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**Divine Grace, Human Will and Sin’s Power:
Can God’s Promises Assure Us of Final Salvation in
Light of Sin’s Power to Weaken the Human Will**

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Introduction

Final Salvation is mostly associated with “the end”. It is viewed as God’s final deliverance from a bad situation into the good situation. This view presupposes that when final salvation takes place the ‘end events’ will break into human history to put an end to sin and

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its power which always weakens human will. This view of the final salvation is forward looking. It says nothing about revolutionising and transforming the present. It gives hope for the future but overlooks the need for transforming the present. In the light of daily evidence of the power of sin, a consequent of such a view of salvation can be Christians who are doing nothing about the present, awaiting final redemption and liberation. On the other level, this view of salvation can form Christians who have lost hope in the final salvation emanating from non-existent signs of transformation in the present order. Both these attitudes are disastrous in many ways. Therefore, we need to speak of final salvation as deliverance which will be propulsive but also bringing transformation into the present reality. In other words, are there signs of transformation in the present order which can assure us of the impending act of deliverance and liberation?

Expressing this differently, in Christian scriptures, the history of redemption and liberation is evidence of the free, benevolent and merciful love of God called grace. The history of redemption and liberation depicts God's grace as effecting salvation. All aspects of salvation confirm divine grace. Therefore in this work, we seek to show how divine grace communicated by God gives us a view of final salvation as the present reality and an assurance of salvation in the future.

A. Jesus Christ Our Divine Grace

Any definition of grace is a subsidiary definition of salvation. By the same token, our understanding of salvation gives us a trace to what we can understand grace to be. In the Christian tradition salvation is centred on Christ, it is something which embraces all human reality, effects transformation and leads it to fullness in Christ (Gutierrez 1973: 151). If our salvation has Christ at the centre, therefore we can conclude that any adequate speech about grace needs to have Jesus Christ at its core.

Any understanding of grace which is far removed from Christ will be inadequate of concrete and realistic pointers to salvation both as present and future realities of human history. A perfect example of this deficiency is found in the understanding of grace firmly emphasized by old scholastic theology. This theology held a view that since God who is the source of grace is invisible, and immaterial,

grace also has to be invisible and immaterial (Comblin 1996: 205). Such a view shows grace that will not penetrate human life and therefore remain irrelevant to humanity (Comblin 1996: 205). In the world permeated by sin and pervasive human will which yields tangible consequences, an invisible and immaterial understanding of grace, will be unable unveil the present reality of salvation and assure us of the impending act of salvation.

Immaterial and invisible understanding of grace is also not in line with Christian God. In the New Testament, one of the important characteristic of Christian gospel is that God's ineffable love has decisively broken into the world and has been actualised in the person of Christ. This intervention of God, through Christ in the world of sin can be simply understood in terms of grace (Torrance 1966: 15). In other words, incarnation is the embodied grace breaking into the world to disturb and redirect human history. The divine Grace embodied by Christ grants all of us assurance of salvation within human history in spite of the power of sin.

Moreover, grace embodied by Jesus Christ does not just break into the human history, it also points to the future. Put differently, grace is a new possibility of life given by God through Jesus Christ where God expressed her full concern for humanity thus incarnating God's merciful love (Duffy 1993: 27). In the incarnation of Christ, the world has received an everlasting sign which always stands as a constant pointer and draws humanity to the redemption and liberation in the future. Grace embodied by Christ is a sure sign of God's salvific work to be fulfilled in the future.

To speak of Christ as grace is also in line with Christian understanding as Trinity. This view is expressed beautifully in the words of Haight, where he says "Grace is God's Spirit, which is God's personal communication of God's own self in love. This is what is revealed in and through Jesus of Nazareth; this is the message of salvation proclaimed in the New Testament"(2011: 408). Haight shows us that God through the grace incarnated in Christ, poured out God's self into the world. This stands as assurance of salvation both in the present and in the future realities regardless of sin's power which always weakens human will. Grace incarnated through Christ is actually the outpouring of God's Spirit or the energy for life inherent within the Three persons of trinity. If the life of Trinity is

present with us, we are assured of salvation in the now till its fulfilment in the future.

