



## ‘Visions of the Good Life: Salvation in the Twenty-First Century’

- Practical Theology, Missiology and Church Polity Conference
- *When:* 8-10 June 2022
- Theological University Kampen | Utrecht  
*Where:* Broederweg 15, NL-8261 GS Kampen, the Netherlands
- International Academic Conference organized by the [Centre for Church and Mission in the West](https://churchandmission.nl), which seeks to draw together scholars with a variety of theological approaches to research on mission, ecclesial practices and church polity
- The main topic of this conference is connected to the CCMW’s research programme, ‘Salvation in the Twenty-First Century’
- *Registration* for this conference: <https://churchandmission.nl/ccmw-2022-conference-registration/>

## Papers that will be presented

The papers below will be presented during the conference. *The presentation schedule can be found at the end of this document.* You will be able to read the papers before the conference. During the conference there will be a short presentation by the author of a paper, followed by an in-depth discussion.

### **1. Jan Martijn Abrahamse**

*Tutor Systematic Theology and Ethics at Christian University of Applied Sciences Ede (CHE) and the Baptist Seminary in Amsterdam (VU University), the Netherlands.*

#### **Does God Still Do Anything Novel?**

#### **The Contribution of Some (Late-)Modern Novelists to Soteriological Understanding**

In this paper a number of modern-day Christian-authored novels will be read as narrative constructions of God’s redemptive work in view of better understanding what it is to experience salvation in Christian perception. For this purpose I have selected novels which

stand out by their particular first-person perspective and common theological motive: the quest for redemption in relation to the themes of suffering, the meaning of life, and, most importantly, the existence of God: Jan Overduin's *Herder en huurling* (1951), Susan Howatch's, *Glittering Images* (1987), Gert-Jan Segers's *Overwinteren* (2000), and Esther Maria Magnis's *Gott Braucht Dich Nicht* (2012).

Novels offer knowledge and understanding, since they “are important *cultural products* and *expressions* of humanity” (Peels, 2020, p. 206), and therefore a valuable theological resource to better understand salvation in its cultural fashion, thus providing a better vehicle for conveying ‘soteriological knowledge’ than soteriological theories or models can. For stories are both tools by which we actively attribute meaning to our lives (McAdams, 2013), as well as mirrors of the cultural frameworks we receive to understand ourselves (Conway, 1998). Novels are, in this sense, not merely aesthetic pieces of fiction generating an alternative world, but “present and represent the complexity of moral life in a fuller sense than abstract generalizations do” (Vos, 2020, p. 185; cf. Hauerwas, 2013). In other words, stories of salvation can – to a certain degree – mediate this salvific experience to another person (Stump, 2018, pp. 301-302; cf. Ford, 1999; Abrahamse 2021) as they enable readers to see the world through the eyes of the fictive characters (Peels, 2020). Reading these novels as ‘thick descriptions’ of salvation offers a more embodied performance or imagination of than systematic theology’s customary (more) abstract and cognitive soteriological reflection and theorizing (cf. Johnson, 2021).

In short, the novels selected in this paper are treated as ‘real-life encounters’, both shedding light on the particular uptake and experience of what salvation is or should be, as well as a window into the time and background in which these novels are written. To make an assessment this paper will employ, besides the familiar soteriological concepts formulated in systematic theology, also insights from literary studies (Richardson, 2002) and notably McAdam’s framework of the six languages of redemption (McAdams, p. 25) to answer its leading question: What do these novels tell us about the experience of salvation in (late) modernity?

## **2. Francis Adebayo**

*PhD student, VU Amsterdam, the Netherlands.*

### **Better Life for All: Contribution from African Soteriological Discourse on Materiality**

There is a deep concern within society and the academy in Africa about the material. The African religious society has been consistent in its search for material well-being in unending combat against poverty and suffering. This effort has been mainly religious and revolves around salvific rituals and liberational sacrifices as a means of obtaining material well-being also known as ‘better life’. This paper explores the African conception of better life by drawing on the African view of spiritual realities, the notion of materiality, and how these two realms of African cosmology unite in making salvation the means to the good life for all.

### **3. Ben Aldous**

*Revd. Dr. Ben Aldous [Churches Together in England]. Institution: Honorary Research Fellow, Queens Foundation, Birmingham, England.*

#### **The centre becomes the periphery: Reflections on Kosuke Koyama's soteriology for 21<sup>st</sup> century mission**

Kosuke Koyama is an often-forgotten Japanese theologian whose writings in the 1970s and 1980s have a prophetic edge to them for considering 21<sup>st</sup> century mission especially in the UK. The paper unpacks Koyama's theology of salvation rooted in *theologia crucis*. Koyama says that for the church Jesus Christ is the centre of all peoples and all things yet Jesus is the centre becoming periphery. "His life moves towards the periphery. He expresses his centrality in the periphery by reaching the extreme periphery. Finally on the cross he stops this movement. There he cannot move he is nailed down." The paper explores this central theme for mission and evangelism in the UK context. It ponders if a move to the periphery, a loss of power, 'efficiency' and speed is a more honestly aligned to the reality of mission in a post Christendom context. Perhaps a need an evangelism of the periphery?

