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Salvation-History as Hermeneutic

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. *Hermeneutics*. What do we mean by "hermeneutics"?

Hermeneutics designates the scholarly attempt to clarify principles pertinent to an adequate understanding and interpretation of texts The fundamental problem posed by hermeneutics is: how can sources of the past be understood in their own historical environment *and* their meaning for the present be adequately perceived? This problem becomes theologically relevant when applied to the Bible.¹

Or, again,

Hermeneutics is the science and art of Biblical interpretation. It is a science because it is guided by rules within a system; and it is an art because the application of the rules is by skill, and not mechanical imitation.²

What principles, or better for the purpose of this paper, what single principle should be used in the hermeneutical task? It is not an unimportant question. "The question of the true nature of interpretation is the supreme question."³ Even better, in another author's words, "The question of the central interpreting touchstone or key is the all important question in biblical interpretation."⁴

So then, we are not dealing with a peripheral matter, but rather with one of the central issues. What will be the touchstone; *the* theme with which we will approach the biblical materials? Will it be the apostle Paul's "In Christ" or "The Righteousness of God"; Luther's "Justification by Grace through Faith"; Calvin's "Sovereignty of God"; Dodd's "Realized Eschatology"; or Schweitzer's "Consistent Eschatology"? One such single principle has been advanced under the term "*Heilsgeschichte*."

2. *Brief History of Salvation-history*. The term "salvation-history," a literal translation of the German word *Heilsgeschichte*, was coined in the middle of the eighteenth century in Pietistic circles in

¹ M. Haverson and A. A. Cohen (eds.), *A Handbook of Christian Theology* (Cleveland: World Publishing Company, 1958), p. 160.

² B. Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation* (Boston: W. A. Wilde Company, 1956), p. 1.

³ K. Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans* (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), p. 9.

⁴ J. P. Newport, "Biblical Interpretation and Eschatological Holy History", *Southwestern Journal of Theology*, IV (October, 1961), p. 85.

southern Germany.⁵ Bengel (1687-1752) was its first representative. He affirmed that we can understand the historical books of the Bible only when we see the divine purpose of redemption that was brought to actualization in them. The historical events are not simply chronological but follow a 'teleological principle. The events of the Last Day of Daniel and the Apocalypse were not abrupt and whimsical but were the necessary conclusion of God's saving work.

The modern approach to history ushered in by Ranke induced the Lutheran theologian J. C. K. Hofmann (1810-1877) to offer a revision of the understanding of salvation-history. As a conservative theologian, Hofmann was unique in that he did not find critical studies destructive to the faith. His distinctive revision of the salvation-history concept was in his emphasis on the fact that, in a teleological view of history, the earlier elements cannot have the same function as the later ones.⁶ Hofmann showed that there must be a connection between the sphere in which prophecy was made and the circumstances of its fulfillment and that in this connection God's saving purpose could be traced. The intrinsic connection is to be found in history. History is an unfolding process; that is, each event has its roots in the past, its meaning in the present, and portends a further development in the future.

The long historical portions and the many incidental events of biblical history are astonishingly important after all, for each one reveals a new aspect of God's purposive activity. By themselves they would, indeed, be meaningless but as a part of the whole history of redemption they are relevant for us today.

G. Vos, formerly of Princeton Theological Seminary, represented a similar viewpoint in this country a number of years ago. Otto Piper, in *God in History* (1939), represents another earlier exponent of the Hofmann position in American theology. In his article in *A Handbook of Christian Theology* (1958), p. 159. Piper contends that salvation-history is the organizer, the center of *all* history.

Other more contemporary exponents of the salvation-history viewpoint to a greater or lesser degree include H. Ridderbos, J. Munck, G. R. Beasley-Murray, R. H. Fuller, P. Althaus, W. G. Kümmel, E. Rust, E. Stauffer, and A. M. Hunter. Old Testament scholars G. Ernest Wright, *God Who Acts* (1952), F. Cross, W. Eichrodt, G. von Rad, M. Noth, and C. Westermann represent this view in their field.⁷

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 90.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

⁷ A. J. Ehlen, "Old Testament Theology as Heilsgeschichte", *Concordia Theological Monthly*, XXXV (October, 1964), pp. 533 ff.