B. Effects of Grace

Scripture has endless testimonies of God's salvific work. This work of salvation depicted in the Scriptures show salvation as resulting in unity with God, unity with one another, inner harmony and a new creation (Gaybba 2004: 162). Based on Gaybba's understanding of salvation we can then conclude that the divine grace embodied by Christ has four effects, namely a harmonious relationship with God, other people, self and participating in the life of God inherent in the web of life.

To put this differently, Grace embodied in Christ shows God overcoming the division between humanity and God has been overcome. In the Pauline theology, the grace of God has afforded us to be called God's Children. Secondly Grace has grace draws humanity into seeking to restore life of community among themselves thus overcoming existing divisions. Thirdly, divine grace gives us power to have all individual's faculties serving the interests of love only. Finally, divine grace makes us more aware of the cry of the environment and calls for a renewed commitment to the care of the entire creation. As a consequence of the above view, we can safely say that assurance of salvation both as present and future realities, become more visible in relationship with God, other people, self and the rest of God's creation. We can only know of salvation as we look at these four aspects of life.

Another way of looking into the effects of grace embodied by Christ is through the work of an African theologian, Manas Buthelezi titled *Salvation as Wholeness*. Buthelezi draws from an African worldview to define salvation as wholeness. In an African worldview there is a sense of wholeness in the manner in which life is viewed. Life is seen as a whole which can never be disintegrated even by death (Buthelezi 1997: 86). Salvation in this context implies to part of the created order of things wherein one can receive and share with others and the rest of God's creation in the life sustaining gifts of God. In this manner, to be cut off from the gifts of God will be regarded as a result of sin and pervasive human will. Any alienation from the gifts of God is considered sinful and salvation as wholeness is necessary.

In his article, Buthelezi makes intentional reference to grace. He says that:

the height of God's grace can be seen in that he accepts His fallen creature, man, into a living fellowship with Him in Christ. Thus in His saving grace God affirms His creation in the form of things and man (197: 88).

Based on this view of Buthelezi, we can conclude that the grace of God embodied by Christ brings about wholeness and overcoming of every division inherent in life. It is the existence of wholeness in human relationships, inner self, relationship with God and the rest of God's creation that we can really experience salvation and actually receive a sign pointing us to the final act of redemption.

C. Human Will and Sin's Power

In the above section we have shown that Jesus is the embodied grace. The incarnation is actually a breaking into the world of divine grace to bring transformation into the present order but also to move human history to the future of God. The divine grace embodied by Christ brings new possibilities and remains a sure sign of God's saving work to be fulfilled in the coming future. Christ as grace is an everlasting sign of salvation regardless of sin's power and obscured human will. We have also shown that grace embodied by Christ has effects of unity. This unity is seen in the relationship between human beings, healthy way of relating to the rest of God's creation, inner harmony and a restored relationship with God. We have shown that in Africa, the major effect of grace is wholeness. Christ, the divine grace enables all humanity and creation to share together in the life of God. Alienation from this life of God is sinful.

While the above is true and exists fully within the present order of things, we also have another reality of sin. The power of sin is evident at a personal level as well as social level. Haight says that sin on individual level can be understood as human freedom that lacks an appropriation of God's self-communicating grace (2011: 395). This human freedom results in issues affecting the person negatively i.e. damaging the image of God in an individual. Moreover, this sin is responsible for creating social structures that do not enhance human freedom. It is at this stage that we begin to talk about social sin (Haight 2011: 399). When these structures are in existence, they are internalised by people born into them. The influence of multiple

levels of society enters into human beings and becomes, as it were, their second nature. Human beings are then socially conditioned beings (Haight 2011: 399). We can learn from Haight's understanding that human will is always tainted by sinful condition into which human beings are born. We can also learn that sin emanates from human freedom which is not guided by the divine grace embodied by Christ.

The results of sin both individually and structurally are disastrous. At this stage I would like to highlight a few results of sin inherent in Africa. In Africa we live in countries which are characterised by abject poverty. There is a need for economic liberation. We also see wars motivated by politics where millions of people lose their lives. Hunger and unemployment have become a reality for many Africans. We also live in places where humanity often means male as a consequence; abuse of women and children is prevalent. The racial and tribal division still have a strong legacy in many parts of Africa. Lately we see religious divisions sparking wars in some parts of Africa. Sickness is also another sad reality of the people of Africa with a lack of good health systems to support them. We live in Africa where the previous forces of oppression continue to oppress us, thus we are in need of psychological liberation. All of these forces have two things in common. Firstly they do not enhance the image of God in a person. Secondly, they are created by human will that has been weakened by sin.

