

KRIEG, Robert A. 2013. *Treasure in the Field: Salvation in the Bible and in Our Lives*. Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press. 165 p. ISBN 978-0-8146-8068-1. Price: R386.00
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In this concise book, Robert Krieg recasts the soteriological insights of the Bible in psychological-existential terms, i.e., by reflecting on salvation as God's gift of one's personal wholeness. Jesus' parable about the person who finds "treasure hidden in a field" (Matt 13:44) constitutes the backbone of Krieg's interpretation: God creates us as "treasures buried in the field" and thus discovering our true selves is the only way toward the "accomplishment" of God's *salus* in our lives. Salvation thus comprehended involves both being released by God from whatever prevents or resists our maturation into the whole person whom God intends, and the completion of our personal existence through union with God in eternal life.

The book is arranged in eight sections, the two first of which deserve special attention as they provide a broad anthropological-theological background for the subsequent, more nuanced, analysis. In chapter 1, Krieg identifies existential challenges implied by the major anthropological facets of the human person created in God's image, i.e., as an "I", a "we", and a "doer". Then he examines two creation accounts found in Genesis and highlights their complementarity: the high point of God's act of creation is described, respectively, in terms of its horizontal dimension (the man, *ish*, and the woman, *ishah*, "becoming one flesh"), and its vertical dimension (imitating God by "resting" on the Sabbath). This leads to the conclusion that the fundamental goodness of creation must always be considered in correlation with the human potential for self-transcendence. Finally, the notions of God's creation and salvation are brought together in the realization that humans – as personal subjects, interpersonal beings, and self-agents – cannot be redeemed unless they meet God anew through these very facets of their personal existence. Based on Merton's understanding of sin as the pursuit of a "false self", chapter 2 looks at the misuse of personal freedom in one's relation to God, oneself, other people, and the earth, which is driven by an often unconscious urge to be "like God". Krieg argues that by imposing either our own egos or a compelling authority upon our lives, we displace God's Word, Wisdom, at the core of our being. In this context, Krieg offers an insightful juxtaposition of heteronomy, autonomy, and theonomy as three modes of exercising God-given freedom. He insists that only theonomy challenges our tendency to be preoccupied about ourselves and thereby may eventually lead to the "decentring" of our ego and "recentering" of ourselves in God. Not only theonomy generates one's personal individuation beyond death, meaninglessness, and evil, but it also opens a person to new experiences

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of God's presence as well as God's absence, the latter of which calls for persistence in faith despite all pressing doubts (Newman). Lastly, the author reflects upon the dynamic interrelationship between freedom and love, pondering it not only in anthropological terms, but also through the prism of the fairy tale *Beauty and the Beast*, and finally he recapitulates it theologically in the light of the book of Job.

In the following chapters, Krieg examines: (3) biblical testimonies concerning conversion as the essence of our potential response to God's gift of salvation; (4) threats to personal individuation inherent in various forms of suffering as seen in the light of the biblical-theological meanings of the human predicament; (5) God's story of creation and salvation seen as a *euclastrophe*, i.e., a potential disaster that ultimately ends well (Tolkien), and thus the utmost source of hope; (6) the person of Jesus Christ conceived of as both God's sacrament to the world and the ultimate realization of our human "Yes" to God; (7) the Gospel portraits of Jesus and their existential and moral implications for Christ's disciples today. While the whole book is centred on relation between the two meanings of salvation, namely "personal wholeness" and "eschatological reality", chapter 8 explicitly elucidates that inherently Christian tension through the lens of the book of Revelation, an "intricate tapestry of images meant to depict God's salvation *in and beyond history*" (141; *my italics*).

I must admit that after reading the *Preface* to Krieg's book I sighed, "Again spirituality reduced to mere psychologising... What more can be said about Jungian meanings of Christian revelation!" However, with every page, my appreciation for the author has been growing. Certainly Krieg's main thesis, which states that only by becoming increasingly aware of our God-given identities we can adequately respond to God's gift of salvation, is neither new nor particularly original. Nor is his biblically rooted interpretation of the Christian meaning of *salus*. And yet, while discussing these relatively familiar aspects of Christian soteriology, Krieg succeeds in bringing a fresh and stimulating perspective that proves both theologically valid and existentially relevant. What prevents Krieg's approach from lapsing into psychologising, so persistent in Christian spirituality today, is his emphasis on human participation in the tripersonal mystery of divine life, a mystery which does not compromise one's singular wholeness, but paradoxically enables the human being to realize his or her God-given personal uniqueness. In the last resort, the major value of Krieg's work lies not so much in the novelty of his ideas, but in his refreshing review of our "redeemed human condition", which elucidates its inherent tension stemming from what Tracy calls the "always-already, not-yet event of Jesus Christ".

