

Preface

This book takes me into a field that is weighed down with a century or more of debate. One might replay that modern discussion about those of other religious traditions by assembling a range of notable writers. Such a spectrum of views would move from Karl Barth (1886–1968), through Karl Rahner (1904–84) and Jacques Dupuis (1923–2004), and on to John Hick (b. 1922). Many further names cluster around these four figures and would enjoy a walk-on part in a study of what twentieth-century authors, official teachers, and significant assemblies—in particular, the Second Vatican Council (1962–5)—contributed to thinking about the salvation of those who do not belong to Judaism and Christianity. Much and all as I appreciate the importance of what has come from those modern sources, I do not wish to organize, distinguish, and appraise their contributions. In various articles and chapters of books (some of them listed in the bibliography), I have already taken part, albeit in a minor way, in that debate. But doing justice to the full story would require at least one large volume, and I wonder how much I might achieve by going over all that ground once again.

The purpose of this book is rather to assemble and assess the biblical testimony about the salvation of God's 'other peoples' or the 'others', before presenting some systematic conclusions and positions about the role of Jesus for the salvation of the world. In going through the Bible I will take up and explore testimony that illuminates the *universal* scope of God's love and offer of salvation. I want to show that this is a strong and lasting theme. Unquestionably, there are many biblical passages that catch the eye and that seem at odds with the universality of divine love (for example the OT oracles against the nations pronounced by various prophets). Here and there I will pay attention to this feature in the scriptural witness (as in examining teaching from the prophet Amos in Chapter 3). But my purpose is not to survey equally and appraise *both* the 'negative' *and* the 'positive' witness; to do that would call for a book twice the length of this one. My aim is to set out in detail all the major biblical

testimony to the universal scope of God's offer of salvation—something that, as far as I know, has never been done before. The witness of the whole Bible to God's universal love is very impressive and should be appropriated much more in contemporary discussions of the 'other' religions and 'God's other peoples'. Before plunging into the intricate, contemporary debates, all parties—or at least all Christian parties—should listen attentively to the full scriptural witness to the universal divine benevolence.

Two central presuppositions undergird this project. First, I believe in the crucified and risen Jesus as the Saviour of all people—that is to say, of all men and women who have ever shared or will share in our common humanity. Along with this role, as we shall see, goes that of his being the universal Revealer or Light of the world. Salvation and revelation can and should be distinguished, but should never be separated.

Second, I accept the canonical scriptures (including the deuterocanonical books of the OT) as written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and therefore as normative and religiously authoritative. Some of the deuterocanonical books, such as the Wisdom of Solomon and Sirach (or the Wisdom of Ben Sira), yield important teaching on the divine relationship with all people. Respect for the inspired status of the whole Bible does not mean, however, putting every book on the same level or closing my eyes to developments (for example from the earlier to the later books of the OT).

From my fairly extensive reading in the area of interreligious studies, I do not think that Christian authors, not to mention others, have explored and appreciated the full range of scriptural testimony that is relevant to the role of Jesus for the redemption of the human race. At times they seem to adopt a position and then rustle up some biblical evidence in its support. The issues should be approached in the opposite direction, by hearing first the full range of scriptural voices and then attempting some systematic conclusions.

The novelty of this book comes from its shifting into focus, right from the outset, the biblical witness. That includes avoiding as far as possible the leaden jargon which has often come to dominate when Catholics and other Christians write and teach about world religions. Eventually I will have to move beyond the biblical testimony to evaluations which use such terms as 'presence'. But I want to delay that shift as long as possible, and certainly not begin by analysing

various ‘-isms’ like ‘Christo-centrism’, ‘exclusivism’, ‘inclusivism’, ‘pluralism’, and ‘theo-centrism’. Introduced originally to sort matters out, these abstract nouns now groan under the weight of their many meanings and at times finish up confusing rather than clarifying discussion. The one unavoidable but relatively uncontroversial ‘-ism’ that will turn up in the early chapters is ‘universalism’, used in the sense of God’s benevolence towards everyone.

