“Salvation isn’t just something we experience after we die; it begins here and now in the circumstances of our daily life”.

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To discuss the idea that “Salvation isn’t just something we experience after we die; it begins here and now in the circumstances of our daily life”, one must first have an understanding of what is meant by salvation; what humanity are being saved from and how. This essay will discuss the world humanity inhabit, though created ‘good’ and in the image of Christ, marred by sin and in need of God’s redemption. This requires a reflection on the saving action of Jesus Christ and his establishment of the Kingdom of God, a Kingdom that has its beginnings in the present on earth and through humanity’s concrete loving actions, but that will reach it’s pinnacle through the Grace of God at the second coming of Christ.

The world and all humanity have been created by God because God willed and desired it to be so. The world is good because it was created by God and humanity has been made in the image and likeness of God. God loves each and every human being and wills to be in relationship with them, but giving them free will as the ultimate sign of God’s love.¹ God does not compel humans to love God back, but desires that they can freely choose to be in relationship with God. This also means that human beings have the capacity to choose not to love God. This choice is sin; it is “turning away

from God in the heart”. Sin manifests in the many times humanity choose not to love their fellow brothers and sisters, unleashing an evil in the world that touches all. This all-pervasive sin restricts the freedom of humanity and our capability for loving God and the world. Sin enslaves humanity, and is the way of death, not the life that only God can offer. Yet God offers salvation from the chains of sin that bind humanity. God still unconditionally loves humanity, despite our sins, and offers redemption and liberation in a newly embodied life. Salvation is a remaking of creation, renewed from the distortion of sin, death and destruction.  

This salvation is made possible through Jesus Christ. When Jesus died on the cross, he took on the sins and sufferings of all humanity. God has chosen to become incarnate in history and enter into the suffering of the people, drawing close in love. When Jesus rose from the dead, the power and enslavement of sin was broken once and for all for all humanity. The resurrection showed that God had broken the vicious cycle of sin that manifests in violence and oppression in the world, and that through Jesus, victory over poverty and persecution is possible. The resurrection was the creation of God’s new world of justice, joy, and hope of salvation. By Jesus’ death and resurrection, the communion of all humanity with God and with each other has been initiated, as the antithesis of sin. This salvation from sin is “isn’t just something we experience after we die; it begins here and now in the circumstances of our daily life”. So then what does this salvation look like? What will a world without the chains

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of sin involve? This is the world preached and practised by Jesus, which he referred to as the Kingdom of God.

The Kingdom of God is something that is beginning here on earth in the present. Jesus speaks of the Kingdom as ‘the harvest that is now ripe’ (Mt 9:37), and that ‘the hour of the bridegroom has come’ (Mk 2: 18-20). The message of Easter is that God’s new world has been unveiled in Jesus Christ. The resurrection was and is with a transformed body, and the power of Easter will transform and heal the present world⁷ and “every aspect of humanity; body and spirit, individual and society, person and cosmos, time and eternity”.⁸ The Kingdom of God occurs on earth whenever human beings are obedient to God through grace, specifically through their active and collective love of fellow human beings.⁹ Yet the Kingdom of God is not yet complete, and its fulfilment is a future goal to be aspired to. The Kingdom is like the leaven or yeast already at work in the world (Mt 13:33 par). The embryo of the future world is in our midst. It is a mustard seed that will grow into something much bigger (Mk 4:31-32).¹⁰ The Kingdom of God has its beginnings at creation, reaches its climax in Jesus Christ, and will be brought to completion at the Parousia. History has already entered its eschatological phase through the life, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and history’s destination has already been decided. Although our salvation has been secured, that outcome is still hidden and can only be grasped in faith and love.¹¹ We live now “between-the-times”, active in the present as people who are to be made

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⁷ Wright, Surprised By Hope, 265.
⁸ Gutierrez, A Theology of Liberation, 151-152.
¹¹ McBrien, Catholicism, 1104.
complete in the future. We must build on the foundations of the Kingdom of God that are here now, creating the bridge to the future wholeness of the Kingdom.

