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## Review Article

### An Answering Heart: Reflections on Saving Participation

ROBERT B. SLOCUM\*

God's gift of salvation is freely offered, and it is to be freely received. Grace completes but does not annihilate nature. "Force is not of God," and we are never compelled to accept God's grace.<sup>1</sup> God never strips us of our free will, and never reduces us to robots or puppets. The process of salvation is more than a ride on a divine conveyor belt! Salvation is by God's call, inviting us to cooperate freely in the gift of life that saves us. Our cooperation in this saving process involves our participation in the life, love, and activity of God in the world.

We are saved by sharing a relationship of love with God, whose love for us is visible throughout Jesus' life and especially in the cross. Love requires freedom to choose and freedom to share. A person with power over me (for example, a drill sergeant, or a robber) can compel my obedience, but that person cannot compel my love. Our freedom to choose—even to choose against relationship with God—is part of God's gift to us. Humanity was created in God's image with freedom to make choices.<sup>2</sup> God respects the in-

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<sup>1</sup> See "The Great Creator of the Worlds," Hymn 489, verse 5, *The Hymnal* 1982 (New York: Church Hymnal Corporation, 1982), which states, "He came as Savior to his own, the way of love he trod; he came to win us by good will, for force is not of God." The text is from the *Epistle to Diognetus* (ca. 150), translated by F. Bland Tucker.

<sup>2</sup> See Genesis 1:26–27. The Prayer Book "Catechism" states that being created in the image of God "means that we are free to make choices: to love, to create, to reason, and to live in harmony with creation and with God." *The Book of Common Prayer* (BCP) (New York: The Seabury Press, 1979), p. 845. Eucharistic Prayer "C" states that God brought forth the human race from the primal elements, "and blessed us with memory, reason, and skill." BCP, p. 370.

tegrity of our creation, and our freedom to choose or reject the divine love that saves us. By grace through faith, we can choose life. We can choose to share and participate in the love of God that is freely offered to us.

Individually, and as members of the church as the Body of Christ in the world, we may participate in the unfolding of salvation history and the completing of the Kingdom of God. Our participation in this saving process involves us ever more deeply in the life and love of Christ, and transforms us ever more nearly into the union with God that is our completion and proper destiny.<sup>3</sup> Our participation in the saving process involves the sacraments of the church along with other expressions of the life of the church community, and other expressions of Christian faith and ministry that may not seem outwardly or publicly Christian in nature. In this essay, I will consider the theology of participation in light of the work of several Anglican theologians, including Richard Hooker, William Porcher DuBose, and Michael Ramsey.

### Richard Hooker

The concept of participation is a cornerstone for the theology of Richard Hooker (c. 1554–1600). John Booty considers that Chapter 56 of Hooker's *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, titled "The union or mutuall participation which is betweene Christ and the Church of Christ in this present worlde," is the "theological heart" and "central chapter" of Book V, and "an epitome of Hooker's theology."<sup>4</sup> In another publication, Booty states that Hooker's use of the term "participation" provides a key to Hooker's meaning in Book V in terms of "the mutual participation of deity and humanity in Christ enabling that mutual participation of Christ in us and we in Christ, which constitutes Christ's body, the church." Booty notes that Hooker "seems to interpret participation by referring to *koinonia* or fellowship."<sup>5</sup>

In Chapter 56 of Book V of the *Laws*, Hooker identifies different degrees of participation in Christ. All creation, humanity included, participates in Christ as creator. Hooker states that "all thinges which God hath made are in that respect the ofspringe of God, they are *in him* as effectes in their high-

<sup>3</sup> See "Day by Day," Hymn 654 in *The Hymnal* 1982, attributed to Richard of Chichester (1197–1253), which prays "to see thee more clearly, love thee more dearly, follow thee more nearly, day by day."

<sup>4</sup> John Booty, "Book V," in *The Folger Library Edition of the Works of Richard Hooker*, Volume Six, Part One, W. Speed Hill, General Editor (Binghamton, N. Y.: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1993), pp. 183–231, 197, 209.