Referring to *Dei Verbum* 12, Krieg deems his approach to the Bible as “critical yet respectful”. Though the opposition implied by such formulation seems inaccurate and superfluous, the actual exegetical component of Krieg’s work witnesses to a background in biblical scholarship. The author highlights both the literal sense and the spiritual sense of the analysed texts. Moreover, in the case of the books that are discussed more extensively, he discusses each text’s source, its historical and cultural context, and its literary aspects. Only then does he expound on the theological significance of the scriptural references in relation to human salvation. At the same time, Krieg’s interpretation without doubt transcends the framework of traditional exegesis and classical Christian soteriology. It can be accounted for, among other reasons, by the fact that he draws on the writings of contemporary authors, in particular Thomas Merton and Romano Guardini, the latter of whom was the theme of two previous works by Krieg. An example of inspiration coming from non-theological sources can be found in Krieg’s creative inquiry into the quasi-religious experience of the Czech playwright (and later president) Václav Havel, which is used by the author as an entry into his final reflection on salvation as depicted in the book of Revelation. The paradox of love and freedom, of personal union and personal differentiation, is thus probed through the prism of both Havel’s encounter with “Being” and John of Patmos’ experience of divine love. Apart from being a skilful theologian, Krieg also proves to be a good teacher capable of using suggestive analogies and illustration, often of a non-Christian provenance, that render the reading more engaging and his line of argument more credible: Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*, *Star Wars*, and *Shrek* to name a few. Krieg’s inclusive language, in regard to both God and humans, fully meets the requirements of a contemporary theological discourse. Finally, the structure and composition of the book have been meticulously thought through, which also deserves praise.

Minor limitations of the text can be found in chapter 6 devoted to Jesus Christ. Regarding Jesus’ self-awareness and message about himself, Krieg maintains that Jesus left it to his post-Easter disciples to identify him as God’s Son and the Saviour of all people. Thus the apostles made *explicit* what Jesus himself left *implicit*. While it is true, in principle, that Jesus communicated his sense of himself as God’s Son only *implicitly*, Krieg’s juxtaposition of the pre-paschal and post-paschal perspectives may suggest an all too simplistic distinction which, in fact, is far from being evident. Furthermore, it is a pity that Krieg has not developed the Christological aspect of salvation by looking upon some theological responses to the old Anselmian question: *cur Deus homo?* He denies the classical answer by Anselm himself (what has been called the “satisfaction substitution theory”) when he states that “Jesus attributed his crucifixion

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to his human enemies and to Satan, not to God. While he freed us from Satan, he saw no need to ransom us from Abba, life's Source and Goal" (116-17). However, no positive theological explanation of why redemption was required in the first place is advanced. While Krieg's justification of our existential (universal) need for *salus* does not raise any doubts, the question remains puzzling in terms of God's economy of salvation.

We can increasingly understand God, but we can never fully fathom God. This apophatic bon mot, which recurs throughout Krieg's study, recaps well the theological profile and aspirations of the author. In *Treasure in the Field*, he does not offer any ground-breaking insights, and yet by skilfully building upon the exegetical and theological Catholic tradition as well as contemporary psychological reflection, he certainly contributes to the Christian understanding of God's gift of salvation, especially as actualised in human life *here and now*. His work is a proof that the theological and existential resources of Christian revelation are boundless and can be always exploited anew by a masterful theologian. Krieg points out that Christ, as a divine-human mystery, is rightly the subject of countless interpretations (139). His own attempt inscribes itself into that centuries-long hermeneutic process, even though his specifically christological interpretation of *salus* may leave the reader somewhat unsatisfied.

Krieg's language is accessible although his work would presume some grounding in scripture and Christian doctrine. The book is highly recommended to all those interested in the biblical foundations of Christian soteriology as well as a more "experiential" approach to the question of salvation.

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