### **4. Björn Asserhed**

*PhD-student, Stockholm School of Theology (UCS), Sweden.*

#### **Trajectories of salvation in missio-formational practices: Christian formation in Swedish church plants**

Sweden is sometimes described as the most secular country in the world. The free-church movement has been declining for almost a century and in the last two decades over a thousand churches has been closed down. However, according to recent reports almost 500 new churches has been planted since 2000. This paper presents preliminary results of field studies of three church plants in Sweden. What practices are forming people in becoming Christians in this context and what trajectories of salvation are offered and realised in these communities of mission?

### **5. Dejan Azdajic**

*Slovenian, Freie Theologische Hochschule Giessen (Department of Practical Theology).*

#### **We Want the Good Life Now: Insights from Lived Religion for a Whole Person and Communal Approach to Salvation in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

While late modern people in contemporary Western societies may be curious about salvation, they certainly long for human flourishing here and now. To achieve this goal, much emphasis is placed on embodied spiritual practices and personal experiences. At the same time, much of the Church in the West with its continuing insistence on cognitive word-based pedagogies and only a marginal emphasis on experiential bodily participation, has witnessed

a diminished impact considering the changing landscape. Building on my ethnographic research and recent research in liturgical studies, this paper intends to offer relevant insights from Lived Religion with its explicit emphasis on enacted theology as a source for catechetical instruction and the whole-body emphasis for a salvific encounter with God. Reflecting on these important aspects contributes to a more holistic understanding of how the Church can promote the good life now, while increasing its effectiveness in its traditional proclamation of God's salvation for the world.

## **6. Janel Kragt Bakker**

*Associate Professor of Mission and Culture, Memphis Theological Seminary, USA.*

*(Visiting Research Fellow, Protestant Theological University, Groningen, the Netherlands, May-June, 2022)*

### **God's Ambassadors? White Christian Nationalists, Salvation, and the Kingdom of God**

The *basileia tou Theo*—often translated into English as “the kingdom of God”—is the central metaphor in the Gospels' account of Jesus' teachings. Jesus portrayed the *basileia tou Theo* as the ever-present domain of God's love and justice; he invited his followers to receive this realm as a gift and enter it with a childlike spirit. However, many western Christians have defied Jesus' teachings and sought to expand their social and political power under the banner of advancing the kingdom of God. In the contemporary United States, white Christian nationalists often reference this metaphor in their bid for dominance. This paper will explore how soteriological and eschatological visions of the good life have animated white Christian nationalists, providing them with an imperialistic cultural mandate and a sense of having favored status as God's ambassadors. Following the consensus model of practical theology, the paper will proceed from historical and sociological interpretation to theological reasoning in order to develop an alternative vision for social and political engagement among white Christians. This vision recognizes Christians as both the subjects and objects of God's mission of redemption for the entire cosmos.

## **7. Jack Barentsen**

*Professor Practical Theology. Evangelische Theologische Faculteit, Leuven | Institute of Leadership and Social Ethics, Belgium.*

### **The legitimacy and authority of church leadership in particular frameworks of salvation**

This paper explores the relationship between different dominant images of salvation and practices of church leadership. A sacramental view of salvation frames the pastor as mediator of divine grace by ecclesially authorized liturgies. A judicial view frames the pastor as accuser and advocate alternately to motivate believers to recognize sin, express repentance and accept forgiveness by faith alone. A participatory view frames the pastor as

one who enables and empowers participation in the life of the church and its mission. Thus, views on salvation legitimate particular leadership practices, which in turn shape community formation, boundary marking and mission.

## **8. Jonna van den Berge-Bakker e.a. (panel of two papers)**

*Jonna van den Berge-Bakker; dr. Marten van der Meulen; dr. Berdine van den Toren-Lekkerkerker; prof. dr. Benno van den Toren (chair).*

### **From fixable to permanently broken: a conversation for a missional ecclesiology on the edge**

We propose a panel of two interconnected papers, in which we explore from different perspectives and approaches – ecclesial analysis in the Dutch context and missiological insights – how the question of salvation for the 21st century cannot be answered without serious and interdisciplinary reflection on the Church's being in this context – towards a missional ecclesiology.