Likely the most widely known exponent of salvation-history is Oscar Cullmann, *Christ and Time* (1950) and *Salvation in History* (1967). The former work seems to represent a rebirth of this theological perspective and Cullmann, labeled by Stendahl "the most productive contemporary writer in the field of NT theology",⁸ seems generally recognized as the leader of the movement. The latter work represents one of the most thorough presentations of the salvation-history program and according to one reviewer Cullmann's "most mature work."⁹

II. A DEFINITION OF SALVATION-HISTORY

1. *Heilsgeschichte*. The German term *Heilsgeschichte* is best translated salvation-history.¹⁰ This term, of course, nowhere appears in the biblical material. The Greek word *οικονομία*, found in the New Testament, carries with it something of the idea of salvation-history. In Colossians and Ephesians Paul uses the word when he speaks of the divine mystery, hidden before, which is now revealed as the divine plan of salvation.¹¹ The economy or administration of salvation might be better used for proper understanding. To introduce another term, however, which, in itself, does not carry the total meaning of salvation-history would be to add only more confusion. This thought of administration of plan is important to the salvation-history idea, however.¹²

2. *Hermeneutic and Theology*. Salvation-history designates both a principle of interpretation and a theological system. As an interpretive principle it asserts that God has made in history a progressive revelation of himself and his will which can be traced in the scriptures.¹³ But the advocates of salvation-history do not see the idea as foreign to the Bible since

... the conception itself begins with the Bible's own understanding of history. Basic to the witness of both the Old and the New Testament is the conviction that God has taken a direct hand in earthly, human affairs, particularly in a specific chain of events by which the total welfare of mankind, its salvation (German: *Heil*), is being prepared for and revealed to the world. The history of this step-by-step process is now seen to constitute the very core of scripture.¹⁴

⁸ K. Stendahl, "Biblical Theology, Contemporary", *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, I (New York: Abingdon Press), p. 421.

⁹ J. M. Boice, "Review of *Heil als Geschichte*", *Christianity Today*, IX (July 16, 1965), p. 26.

¹⁰ O. Cullmann, *Salvation in History* (London: SCM Press, 1967), p. 17.

¹¹ Cf. Eph. 1: 10, 3: 9; also Rom. 11: 25; I Cor. 4: 1, 15: 51; and the use of *μυστήριον*.

¹² Cullmann, *Salvation* . . . , p. 76.

¹³ H. Kistner, "Salvation History", *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, XII (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1967), p. 998.

¹⁴ Ehlen, p. 517.

Thus the current debate over salvation-history is motivated, in part at least, by a desire to discover the scriptures' own understanding of interpretation and history.¹⁵ Some of the critics of salvation-history have accused its advocates of transforming theology into a religious philosophy of history. Stendahl answers,

Cullmann's answer would be that NT Theology *is*, whether we like it or not, a religious philosophy of history, and that he finds it difficult to see how this historical dimension can be translated away in any presentation of the gospel to the present age.¹⁶

An emphasis should be put on "religious" since Cullmann will not allow salvation-history to be simply a philosophy of history. History and salvation-history are not equals.

The two are not identical, but there is an analogy between them. . . . Reference should be made to three essential points in which this analogy comes to light: First is the fact that we are concerned with a connected series of events, even if the principle is not arrived at historically. Second is the fact that within the divine plan a place is left for historical contingency, for human resistance and sin, and the mysterious 'detours' taken because of this resistance and sin—in other words, salvation-history also includes a history of disaster (*Unheilsgeschichte*). Third is the fact that the essential individual events constituting this series of events belong to history. . . . History is . . . a very important aspect of what we call New Testament salvation history. A sequence of real events represents an analogy to history that is worthy of note, even though their selection cannot be explained historically.¹⁷

The term "theology of history" might be more suitable for Cullmann since the events in the salvation-history are theologically sequential being held together by revelation.¹⁸

Tillich seems in general agreement when he suggests that salvation-history is manifest in history but it is not a product of history; on the other hand, it is not "supra-historical" because it is in history. It is both secular and sacred. For Tillich salvation-history is "a sequence of events in which saving power breaks into historical processes."¹⁹

3. *Hermeneutical Definition.* Salvation-history as a hermeneutical principle, then, is an approach to the Bible which views the scriptures, as they view themselves, as the progressive unfolding of the divine plan for the salvation of man in a series of theologically interpreted historical events.