One terminological issue remains a nagging problem. With many others, I dislike such negative labels as ‘non-Christian’ and ‘non-evangelized’. But how are we to name en bloc those of other religious traditions? In this book I decided to adopt the terms ‘God’s other peoples’, ‘others’, and ‘outsiders’, understanding these general terms in a positive sense.

Beyond question, I want to arrive at some closing judgements, and not lay myself open to the criticism of being long on biblical detail but short on systematic conclusions. But, before moving to any such conclusions, a series of chapters will explore and retrieve what the Bible has to say about the human condition and about the religious life of ‘others’. First, how do the scriptures account for the origin, nature, and destiny of human beings? Second, what did the chosen people of God (according to the OT) and Christians (according to the NT) think about the religious situation of ‘others’, those who did not (or did not yet) belong to their community of faith?

As a Christian I use the terminology of Old Testament (OT) and New Testament (NT). Here ‘old’ is understood as good and does not imply any ‘supersessionism’, or the view that the NT has rendered obsolete, replaced, and so ‘superseded’ the OT.

In dealing with the OT scriptures, I intend to follow more or less the sequence of the Hebrew Bible: the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings. I am well aware that this threefold ordering of the books—(1) the Pentateuch and the historical books, then (2) the prophets, and, finally, (3) the wisdom books—does *not* mean that the works found under (1) were all written before (2), or that the prophetic books were all written before (3). Further, the particular sequence of books within each of these three groupings does not represent—or at least does not necessarily represent—the order of their composition. As regards the final text of individual books, these can include a variety of traditions which should be dated to various periods. Such

books as Genesis, Proverbs, and Isaiah classically exemplify this variety. In the case of the NT canon, the four Gospels precede the letters of St Paul. But the canonical texts of the Gospels were almost certainly put into their present shape *after* the Apostle wrote his letters. Once again the canonical order does not necessarily represent the chronological order in the composition of NT books (and of traditions that can enter into the final text). Occasionally this difference can prove significant to some arguments being developed in this book and will be included in the discussion.

One needs to examine carefully the testimony from both parts of the scriptural canon, in which the OT enjoys a certain advantage over the NT for thinking about the relations of 'others' to God. The OT scriptures emerged from oral traditions and writings that went on for over a thousand years, centuries in which the Israelites experienced many other peoples, cultures, and religions. The OT yields a rich variety of positive and negative reflections on the religious situation of the 'others'. Palestine itself served as a kind of 'sacred bridge' between Egypt and Mesopotamia, while years of exile outside Palestine also provided the Israelites with extensive first-hand contacts with the religious beliefs and practices of the 'others'. By way of contrast, the NT resulted from only seventy or so years of Christian experiences, even if those decades involved contacts around the Mediterranean, in North Africa, out to the Middle East, and even beyond. As regards the cradle of Christianity itself, Palestine admittedly was multi-lingual and, to some extent, multi-ethnic and multi-religious. But the experience of 'others' reflected in the 27 books of the NT cannot match the great variety of experiences, hopes, and wishes derived from Israel's long history and incorporated in the 45 books of the OT.

Israel's history had been shaped, to a large extent, by contacts with other peoples, and, since much of that history was one of suffering, what predominates in the sayings about the nations (e.g. Jer. 46–51; Ezek. 25–32, 35; Zeph. 2: 4–15) were words of judgement. But that, as we shall see, is not the whole story. Instead of proposing merely negative things about 'outsiders', the OT also acknowledges the gracious goodness of God towards the nations and foreigners. Traditional Judaism, which draws not only on the scriptures but also on rabbinic literature, also offers a generous view not only of the

salvation of non-Jews, but also of their co-operation in God's plan, as we will see below.

This book begins then with the biblical witness. Some data will be treated several times. But I make no apology for that repetition. It seems important and even necessary to drive home the relevant teaching from the OT and the NT and the implications of such teaching.