Future salvation does not mean that we will be saved from an evil world, taken to a new place of perfection. Rather, the Kingdom of God has already been rooted here and now in this world, and this world is where it will find future completion. Although the world is enslaved to sin, God created the world to manifest God’s desire and purpose. The world that originates from God is intrinsically linked to God, and held in relationship with God. The Genesis story tells us that all God created was good, and thus the world has hope and future and is the setting God has chosen to be in relationship with humanity. It is the setting for God’s Kingdom. Creation was in itself the first salvific action of God. God created the world with its future salvation already determined, and thus creation was the initiation of God’s redemptive journey with humanity. Second Isaiah and Psalms talk of God as both Creator and Saviour at the same time, because creation and salvation are inseparable. God’s salvific actions continued in the world through the resurrection. The resurrection has taken place as an event within our world, and it will have repercussions within our world, here and now. Jesus did not declare that the world was redundant and one day to be scrapped, with the Kingdom of God to take place in the distant heavens. Rather, the book of Revelations speaks of the marriage of heaven and earth, of our world being the place

12 Wright, Surprised By Hope, 299.
13 Wright, Surprised By Hope, 219-220.
16 Gutierrez, A Theology of Liberation, 154-155.
where heaven is embodied.\textsuperscript{17} Jesus advocated the transformation of this world and that the Reign of God will occur in our earth, renewed.\textsuperscript{18}

Humanity has been chosen as the workers to continue God’s plan of salvation and to be the builders of the Kingdom. Although humans are tainted by sin, God has made us God’s representatives on earth, recruited for the task of developing the world for the Reign of God.\textsuperscript{19} God created humanity in God’s image and likeness, and to be human means to participate in God’s life. To reach our potential as human beings requires us to cooperate with God in the ushering in of salvation.\textsuperscript{20} We are called to accept God’s invitation to relationship with God by responding in faith and love, or we have the freedom to reject the offer and turn to sin.\textsuperscript{21} Through our actions in this world, we become more or less human – through our building of the Kingdom, or tearing down of the Kingdom. Yet, having our origins in God has left human beings with an innate yearning for life with God. St Augustine stated, “Our hearts are restless until they rest in you Lord”. We feel an intrinsic pull towards God, mediated through creation, and a desire to build up God’s Kingdom in the here and now.\textsuperscript{22} The movement of history towards its fulfilment in the Kingdom of God is believed not only because it is the future promised by God, but also because our very human nature demands that we work for it. We are “constitutionally restless” in our longing for love and truth, something only to be satisfied when we engage with God and God’s activity in our world.\textsuperscript{23}

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\item \textsuperscript{17} Wright, \textit{Surprised By Hope}, 115.
\item \textsuperscript{18} Wright, \textit{Surprised By Hope}, 202-203.
\item \textsuperscript{19} Sachs, \textit{The Christian Vision of Humanity}, 21.
\item \textsuperscript{20} Sachs, \textit{The Christian Vision of Humanity}, 27.
\item \textsuperscript{21} McBrien, \textit{Catholicism}, 1104.
\item \textsuperscript{22} Sachs, \textit{The Christian Vision of Humanity}, 30-32.
\item \textsuperscript{23} McBrien, \textit{Catholicism}, 1103.
\end{itemize}
The task of contributing to salvation in the present is not an easy one, and it is only through God’s grace that humans can hope to achieve this goal. Through the work of the Spirit, we are given the strength to turn away from sin and be brought to faithfully follow Jesus in the way of discipleship, prayer, hope, holiness and love.  

God’s unmerited grace is bestowed upon humanity to help us overcome temptation to sin and live a truly human life. It is the Spirit poured into our lives, sparking a metanoia in our hearts, a complete interior renewal; “it is radical conversion, a profound change of mind and heart”. Only through Grace are we equipped for the task of building God’s Kingdom in the here and now. We can allow God to work through and in us to transform this life and allow God’s redemptive presence to enter in, culminating at the Parousia. What humanity accomplish now through the power of the Spirit, will, through the resurrecting power of God, remain internal and eventually be incorporated and enhanced in God’s new world.