III. THE THEOLOGY OF SALVATION-HISTORY

1. *Introduction.* We have previously indicated that salvation-history is not only a principle of interpretation but is also, as a

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 518.

¹⁶ Stendahl, p. 421.

¹⁷ Cullmann, *Salvation . . .*, p. 78.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

¹⁹ P. Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, III (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), p. 363.

result of the application of the principle, a theological system. To what theology does the salvation-history hermeneutic lead us? Three major theological affirmations may be made:²⁰ (1) God is at work in historical event. (2) The purpose of God's work is the establishment of the Kingdom of God. (3) The Kingdom of God has been inaugurated in Jesus of Nazareth.

2. *God is at Work in Historical Event.* The present work of the existential interpreters has to a great extent diminished the emphasis on the historical event in biblical interpretation. The advocates of salvation-history are generally dissatisfied with this de-historization of Christian theology and make the claim with Cullmann that "all Christian theology in its innermost essence is Biblical history."²¹

Old Testament view. The ancient Israelites were not so interested in events for their own sake as much as for the why and wherefore of the events. The Israelites, themselves, sought to interpret history. Their interpretation is "entirely colored by their religion, so that for them there was no merely profane history; for them all history was religious history."²² The obsession of the Israelite writers with history is not accidental.

G. Ernest Wright²³ lists five major Old Testament "events" around which the theology of the Hebrews seemed centered: (1) The Promises to the Patriarchs—The Israelite patriarchs had received certain promises, and the history of the nation of Israel was interpreted as a fulfillment of those promises. (2) The Exodus from Egypt—The Exodus was interpreted as God's freeing of his people and an integral part of the fulfillment of the ancient promises. (3) The Covenant Making at Sinai—This unique national experience had given Israel an understanding of society and a law of divine and

²⁰ H. Hartwell in his "Review of *Heils als Geschichte*", *Scottish Journal of Theology*, XIX (December 1966), p. 474 lists six "main concerns and characteristics of the biblical Heilsgeschichte". He notes that "Heilsgeschichte, rightly interpreted, (1) comprises a series of saving events and their interpretation as such by eye witnesses on the basis of a revelation mediated by the Holy Spirit as well as the inter-relatedness of these saving events by means of a divine plan of salvation of which they form an intrinsic part, (2) is a particular 'history' in which both continuity and contingency have a place, the former in view of God's plan of salvation as the constant of Heilsgeschichte, the latter in view of the historical circumstances at any given time, especially in view of human sin, (3) is not static but *in actu*, continually developing in connexion with new events demanding fresh re-interpretation of the Heilsgeschichte, (4) is governed by the principle of election but has as its goal the salvation of all men, (5) leaves room for man's free responsible decisions since contingency is one of its constituent elements, (6) represents the essence of the New Testament message."

²¹ O. Cullmann, *Christ and Time* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1950), p. 23.

²² Kistner, p. 998.

²³ G. E. Wright, *The Book of the Acts of God* (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1957), pp. 19-20.

community obligations had been given them. (4) The Conquest of Canaan—The conquest was interpreted as God's gift of a land to Israel. Unless, however, Israel were faithful to her assumed obligations the land might be taken away. (5) The Davidic Monarchy—David's conquests were regarded as the fulfillment of the promise of a land and his government was a fulfillment of the promise of security from enemies and slavery.

The nation's salvation-history is particularly rooted in the experience of the Exodus. Israel remembered this as God's great saving act (Exodus 15: 1-18; Deuteronomy 5: 15; Amos 9: 7; Micah 7: 4).²⁴

Event and interpretation. The Old Testament prophets also share this salvation-history view of theology. More important, with regard to the prophets, is their view of the future; their predictions which are fulfilled in the New Testament. These predictions are not outside the salvation-history view of events.²⁵ The prophets do, of course, see importance in the future event as well as in the past event. But their view of the future is not apart from their view of the past. They reinterpret the past in the light of the present. This reinterpretation of event is an integral part of the salvation-history program since salvation-history is progressive by nature of its alignment with history. It must be remembered, however, that salvation-history and history are not the same. The sequential relation in salvation-history is not due to cause-effect but is due to revelation. In the scripture, the development of salvation-history depends upon a revealed interpretation of the event as well as the divine action in the event. Cullmann calls this series of interpreted events a "kind of chain of salvation-historical insights and representations."²⁶

Event, interpretation, new event, and re-interpretation. In the New Testament, as well as in the Old Testament, we are dealing with a continual development. The inclusion of new material into the New Testament proclamation is a threefold process.