I might have chosen another starting point: for instance, the conditions for inter-religious dialogue, its nature, and its aims. Engaging in such dialogue is obviously of immense importance as the human race moves further into the third millennium. The world has become increasingly interdependent—economically, politically, and religiously. It is not simply the mass media that has crossed national and continental frontiers. Our global situation has turned more and more multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, and multi-religious. Inter-religious dialogue at every level is a pressing necessity. In this book I hope to help in laying a foundation for such dialogue by exploring thoroughly what the scriptural witnesses would say to Christian (and also to non-Christian) partners in these exchanges.

I am most grateful to many people for their help and encouragement in writing this book: Michael Barnes, Abigail Brown, Brendan Byrne, Richard Clifford, Charles Conroy, Robert Doran, Gerald Goetz, Anne Hunt, Robert Joda, Nicholas King, Joseph Mueller, Maev O'Collins, Kevin O'Reilly, John Schmitt, Thomas Stegman, Jane Steingraeber, Roland Teske, David Twetten, the graduate students at Marquette University who took Theology 316 in the fall semester of 2006, and two anonymous readers for Oxford University Press. I also wish to express my warm thanks to three Jesuit communities for their support when I was composing this work: Jesuit Theological College (Parkville, Australia), Marquette University Jesuit Residence (Milwaukee, USA), and John Sinnott House (Wimbledon, England). With gratitude and affection I dedicate this book to the memory of Jacques Dupuis, a theologian of immense learning who always held that followers of other religions are persons to be encountered and are not 'cases' to be reduced to mere statements about them.

Gerald O'Collins, SJ

St Mary's University College, Twickenham
Easter, 2007

Contents

<i>Abbreviations</i>	xii
1 From Adam and Eve to Abraham and Sarah	1
2 Exodus, Deuteronomy, Ruth, and Naaman	17
3 Balaam, Amos, and Jonah	31
4 Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Malachi	42
5 Wisdom and the 'Others'	54
6 Provisional Conclusions from the Old Testament	64
7 Jesus and the 'Outsiders'	79
8 Dying and Rising for All?	100
9 The Apostle to the Gentiles	121
10 Luke on Jesus and Salvation	142
11 Jesus, the Church, and Israel	162
12 The Universal Benevolence of God	176
13 Holy 'Outsiders'	199
14 The Universal Presence of Christ and the Spirit	207
15 Universal Wisdom	230
16 Saving Faith and 'Outsiders'	248
<i>Select Bibliography</i>	260
<i>Index of Names</i>	262
<i>Biblical Index</i>	266

1

From Adam and Eve to Abraham and Sarah

The Book of Genesis deploys a range of traditional figures and stories that symbolize the unity of humankind and God's loving concern for all human beings. This chapter picks out Adam and Eve, Noah and his family, and then the patriarch Abraham and his wife Sarah. Their stories show how God cares for everyone and shows a universal benevolence. Let us see the details of these ancient legends, along with their views of the human condition and its religious practices. Jewish history looks back not merely to Abraham and Sarah but also 'beyond' them to the 'parents' of the human race and the mythical 'time' when humanity was one.

ADAM AND EVE

The Hebrew word *'adam*, a common noun that signifies 'human being (man)' or 'humanity (mankind)', also functions in the Bible, albeit rarely, as the proper name for a male person, the first human being. The Book of Genesis uses the word as the name for the first human individual only after Adam and Eve have been expelled from Eden. Prior to that, the so-called Priestly tradition speaks of the creation of *'adam* in a collective sense (as 'humanity' or 'human-kind') (Gen. 1: 26–8). The Yahwist tradition then depicts the creation and sin of *ha 'adam* ('the man') and makes it clear that is referring to the first male individual (Gen. 2: 4–3: 24). But the proper name

‘Adam’ occurs in the Hebrew text at Genesis 4: 25, when Adam is identified as the father of Seth.¹

Thus at the start of Genesis, the story of the creation and of the subsequent sin of ‘the man’ and ‘the woman’ (e.g. Gen. 3: 2, 6, 12, 13, 15–16) works to depict symbolically the origin and present sinful state of humankind, or of everyman and everywoman. The figures of ‘Adam’ and ‘Eve’ may be individual, but are used to portray the whole human race and not merely the story of two human beings. The opening chapters of Genesis apply to the entire human community: first, their creation through the goodness of God and then their fall into sin that has affected all subsequent generations. What we read in those chapters refers universally to human beings, their origin, and their life in the presence of God.² What is at stake is the relationship between God, the lord of history and creator of the world, and human beings, the climax of the creative work of God. These are the headlines; let us now see the small print.