<sup>5</sup> John Booty, "An Elizabethan Addresses Modern Anglicanism: Richard Hooker and Theological Issues at the End of the Twentieth Century," *Anglican Theological Review* 71:1 (1989), pp. 8–24, 14. See also John E. Booty, "Richard Hooker" in *The Spirit of Anglicanism*, William J. Wolf, editor (Wilton, Conn.: Morehouse-Barlow Co., Inc., 1979): pp. 1–45, 17–20.

est cause, he likewise actualle is *in them*, thassistance and influence of his deitie is *theire life*.”<sup>6</sup> But our participation in Christ is to exceed the general participation of all creation in the creator. Hooker urges that we may become “sonnes of God” by participation in the life of the church, by which we become living members of the Body of Christ in the world. The participation of Christ in the faithful and the faithful in Christ means that “by vertue of this mysticall conjunction wee are of him and in him even as though our verie flesh and bones should be made continuuate with his . . .” (p. 237).

For Hooker, participation in Christ may take place in different ways, but it is always dependent on the gift of Christ’s presence. We cannot “participate in him without his presence” (p. 227). The focus of our participation in Christ is found in the sacraments, which “are founde to be most necessarie” (p. 245). Baptism and eucharist are “meanes effectuall whereby God when wee take the sacramentes delivereth into our handes that grace available unto eternall life, which grace the sacramentes represent or signifie” (p. 247). Each sacrament has its own particular benefit as we participate in the saving life of Christ. In this regard, “Wee receive Christ Jesus in baptisme once as the first beginner, in the Eucharist often as beinge by continewall degrees the finisher of our life” (p. 248). Sacramental participation begins and tends toward the completing of salvation in the life of the Christian believer.

### *William Porcher DuBose*

William Porcher DuBose (1836–1918) emphasizes that Christ’s presence in our lives and in the church is real, and the salvation we may know through Christ’s presence is also real.<sup>7</sup> Christ’s victory over sin has torn the veil of separation between God and humanity, so that Christ “has actually brought humanity, both in His body natural and in His body mystical, into a real oneness with God.”<sup>8</sup> DuBose uses the word “actually” to emphasize the reality of at-one-ment, or union with God. This union with God is realized and accomplished in Christ’s natural body and in his mystical body, the church.

<sup>6</sup> Richard Hooker, *The Folger Library Edition of the Works of Richard Hooker, Volume Two, Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, Book V, W. Speed Hill, General Editor (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1977), p. 237.

<sup>7</sup> This discussion of DuBose’s theology of participation relative to soteriology and ecclesiology is drawn from Robert Boak Slocum, *The Theology of William Porcher DuBose: Life, Movement, and Being* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 2000), and used with the permission of the publisher.

<sup>8</sup> William Porcher DuBose, *The Soteriology of the New Testament, New Edition* (New York: Longmans, Green and Company, 1899), p. 55.

Our participation in the sacramental life of the church is to be participation in the process of our salvation. With respect to the eucharist and 1 Corinthians 11:26, DuBose states that "as baptism is our admission into, so the eucharist is our continued participation in the power and fact of Christ's death and resurrection; the means by which they become, or are made, truly *ours*" (p. 117).<sup>9</sup> Baptism also signifies participation in Christ's death and life. Christ embodied in the sacrament of baptism the "power over all flesh to give life to as many as will receive Him" (p. 344).

Through participation in the sacraments we may be effectively included in Christ's victory for our salvation. His victory over death is to be ours, as we participate in it through the life and sacraments of the church. Any arresting of the saving process so that salvation would have been complete in Christ but somehow not salvation for us "would have been to interpose between cause and effect, and frustrate the whole 'Because I live ye shall live also'" (p. 348).<sup>10</sup> We are to be included in the Incarnation, and Christ's salvation, as we participate in the life and sacraments of the church. Baptism extends the Incarnation "and all that it includes" to us (p. 351).<sup>11</sup>

The "truth of baptism" goes beyond the form of the baptismal liturgy itself. DuBose emphasizes that our need for saving participation in Christ would have been very real and compelling, even if there were no rite of baptism. DuBose states:

If there were no such word and no such rite [as baptism] in existence the fact would still remain that unless Jesus Christ can so take us into union with His person as to make us actual participants in His death and resurrection, His own death and resurrection would have no saving significance or efficiency for us (p. 351).