First, the event, with the new revelation relating to it, is assimilated into the old *kerygma*. Second, on this basis the old *kerygma* is interpreted anew. Third, the recipient or recipients of the revelation with their functions are themselves assimilated into the *kerygma*, as we see in the case of the witnesses to the resurrection.²⁷

The Old Testament salvation-history culminates in the New Testament but it does not stop with Jesus; that is the apostles continue the re-interpretation of the past salvation-history. This is why their Christology may be more advanced than the Christology of

²⁴ Kistner, p. 998.

²⁵ Cullmann, *Salvation . . .*, p. 89.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

Jesus in its presentation. Just as the Exodus stood for the mighty act of God in the Old Testament, the Easter event becomes the mighty act of God for the New Testament writers. Just as the Old Testament seems continually to interpret itself and add to the revelation of God, so also the New Testament writers interpret the salvation-history of Jesus in the light of the resurrection of Jesus. This means that the significance of the pre-resurrection Jesus is re-interpreted in the light of that resurrection. This is not to deny the continuity between Jesus and the apostles, rather it is to justify it.

Before the *full* revelation, the disciples did not understand the whole significance of what had happened in the life of Jesus. This revelation was made manifest to the early Church for the first time in retrospect, in light of the Easter event. . . .

It became subsequently clear to the disciples that everything they had previously seen and heard in Jesus' life and preaching had been the decisive saving revelation of God. It became clear to them that the life Jesus lived and the doctrine he preached together represented the central *kerygma* in which the whole history of salvation came to a climax. They had to *transmit* the *kerygma* they received from Jesus and at the same time interpret it anew. In the case of Jesus' life, they did not need to create afresh the interpretation of the events they had witnessed. The recent debate about the 'historical Jesus' often suffers from failing to take into account that not only the events but also their salvation-historical interpretation—in the proclamation of Jesus—were given with the historical Jesus.²⁸

This is to say, Jesus himself interprets his own place in the salvation-history. There is a salvation-history *kerygma* reaching back to Jesus himself. Both Jesus and the apostles preached the same *kerygma*. Both preached the arrival of the climax of salvation-history in Jesus; the arrival of the Kingdom of God. This is the meaning of the self-consciousness of Jesus for Cullmann who is doubtful that genuine continuity between the *kerygma* of Jesus and the *kerygma* of the community can be developed apart from Jesus' messianic self-consciousness.²⁹ "The church proclaims a Jesus who proclaims himself."³⁰ For this reason, the salvation-history advocates seek to discover the historical Jesus and the message that he proclaimed.

Whether or not Jesus historically proclaimed himself as the eschatological event in salvation-history is of the utmost importance to salvation-history advocates. The *skandalon* of Christianity is the once-for-all divine act of God's self-revelation in Jesus of Nazareth.³¹

3. *The Purpose of God's Work is the Establishment of the Kingdom of God. The nature of the kingdom.* The translation of ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ as "Kingdom of God" is perhaps unfortunate since βασιλεία, as

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 108 ff.

³⁰ E. Rust, *Salvation History* (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1962), p. 72.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

its Aramaic equivalent *malkuth*, means, strictly speaking, "reign" or "kingship" rather than "kingdom." The Kingdom of God as it appears in the New Testament is a familiar concept to Hebrew thought. The Jewish religion has always recognized that God is king over the earth. The problem for the Hebrews was how God could be king *de jure* and not set himself up as king *de facto*.³²

The Hebrew monarchy, was, theoretically, a concrete expression of God's rule, the king being God's representative. The messianic hope of Israel was at first directed to a future assertion of God's rule in this world. Thus the Kingdom was future.³³ The Jewish prayer "may God establish his kingship during your life" (the Kaddish Prayer) gives expression to this eschatological hope.