Human existence, according to Genesis, consists in relationships—between human beings and nature, among human beings, and between human beings and God. Human creation can respond to and collaborate with the creator—something clearly implied when God says: ‘Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness’ (Gen. 1: 26). This is to define human beings in terms of their relationship with God and their dialogue with God. The creation story, which attaches God-like attributes to human beings as such (and not specifically to Israelites, who have not yet appeared in the story) inspires a psalm to express wonder at the divine favour shown towards human beings: ‘you have made them a little lower

¹ The Priestly tradition has normally been dated to the time of the Babylonian captivity in the sixth century BC. The Yahwist tradition used to be dated to the time of David and Solomon, but many scholars now lower the date by a century or more. Some even doubt the distinct existence of the Priestly and the Yahwist traditions. See E. Zenger *et al.*, *Einleitung in das Alte Testament* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 5th edn., 2004), 90–123.

² F. Maass, ‘*Adham*’, in G. J. Botterweck and H. Ringgren (eds.), *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, i (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1974), 75–87, at 83–4: ‘the use of the word *adham* in the OT presents one of the strongest evidences for ancient Israelite universalism. In most passages using *adham*, including the earliest texts, it is clear that this word is not intended to refer particularly to Israelites but to all men.’

than God [or ‘the angels’]; and crowned them with glory and honour’ (Ps. 8: 5).

This sense of the unconditional dignity of all human beings and the sanctity of their life comes through a later, classical Jewish homily on the creation story. ‘For this reason was one single man created: to teach you that anyone who destroys a single life is as though he destroyed the whole of mankind, and anyone who preserves a single life is as though he preserved the whole of mankind . . . [Since each of us is an Adam] everyone must say: “For my sake the world was created”’ (*Sanhedrin*, 4. 5).³

In the older, Yahwist account of creation (Gen. 2), God places ‘man’ in the garden and then provides for all his needs. The later Priestly tradition (Gen. 1) shows God preparing the earth as a ‘house’ or ‘tent’ and then bringing in the human tenants: ‘male and female’ (Gen. 1: 27).⁴ The ‘house’ belongs to the divine proprietor; humanity can only be God’s steward and mouthpiece. Communication is both vertical (between God and humanity) and horizontal (among human beings themselves). The Yahwist account dwells on the fact that ‘the man’ needs a partner, while the Priestly version shows God creating humankind as a community. It is to humanity as a whole that God delivers the injunction: ‘be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it’ (Gen. 1: 28). Here *’adam* is understood not as a single couple, still less as ‘the man’, but collectively as the ‘composite whole as male and female’ or a human dyad created in the divine image (Gen. 1: 26–7).⁵

Genesis expresses not only humanity’s inherent dignity (as created by God and endowed with God-like qualities) but also the mission that issues from this dignity. Human images of God manifest the divine rule on earth and have the privileged task of being God’s stewards, continuing and completing God’s creative work by presiding in the divine name over the rest of creation. In particular, three

³ See M. Greenberg, ‘Mankind, Israel and the Nations in the Hebraic Heritage’, in J. R. Nelson (ed.), *No Man Is Alien* (Leiden: Brill, 1971), 15–39, at 38.

⁴ Some scholars argue that the final redactions of the Yahwist and Priestly traditions were roughly contemporaneous—in the sixth century BC; see A. Lacoque, *The Trial of Innocence: Adam, Eve and the Yahwist* (Eugene, Oreg.: Cascade Books, 2006), 17–21, 52–60.

