unnecessary perfections have no salvific purpose.

Human institutions could gain some effectiveness in the economy of salvation if one denied that salvation is equally available to all persons and allowed various forms of human growth to influence the fulfilling of the conditions for divine intervention. Even in this instance, however, the divine operation which completes the perfecting of each person

⁹⁰ In Gregory's explanation the body is purified by operative graces.

⁹¹ This would be true of Gregory's explanation of the purification of the body through death and resurrection.

deprives his earlier achievement of a final significance. If growth within this world and final perfection are discontinuous, or if the former is only a condition for the divine operation which produces the latter, the advance of humanity can be assigned only a limited religious significance.

The interventionist model offers great resources to modern theologians. If one chooses to assert some continuity between this life and the next, it allows the specification of such conditions for divine intervention as can be achieved in any human situation. Moreover, it allows divine operation to supply for the inadequacies of human growth and the regressions of sin. Because the interventionist model involves the substitution of divine operation for human achievement, it restricts the ultimate value of human effort. When it is grounded on an assertion of the equal availability of salvation, this schema imposes severe limitations on the role of religious and other human institutions in the process of salvation.

Developmental Schema

Because of its continuity and insistence on co-operation between human efforts and divine action, the developmental model avoids the limitations of the interventionist schema. It can ground the religious significance of individual and social growth and the enterprises of human history. However, it entails inequalities in different human situations which are significant for salvation and thus involves a form of privilege and election of some individuals and groups.

In this schema human effort is effective in every stage of the process of attaining perfection. Divine grace co-operates with but never replaces human action. Thus the stages in the process are intrinsically and continuously related by the functioning of created means. As attained in such a process, beatitude will be the product of human effort and co-operative divine grace rather than of the intervention of an operative grace.

If the means of growth toward perfection are neither exclusively contained within the created nature of each person nor given only by unmediated interior graces, then the economy of salvation will include social institutions which foster religious growth. Religious traditions which inspire and guide the efforts of their adherents provide significant assistance in the process of development. If a person concentrates on a form of growth which is peripheral to the true goal of humanity, his efforts are wasted. Thus, champions of the Egyptian desert who fixed their attention on the subjection of the flesh failed to advance in spiritual union with God.⁹² If the unity or continuity of nature and grace forms a part of the explanation of the economy, then all institutions which affect

⁹² See nn. 30 and 47 above.

the actualization of human potential become relevant for attaining beatitude. The social institutions which constitute the cultural context of an individual's life would help his religious growth to the extent that they encourage and provide means for it. Growth would be retarded by social institutions which disvalue it or deprive the individual of appropriate means. Thus a religious motivation would ground the commitment to the evolutionary development of humanity, which increases the resources available for individual progress.⁹³

Because of the significance it gives to the human environment and to the institutions which differentiate one environment from another, the developmental schema excludes the assertion that human individuals have equal opportunities in the pursuit of perfection. Any attempt to re-establish egalitarianism by special interior graces to individuals in deficient cultures would undercut the religious significance of human institutions. Actually, the imperfection of every human environment limits the inequality implied by this salvific significance of cultural institutions. In a developmental schema spiritual growth would not be limited to terrestrial life.⁹⁴ Thus one could recover some egalitarianism by a sort of eschatological affirmative-action program in which God specially assists the deprived.

Church as Normative and Constitutive

One cannot assign any religious institution a significant normative role in an egalitarian economy of salvation. In a system in which salvation is universally but not equally available, a religious tradition which can justify a claim to normative status by mediating a divine revelation of the true goal of humanity and the way to attain it would have a peculiar value. Its inspiration and guidance would provide to its adherents the best available assistance in fulfilling the conditions for divine intervention or developing toward full perfection. It could also have a significant role in fostering the proper growth of other religious traditions and secular institutions. In a universalist economy all traditions and institutions can mediate divine grace. Hence a normative church would be influenced by these other institutions but would judge according to its own normative resources.⁹⁵

The constitutive function of the Church might be understood in two nonexclusive ways. The Church might be a necessary mediator of the

⁹³This conclusion follows whether one asserts that natural development is identical with religious development, a necessary condition for it, or simply an aid to it.

⁹⁴Gregory specifies that spiritual growth is unending.

⁹⁵In his article on mission Roger Haight seems to argue from such a normative function of the Church.

means of salvation or the earthly form of a heavenly reality. Each must be examined in a universal economy.

To assign a constitutive function to any particular religious institution, one must specify the relation between the plurality of communities of the present age and the social unity of the *eschaton*. If the eschatological kingdom of God brings an abrupt end to all churches and replaces them with a new social unity, then no earthly institution has this constitutive role.⁹⁶ If, however, the eschatological community is achieved by the transformation of some particular church whose reality continues in the new age, then the religious unity of humanity would be anticipated in that one institution and all other communities would attain fulfilment only in being joined into it in the *eschaton*. Because this church would already contain the final unifying principle of saved humanity in which all individuals and institutions reach perfection, it would be a constitutive element in the economy of salvation. Such a constitutive function could be expressed in either a continuous interventionist or a developmental schema. Gregory concentrates on individual salvation and describes only the mediatory function of the Church, but Augustine's description of the City of God located within the Catholic communion would make that Church such a constitutive element.⁹⁷

CONCLUSION

The theory of universally available salvation indicates a shift in perspective which distances the contemporary Christian theologian from most of his predecessors. In this context the need for a new ecclesiology is immediately and strikingly evident. The results of the present investigation of patristic theology indicate that the Church must be understood through its relations to the other elements in the economy of salvation. A theory of the nature and task of the Church rests upon certain assumptions and assertions about human perfection, the process through which it is attained, and the interaction of divine grace and human effort in this process. To build an ecclesiology adequate to the new universalism, we must elaborate a new understanding of the entire economy of salvation. The purpose of this article has been to clarify two schemas of the economy and their resources for the work of contemporary theology.

⁹⁶ Christians would still attempt to convert others to acknowledge and live the truth of the relationship of humans to God through the Church. Such a form of life would be religiously significant but would not necessarily advance an individual's salvation. Church members would have access to an explicit union with God not available to others.

⁹⁷ This appears to be Robert Sears's line of argument for the constitutive nature of the Church in his "Trinitarian Love as Ground of the Church."