Through Jesus Christ’s death on the cross and resurrection, our future salvation has been promised, but Jesus preached in his life and ministry a way that humanity must emulate in order to begin working for salvation today. Jesus’ life and death were the praxis of the Kingdom. He condemned human suffering in the form of hunger, poverty, and oppression and advocated a world of “peace, laughter, happiness, and mercy”. Jesus called for a social revolution ad re-ordering of relationships within society. “He spoke of turning the other cheek instead of taking revenge, of loving one’s enemies instead of hating them, of doing good to those who

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24 Wright, Surprised By Hope, 212.  
25 McBrien, Catholicism, 1134-1135.  
27 McBrien, Catholicism, 1104.  
28 Wright, Surprised By Hope, 219-220.  
29 Wright, Surprised By Hope, 204.  
30 McBrien, Catholicism, 1122.
hate you, of blessing those who curse you, and of forgiving them all”. Jesus declared that all humanity are equal in dignity and worth, as we are all made in God’s image and likeness. The outcasts and marginalized are deserving of as much respect as those of high rank and status, and in fact that we should strive to move down the social ladder, instead of aspiring to reach the top. 31 The first will be last and the last will be first (Mk 10:31). What Jesus was urging from humanity was for society to become like a family of brothers and sisters with God as their loving parent. This is what the Kingdom of God will look like. 32 All authority in heaven and on earth had been given to Jesus and he demanded that we work as agents of that authority (Mt 27: 18-20). 33 Jesus commissioned humanity to go and make this Kingdom happen. Salvation is present in the world today whenever we act on Jesus’ commission, gathering together as the seeds of the emerging kingdom, standing in solidarity with our fellow human beings; healing one another, learning from one another, sharing with one another, and loving one another. 34

Working for salvation demands that we read the signs of our times, and apply the gospel to he major issues of our world, making God’s healing presence a concrete reality through our intentional actions. 35 The Gospel message calls us to constantly criticise institutions, structures, and mentalities that promote oppression and oppose God’s love. We must strive for justice and defend the rights of the poor, the hungry, the marginalized, and the oppressed. “The struggle for justice is the struggle for the Kingdom”. 36 The cross shows that God is in solidarity with today’s victims, opening...

31 Nolan, Jesus Today, 50-52.
32 Nolan, Jesus Today, 57.
33 Wright, Surprised By Hope, 247.
34 Nolan, Jesus Today, 167.
35 Wright, Surprised By Hope, 279.
36 McBrien, Catholicism, 1122-1125.
the possibility of their own active engagement against the forces of oppression. In the crucified people today, Christ acquires a body in history, truly present among the crucified masses, and those who struggle for liberation and justice, bring salvation to the world today and show us the Kingdom of God. Only by Christ’s death on the cross could divine love enter into the human world, recreating humanity in Jesus as new creatures, transformed to seek the justice and love that Jesus exemplified. 37 Jesus spoke through the Beatitudes (Mt 5: 3-12) that the reign of God will rise up from below; from the poor, the outcasts, the exploited, and the abused, when they reject their unjust and dehumanizing reality, and struggle for liberation, with the hope of faith. 38 When we confront sin, “evident in oppressive structures, in the exploitation of man by man, in the domination and slavery of people, races, and social classes”, we can turn the world from sin to grace, hate to love, death to life, and work for salvation. 39

Salvation is God’s recovery of humanity from the actions of sin that turns us away from God’s love and life. God created the world as the beginning of humanity’s salvation history, culminating our salvation in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Through Jesus, God broke into human history and entered the world, planting in our earth the seeds of salvation. The Kingdom of God has begun in the here and now and grows whenever human beings heed the call of Jesus to discipleship, practising love through identifying situations of injustice and striving to rectify them, drawing on the power of the Spirit. Our liberative actions today contribute to the development of the Kingdom of God and are salvific events. Yet they are not all of salvation, nor the completion of the Kingdom. The fulfilment of salvation will be a

37 Sobrino, Jesus the Liberator, 255-260.
38 Gutierrez, A Theology of Liberation, 174.
39 Gutierrez, A Theology of Liberation, 175-176.
gift from God, a goal we strive towards, hoping for the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, to bring the loving communion of all humanity with God to fullness.

Bibliography