But there *is* a rite of baptism whereby we may encounter and be included as participants in Christ's saving experience of life, death, and resurrection. The power of Christ's death "to atone, to redeem, and to save" depends on the "truth of baptism," which is "the possibility of such a real relation between Jesus Christ and ourselves as that He can become we, and we *He*; His death our death, and His life our life" (p. 347–348). Our participation in this saving process of at-one-ment involves our faith. Salvation is not just *done* to us or for us. And the sacraments are not magic.

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<sup>9</sup> DuBose quotes St. Paul's statement in First Corinthians 11:26 "that 'as often as (in the Eucharist) we eat the bread and drink the cup we do set forth the Lord's death until He come'" (p. 116).

<sup>10</sup> DuBose quotes Jesus' promise to his disciples as recorded in John 14:19.

<sup>11</sup> DuBose quotes Romans 6:4 in this context: "We were buried with Him by baptism into death that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we also should walk in newness of life."

We are included and sustained in Christ's salvation through the life and sacraments of the Church. But our encounter with Christ's objective gift of salvation is to be completed subjectively in our lives by faith. Faith is at the heart of our saving participation in Christ. Our saving relationship with Christ, like any living relationship, involves a mutuality of giving. We have the freedom to reject or fail to receive salvation in Christ, which blocks our participation in the saving process and prevents the subjective realization of Christ's gift in our lives. DuBose explains, "what is given in Christ by baptism is not conditioned upon anything, not even faith. Faith is not the condition of God's giving, but only of our receiving." It is not by some arbitrary or legalistic requirement that faith is the condition for our receiving the saving benefits of baptism. It is simply "inherent in the nature of the thing" because "we cannot receive spiritual things without faith, for faith is our reception of spiritual things" (pp. 366–367). We are not and cannot be forced to receive salvation in Christ.

It is only with the eyes of faith that we can discern and fully experience the spiritual reality of the church's life and sacraments. Objectively, baptism expresses and is our life in Christ. It is our inclusion in the Incarnation. But we may deny ourselves this great gift by our subjective refusal of it through lack of faith.

### *Michael Ramsey*

Michael Ramsey (1904–1988), Archbishop of Canterbury from 1961 to 1974, cautioned against the dangers of religious individualism, and pointed toward the wider and continuous fellowship of the Christian church through time in communion with Christ. Offering a catholic perspective on justification in *The Gospel and the Catholic Church*, Ramsey states that "to be justified is to depend upon no solitary Christ; it is to depend upon One whose people, the continuous race of God, are His own humanity."<sup>12</sup>

Participation in the "continuous race of God, Christ's own humanity" can be sacramental. Ramsey states, "The Liturgy is not an exercise of piety divorced from common life, it is rather the bringing of all common life into the sacrifice of Christ" (p. 119). Ramsey identifies the importance and specifics of sacramental participation of community members in a commentary on the liturgical movement in the Roman Catholic Church: "Lay folk are being taught to follow the rite in their missals instead of using it mainly as an occasion for individual prayer. The offertory is being emphasized by appropriate ceremonial, which brings out its meaning as the people's own gift to God of

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<sup>12</sup> Michael Ramsey, *The Gospel and the Catholic Church, Second Edition* (Cambridge, Mass.: Cowley Publications, 1990), p. 192.

the bread and wine representing their own common life." He adds that the people are now taught to join in singing the people's parts of the service, and concludes that "both in doctrine and in parochial practice, the truth is revived that the sacrifice of the Mass includes the sacrifice of all the members of the Body" (p. 176). Saving membership in the Body of Christ may be experienced through sacramental participation.

Ramsey also identifies the saving benefit and need for participation by the Christian believer in the death of Christ. Jesus' prediction of his death "bewildered" his disciples, "and in answer to their bewilderment He taught them that they would not understand [His] death except by sharing in it" (p. 6). Death is definitive for the mortal condition, and Jesus' death was the ultimate sign of the extent of God's participation in humanity.