I have used Africa as an example since it is a continent I know most. However, I am certain that some of the issues mentioned above are true in other parts of the world. If that is true, we have to ask the question, in what way does the divine grace embodied by Christ give us assurance of salvation?

D. Crucified One, Our Divine Grace and Assurance of Final Salvation

The situation in Africa clearly shows that we need a different way of talking about the divine grace and its effects. The effects of harmonious relationships and wholeness discussed above do not make much sense in Africa. The reality of Africa is more characterised by the absence of the above discussed effects of grace. In parts of Africa where they exist, they are quickly obliterated by the power of sin. Does this mean we can talk about the divine grace and the assurance of salvation we receive from it?

I think we can, however we have to take serious the African context of suffering. In Africa, life is crucifixion for many people. Thus the experience of suffering and crucifixion gives us a way into making relevant speech about divine grace and salvation in Africa. This means that we have to closely look at the crucified God on the cross to find ways of talking about the divine grace. It is the crucified one who can mediate meaningful and relevant grace to the people of Africa. At this stage I would like to outline four way in which the death of Christ on the cross can be means of grace for those who are suffering.

1. Solidarity

Moltmann says that on the cross we see that Christ became an outcast, accursed and crucified. On the Cross God is dehumanised and humiliated until death (1974: 211). Due to the crucifixion of God, the divine grace embodied by Christ was found in a place of death. Since then, all those who are experiencing sin's power of death can be assured of the presence of the saving grace even in the places of death. In other words, divine grace embodied by Christ is in solidarity with those who are experiencing any form of death in their lives. The crucified One is an everlasting assurance that the grace of God has broken places where the power of sin seems to be domination. Moreover grace assures those in suffering of the imminent end of the power of sin.

2. God Suffering

The death of Jesus must be understood as the death in God not as a death of God (Moltmann 174: 213). This suggests that the death of Christ was a reality for all persons in the Trinity. There is a sense in which God the Father and the Holy Spirit suffered when the Christ was crucified. Moltmann explains the suffering of Father by saying that it was the bond of love between the Father and the Son which caused pain and grief to the Father. He continues to say that while the Son suffered death, the Father suffered the death of His Son; the Father suffered death of his Fatherhood in the death of the Son (1974:251).

Since the death of the Son was in God, there is not death which can ever be separate from God. Every death becomes an activity within the life of God. Thus every from of death is experienced fully by God. To express this in the language of grace, we can say that in

the midst of any form of death, God experiences that death as refusal from humanity to receive the grace which can enable human will to participate in the creative life of God. Moreover since the death happens within God, we can be assured of salvation

3. Risen One—Victims Take Their Power Back

The Crucified Christ becomes the Risen One. The Christ who was humiliated, accursed and killed has defied the powers of sin by rising from the dead. He stands risen with power, being the Lord of all. In other words the grace embodied by Christ defied the powers of death created by sin. Moreover, the risen one becomes an everlasting assurance of salvation. The Risen One stands as a sure reminder that the power of sin can never keep us in death forever. For those who are experiencing any form of death, the Risen One stands as the promise for new life and wholeness in their lives.

4. Creating a Better Life

The Risen Christ calls us to the new possibilities of life in the face of sin's power which causes different forms of death. The Risen Christ is the grace which calls many to follow his way, join him in creating a better life. The Risen Christ is grace which empowered us to stand against the power of sin both at personal and social levels. In the Risen Christ we see that the power of sin has failed to extinct the grace embodied by Christ, therefore we know that there will always be salvation both now and in the future.

Conclusion

Can God's promises assure us of final salvation the light of Sin's power to weaken human will? Yes, Is my answer to this question! Sin brings suffering and death. The Crucified One has penetrated the power of sin and stands victorious over it. The One who was crucified but now Risen stands over the power of sin as a concrete assurance the salvation both in the present and in the future is possible! The Risen Christ is grace which speaks to us of final salvation which is forward moving but also bringing transformation to the present reality. To express this differently, the Crucified One has become the Risen One who is now the sign of transformation of the present order and assures us of impending act of deliverance and liberation.

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