The prophets longed for a new day, a new heart, a world of peace. The apocalyptists dreamed of a new age beyond history brought by divine interruption. The Zealots believed it could be brought by political action. The Pharisees believed the day would dawn when the Law was perfectly kept.³⁴

The Kingdom of God is thus seen as the fulfillment of Hebrew hope for a life experience fully ruled by God, a life experience of righteousness and justice under God. "The essence of Christ's preaching of the Kingdom is in the word 'Thy will be done'; all the rest is commentary."³⁵ The Kingdom in essence is wherever and whenever life is wholly obedient to God and he is established as king; that is, where life is totally redeemed. The Kingdom is the realization of the full work of God on behalf of his subjects. It is the "whole salvation of God."³⁶

The purpose of God. The work of God in history is redemptive. God reveals himself that reconciliation may be achieved.

Apart from such an act of reconciliation and grace history will continue to be the story of sin and death. It will be life in the wilderness, a realm of alienation in which man alternates between arrogance and hopelessness, pride at his own powers and despair at his demonic bondage.³⁷

Cullmann seeks to demonstrate this redemptive nature of salvation-history by showing that in the Bible a principle of representation is present, always moving toward the realization of the Kingdom of God.

32 A. Richardson, *An Introduction to the Theology of the New Testament* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1958), p. 84.

33 M. Burrows, *An Outline of Biblical Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1946), p. 188.

34 Richardson, p. 84.

35 T. W. Manson, *The Teaching of Jesus* (Cambridge: University Press, 1931), p. 161.

36 A. M. Hunter, *Introducing New Testament Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1957), p. 26.

37 Rust, p. 20.

It takes its start from the broadest conceivable basis and narrows steadily until it reaches that center (the particularity of Jesus of Nazareth) from which it broadens out: Creation—mankind—Israel—the remnant—the One—the apostles—the Church—mankind—the new creation.³⁸

The progressive and historical of salvation-history are, therefore, again brought to the front.

4. *The Kingdom of God has been Inaugurated in Jesus of Nazareth.* One of the major contributions of Cullmann to the concept of salvation is his view of time which is worked out in *Christ and Time* (1950). There Cullmann suggests that the uniqueness of the Christian conception of time is of a twofold character.

In the first place, salvation is bound to a *continuous time process* which embraces past, present, and future. Revelation and salvation take place along the course of an ascending time line. Here the strictly straightline-conception of time in the New Testament must be defined as over against the Greek cyclical conception. . . .

In the second place, it is characteristic of this estimate of time as the scene of redemptive history that all points of this redemptive line are related to the *one historical fact* at the mid-point, a fact which precisely in its unrepeatable character, which marks all historical events, is decisive for salvation. This fact is the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.³⁹

Is Jesus, in fact, the centre of salvation-history as Cullmann claims? Does Jesus, in fact, achieve the purpose of salvation-history; that is, the establishment of the Kingdom of God?

Consistent eschatology. The phrase consistent eschatology is popularly associated with the name of Albert Schweitzer. Schweitzer viewed the Kingdom of God as an eschatological category; that is, the Old Testament viewed the arrival of the Kingdom in its final form as a "last thing." Schweitzer argues that Jesus was dominated by this fixed eschatological expectation. Jesus expected the arrival of the Kingdom in his immediate future.⁴⁰

One of the pivotal points of Schweitzer's understanding of Jesus' expectation is his interpretation of Matthew 10: 23. Jesus, sending the disciples on the Galilean preaching tour, according to Schweitzer, fully anticipated the arrival of the Kingdom before their return. The failure of its arrival at that time caused Jesus to undertake a mission to force its arrival. He did this by taking upon himself the messianic woes of the future Son of Man. Jesus thus believed that the Kingdom would come and he would be manifest as the Son of Man. A program which ended in tragedy on the cross.⁴¹

³⁸ Cullmann, *Christ . . .*, p. 178.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

⁴⁰ A. Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1964), p. 358.

⁴¹ N. Perrin, *The Kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1963), p. 31.