⁵ H. Wallace, ‘Adam’, *ABD* i. 62–4, at 63.

activities are given to ‘the man’ and only to him among all living creatures: namely, to cultivate the earth, to ‘keep’ or guard the Garden, and to name the animals—an act which suggests his unique wisdom and intelligence (Gen. 2: 15, 19–20). A psalm echoes the Genesis account and celebrates the wonderful share in his own dignity that God has granted human beings by giving them authority over the rest of creation: ‘You have given them dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under their feet, all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea’ (Ps. 8: 6–8).

Humanity collectively enjoys a favoured status vis-à-vis the rest of creation, but relies totally upon God for this status and indeed for life itself. Humanity is likewise responsible collectively in its obedience to God, and should obey the commands of God—in particular, the command not to eat any fruit ‘of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil’ (Gen. 2: 16–17). Hence when ‘the man’ and ‘the woman’ disobey the divine command, their rebellion affects universally the whole human community. ‘The man’ and ‘the woman’ eat the forbidden fruit, and lose both their innocent relationship with one another and their trusting relationship with God. The story vividly portrays their loss of innocence and urge to redress their self-image: ‘The eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sowed fig leaves together, and made loincloths for themselves’ (Gen. 3: 7). They now ‘know’ through their experience the difference between ‘good’ and ‘evil’ (Gen. 3: 5). In their guilt they try to hide ‘themselves from the presence of the Lord God’ (Gen. 3: 8). They had hoped that eating the forbidden fruit would make them even more ‘like God’ (Gen. 3: 5); now they anxiously try to get away from God. Sin has disrupted their basic relationship with their divine Lord.

The story of the first sin brilliantly presents what everyman and everywoman do: their instinct is to put the blame on someone else. ‘The man’ blames ‘the woman’ and even God: ‘the woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree’ (Gen. 3: 11). ‘The woman’ blames the crafty serpent who has tempted her: ‘the serpent tricked me, and I ate’ (Gen. 3: 13). But ‘the man’ and ‘the woman’ have deliberately disobeyed the divine will and must suffer the consequences. Their transgression has a tragic outcome.

The Genesis story picturesquely tells what follows the sinful loss of their first innocence, when ‘the man’ and ‘the woman’ were unashamedly naked (Gen. 2: 25)—in a guiltless relationship with one another and with God, which traditional Christian language was to call ‘original justice’. The biblical text appeals to an ancient explanation for the pain of childbirth, when God says to the woman: ‘I will greatly increase your pangs in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children’ (Gen. 3: 16). In place of an ideal relationship of joyful equality and mutual dependence intended by the creator (Gen. 2: 18–23), the woman finds herself ‘ruled over’ by her husband (Gen. 3: 16) and named by him ‘Eve’ (Gen. 3: 20). Where pain now characterizes the woman’s experience of giving life through childbearing, something similar holds true of the man. His work in cultivating the garden should have been normal and natural (Gen. 2: 15), but sin turns work into distressing toil (Gen. 3: 17–19). In bringing life, in his case by gaining bread from the ground and its crops, the man too will have to suffer pain. In language that is as fresh as ever, the Genesis story drives home the point: far from enhancing their life, sin leaves everyman and everywoman less than they should really be, and ushers in destructive consequences.

The most distressing consequence concerns death. Fashioned from dust (Gen. 2: 7), ‘the man’ and ‘the woman’ are by nature mortal; their death should have been like that of Abraham, who will die surrounded by his family in ‘ripe old age’—a death that peacefully completes a life spent in faithful obedience to God (Gen. 25: 1–11).⁶ But disobedience to God has changed the experience of death for sinful human beings: death has become a troubling, inexorable fate (Gen. 3: 19), a distressing sign of sin. Flanked by suffering and pain, death signals the radical change that sin brings to the human condition.