Sharing in Jesus' life, death, and resurrection is also the ultimate extent of the Christian's saving participation in the Body of Christ. Ramsey explains that "while it is true that the Church is founded upon the Word-made-flesh, it is true only because the Word was identified with men right down to the point of death, and enabled men to find unity through a veritable death to self" (pp. 6-7). Ramsey's understanding of death recalls the earlier statement of Athanasius that "the Son of God became man, so that the sons of men . . . might become sons of God," which Ramsey quotes in another context in *The Gospel and the Catholic Church* (p. 143).<sup>13</sup> Our participation in Christ is transformative for us.

Jesus participates in humanity to the point of death, and humanity may participate in Jesus' life, death, and resurrection by dying to self, and by being faithful to the point of death. This participation takes place especially in and through the church, which is the Body of Christ in the world. Ramsey states that Jesus "died to self, morally by the will to die throughout His life, actually by the crucifixion." Therefore, as Christ "is baptized into man's death, so men shall be baptized into His; and, as He loses His life to find it in the Father, so men may by a veritable death find a life whose centre is in Christ and in the brethren" (p. 27). This is the ultimate participation and mutual relationship of the divine in the human and the human in the divine. Without this participation, the reality of salvation in Christ is lost and the Gospel becomes nonsense. Ramsey explains that Jesus' "death is spiritually unintelligible except the disciples share in it, and by sharing in it through the baptism of the Spirit they and all the believers know the death and resurrection as a present fact" (p. 34).

Ramsey's understanding of our shared participation in Jesus' death and life is formative for his ecclesiology and anthropology, as for his epistemology. The church is more than a philanthropic institution, and we are called to

<sup>13</sup> Ramsey cites Athanasius's *De Incarnatione*, p. 54.

more than individual self-reliance. In a very radical way, all must be understood and founded upon "the Gospel of Christ crucified and risen." This also provides Ramsey's interpretive perspective for *The Gospel and the Catholic Church* (p. 5). In this regard, Ramsey states, the church exists to teach us "to die to self and to trust in a Resurrection to a new life," and points us "to a unity and a peace which men generally neither understand nor desire." We are to participate in the cross as we share salvation in Christ. Ramsey explains that "the Cross is the place where the theology of the Church has its meaning, where the unity of the Church is a deep and present reality, and where the Church is already showing the peace of God and the bread from heaven to the nations of mankind" (pp. 8-9).

The perspective of "Christ crucified and risen" also is determinative for Ramsey's understanding of humanity. He draws on various New Testament texts to describe the saving participation of Christ in the believer and the believer in Christ.<sup>14</sup> Ramsey states that the Christian's death to self is not only "a response to the death of Christ as a past event; it is a present sharing in His dying and rising again." In short, as "one died for all, therefore all died" (2 Corinthians 5:14). Identification with Christ's death changes the way we see ourselves. Those who share this identification no longer think of themselves "as separate and self-sufficient units, but as centred in Christ who died and rose again" (pp. 32-33).<sup>15</sup> For Ramsey, our participation in the Body of Christ points away from an isolated self-sufficiency. We must die to self, and selfish isolation. We are to be faithful unto death, discovering our life in Christ and Christ's life in us.

Hooker, DuBose, and Ramsey all bear witness to the centrality of participation in the life of faith and salvation. We may participate in the love of God by free choice, but we do not act alone. God's love makes our choice possible, and upholds us as we choose. Our participation in the love of God draws us beyond the limits and delusions of the self in isolation. God is faithful unto death, and invites us to make our own ultimate response by dying to self. The Incarnation includes us as we share Christ's death and resurrection in our own lives and in the church. Our participation involves us in a cooperative mutuality of unequals as we accept God's saving offer of divine life.

<sup>14</sup> Mark 8:34; John 15:4, 5; Romans 6:3, 4; 2 Corinthians 5:14-17; Galatians 2:20.

<sup>15</sup> Ramsey states this position in his commentary on 2 Corinthians 5:14-17. Chapters 2 and 3 of *The Gospel and the Catholic Church* are titled, respectively, "One Died For All" and "Therefore All Died."