Realized eschatology. Opposed to the disillusioned Jesus of the consistent eschatology program is the optimistic Jesus of the realized eschatology of C. H. Dodd. Dodd accepts the apocalyptic idea that the Kingdom is the intervention of God in the history of mankind, but he questions the time of its arrival. For Dodd the Kingdom is not eschatological in the sense that it remains in the future, rather, it is eschatological in the sense that it is final. He argues that Jesus taught that the Kingdom, as a present reality, was realized in his own ministry. The eschatology of Jesus is "realized eschatology" and the kingdom is a present reality.⁴²

Inaugurated eschatology. Though none of them uses the term "inaugurated eschatology," Jeremias, Kümmel, and Cullmann all seem to represent a position where the future and the present aspects of the Kingdom are united in such a way that this term could be used.

Jeremias modifies Dodd's terminology from realized eschatology to "eschatology in the process of realization."⁴³ Cullmann speaks of the "already" and the "not yet" in the message of Jesus.⁴⁴ Kümmel says "he who will bring the Kingdom of God in the future has appeared in the present in Jesus himself, and in him the powers of the coming aeon are already at work."⁴⁵

Jesus proclaimed both a present Kingdom and a future Kingdom. He proclaimed that it was imminently near, and men must not miss the opportunity to enter it. If the demons are "cast out by the power (or finger) of God" (Matt. 12: 28), the Kingdom of God has "come upon" (confronted) Jesus' hearers.⁴⁶ The answer given to John's disciples concerning looking for "he who is to come" (Matt. 11: 5) and the saying about the binding of the "strong man" (Mark 3: 27) imply that Jesus saw in his ministry the fulfillment of the Kingdom blessings of Isaiah 35: 5 ff. and 61: 1 and the vanquishing of Satan as indications of the Kingdom's arrival.⁴⁷

But in another sense, God's reign still remained to be established. It is in this sense that Jesus bids his disciples to pray "Thy Kingdom come." This is also the meaning of the Last Supper. As often as the Supper is observed it proclaims the "unfulfilled climax of the work of salvation."⁴⁸

42 C. H. Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1962), pp. 37, 39.

43 J. Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1962), p. 230.

44 Cullmann, *Salvation . . .*, p. 194.

45 W. G. Kümmel, *Promise and Fulfillment* (Naperville: Alec R. Allenson, Inc., 1957), p. 153.

46 Burrows, p. 191.

47 Cullmann, *Salvation . . .*, pp. 193-95.

48 J. Jeremias, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1966), p. 253.

The proclamation of the death of Christ is not therefore intended to call to the remembrance of the community the event of the passion; rather this proclamation expresses the vicarious death of Jesus as the beginning of the salvation time and prays for the coming of the consummation.⁴⁹

Jeremias argues that the Passover ritual regularly contained a liturgical anticipation of the messianic parousia.⁵⁰ But the messianic parousia is not fulfilled in the cross or the resurrection for the instruction of the Lord is to continue the Supper and thus Jesus himself witnesses to the unfulfilled consummation.

Cullmann speaks of the consummation as "Victory Day" when all that has been begun in the ministry of Jesus will be completed. It is then that the Spirit will "lay hold" of the entire creation and the "new creation" will emerge.⁵¹

Jesus is the centre of all salvation-history in that in his person is summed up all the past and the future. He is the completion of both past and future. Cullmann does not mean by "centre" or "mid-point" necessarily half-way chronologically; "central" would perhaps be a better term, although that does not really express the linear idea of salvation-history so important to him.

IV. SUMMARY

Understanding of the divine revelation is certainly the worthy goal of all who read the Bible. The problem of making sense of it altogether is the supreme problem of interpretation. One viable solution to the hermeneutical problem is to adopt the thesis of salvation-history as the unifying principle.

Salvation-history is both an hermeneutical principle and a system of theology. The system of theology which issues from the application of the principle attempts to take seriously the Bible itself on its own terms and in its own language.

Its theology is the theology of an active, purposeful God who has entered the sphere of human history in a series of decisive events. The divine acts culminate in and receive their meaning from the central act of history, the death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. This once-for-all event is the decisive battle of redemption. All previous salvation-history and all future salvation-history take their meaning from it. The future "victory day" is assured and its fruits partially anticipated by the central redemptive act.

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⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 255.

⁵¹ Cullmann, *Christ* . . . , pp. 141-42.