Having made a decision unworthy of those created in the divine image (Gen. 1: 26–7), the man and the woman are banished from the garden of Eden into a foreign place. Cherubim and a flaming sword now guard the entrance into the garden and ‘the way to the tree of

⁶ For the Yahwist tradition, physical death is humanity’s return to dust and the handing back of life’s breath to God. The OT expresses a firm belief in afterlife only in the post-exilic times.

life' (Gen. 3: 24). Other books of the Bible will use exile and suffering in a foreign land to symbolize sin and the lot of sinful human beings: Jesus' parable of the lost son, for example, pictures the boy who will become a dissolute sinner as leaving his parental home for 'a distant country' (Luke 15: 13). The last book of the Bible will portray final damnation as 'the second death' to which the damned will be banished and final redemption as entering a heavenly Jerusalem and receiving God's abundant blessings from the 'tree of life'. For humanity, paradise regained will mean re-entering the garden and being given access to the final 'tree of life', which will be watered by the river of life coming from the Lamb (Rev. 22: 1–2).

Despite the sad consequences of sin, God does not curse the first two human beings and continues to cherish them; their disobedience cannot render void the special relationship between God and the human race. Eve will remain 'the mother of all the living' (Gen. 3: 20). The curse upon the serpent in Genesis 3: 15 ('I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall strike your head, and you shall strike his heel') seems to recall an ancient explanation of why serpents crawl rather than walk and why human beings instinctively fear serpents. Yet this curse also suggests the future possibility of human salvation: 'once admitted that the serpent symbolizes sin, death and the power of evil, it becomes much more likely that the curse envisages a long struggle between good and evil, with mankind eventually triumphing'.⁷ Starting with Justin Martyr (d. around 165) and Irenaeus (d. around 200), many Christian commentators were to interpret this verse as 'the first Gospel (Protoevangelium)' conveying the first divine promise of salvation to come through 'the woman' (identified as Mary) and 'her seed' (Christ).⁸ Moreover, even in the immediate aftermath of their sin, God actively cares for disobedient human beings by clothing and protecting them with 'garments of skin' (Gen. 3: 21). God does something similar after the murder of Abel, by putting a protective 'mark on Cain, so that no one who came upon him would kill him' (Gen. 4: 15). Human sin does not do away with divine mercy.

⁷ G. J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15* (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1987), 80.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 80–1.

When the Priestly tradition returns in the Genesis narrative, it teaches firmly that, despite the presence of sin, human beings remain created in the image of God. The divine 'likeness' and 'image' are transmitted to the descendants of Adam and Eve: 'When God created humankind, he made them in his likeness. Male and female he created them, and he blessed them.' When Adam begets Seth, he 'becomes the father of a son in his likeness [the divine likeness] and according to his image' (Gen. 5: 1–3).

We can sum up this vision of all humanity with which the Bible starts. Even after their sin, human beings continue to display the divine image and likeness and to experience the loving concern of God. They must rely on God for everything, and hope for a redemption to come. The universal benevolence of God brightens a situation darkened by human sin. While human guilt is universal, the divine love and concern are also universal.

NOAH AND HIS FAMILY

The Genesis story sees the disobedience of Adam and Eve as initiating an avalanche of sin. Cain murders his brother; this fratricide paves the way for a terrifying increase of violence and the unbridled revenge killings practised by Cain's descendant, Lamech (Gen. 4: 8, 23–4). Violence also brings a breach of boundaries between heaven and earth. 'Beings of the heavenly court' take human wives, even though their offspring remain mortal and do not become semi-divine (Gen. 6: 1–4). Whatever the source of this fragment of mythology, lustful practices contribute to the steady advance of sin that degrades the human condition. Described earlier as 'good' (Gen. 1: 31), the earth itself has now become corrupt through the violent and wicked deeds of human beings (Gen. 6: 11–13). In their colourful way, the opening chapters of Genesis show human beings opting against God and one another. Evil decisions coalesce and shape a whole situation of sin, which needs 'cleansing' to allow for a new beginning (Gen. 9: 1–2).

Although God's judgement takes the form of a catastrophic flood, the merciful love of God still operates. As we saw above, earlier in the