#### *1. Ecclesiology & soteriology: From Eastern Congo to Groningen – Church as mission (Berdine)*

What is salvation in a context of ongoing violence and physical vulnerability because of the HIV and Ebola viruses? And in a neighbourhood in the Netherlands where we find social cohesion, yet lived out in the vulnerability of poverty and on the margins of society? Reflecting on salvation in the lived experience of these two contexts, I look for indicators towards a missional ecclesiology in the light of God's mission. Church as community is a gift received, a home of welcome and formation, and a call to be and do.

#### *2. Ecclesiology & Eschatology (Jonna & Marten)*

Many churches are occupied with fixing problems, such as membership decline. They have a nagging feeling they do not respond to their calling. We think churches can discover God's shalom if they stop fixing problems and move toward a different understanding of their permanent brokenness. We work on a missional ecclesiology that enables people to follow Jesus in living out this shalom. Churches in marginal situations taught us eschatology is crucial. How does understanding the present in the light of God's future open up space to love what is given and will be given?

## **9. Philipp Bartholomä**

*Prof. dr., German, Freie Theologische Hochschule Gießen (department of Practical Theology).*

### **From Acceleration to Resonance: Hartmut Rosa's Sociology of the Good Life and the Mission of the Church**

In his influential socio-critical narrative, German sociologist Hartmut Rosa combines a resolute diagnosis of the crisis of late modernity (which he relates to an unhealthy „cycle of

acceleration“) with the optimistic credo that „a new relationship with the world“ (which he describes as „resonance“) can overcome the late-modern pathologies of alienation and lay the foundation for a good, successful, or even happy life. Initially, this paper summarizes the main elements of Rosa’s signature of late-modernity. This is followed by a critical assessment of his „redemptive story“ from a theological point of view. Against this background, we will finally explore some practical-theological implications for a missional ecclesiology in the secular West.

## **10. Pieter Dirk Dekker**

*PhD student, VU Amsterdam, the Netherlands.*

### **Who will be saved? The preferential option as a challenge to Augustinian doctrines of divine election**

Theologians have often debated the ‘who-question’ of salvation: who will be saved, and might we identify a certain logic to this? According to liberation theologies, God’s salvific acts are guided by a preferential option for the poor. Taken at face value, this claim challenges conceptions of election from the Augustinian tradition, which presuppose, often within a voluntaristic framework, that God elects some and reprobates others irrespective of their faith, merit, or, for that matter, socio-economical position. This short paper analyses how prominent liberation theologians such as Gutierrez and Ellacuría position themselves vis-à-vis more voluntaristic conceptions of divine election and preference.

## **11. Jan Scheele-Goedhart**

*Rev. Protestant church of Vijfhuizen (PKN), senior researcher RIGO Research en Advies BV, PhD student PThU, the Netherlands.*

### **Work and the Good Life**

Many would argue that a work is an important part of a good life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century; at the very least, unemployment is generally considered undesirable. Other voices, however, would argue that contemporary society overvalues (paid) work and that there are aspects of our work-culture like the meritocratic ideal that are fundamentally at odds with a Christian theological vision of salvation and the good life. First, based on empirical data obtained for a PhD-project on the interaction between ecclesial practices and lived faith in the sphere of work, this short paper will analyse the visions of the good life and the soteriological imagery of Protestant churchgoers in relation to their work. Second, the paper will reflect theologically on those empirical results and suggest implications for soteriology, for preaching and pastoral care to working congregants and for theological reflection on work in general.

## **12. Rein den Hertog**

*Minister within the Christian Reformed Churches in the Netherlands.*

### **Salvation through ministry**

In my paper, I want to focus on the question of how ministerial theology within a church denomination with a pietistic background can contribute to 'the good life' of its surroundings. Within a pietistic setting, the view of salvation risks being narrowed to the individual believer's relationship with God, leaving (too) little room for the communal witness of the church to the world. Theology and practice of ecclesial ministry needs to be rethought in order to contribute to the development of church with a relevant view of salvation, without betraying its pietistic background.

## **13. Matthew E. Hovde**

*Rev., C.S.C. (USA).*

*KU Leuven, Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies, Doctoral Researcher, Research Unit of Systematic Theology, Leuven, Belgium.*

### **Chastity, Poverty, and Obedience: The Good Life of Self-Renunciation**

The Consecrated Life presents a counter-cultural perspective of the good life, as one animated primarily by self-renunciation and denial through the evangelical counsels of Chastity, Poverty, and Obedience, as a means to human flourishing. This is supported by systematic theologians who argue for an ecstatic human personhood, as well as by liturgical texts for the celebration of the consecrated life. These work in tandem to argue that the eschatological perspective of the Consecrated Life is inseparably united to the practical asceticism that constitutes its form, and offers a perspective on the good life as inherently one of out-pouring in imitation and participation in Christ.

## **14. Keas Keasler**

*Assistant Professor of Christian Spiritual Formation; Director of M.A. in Christian Spiritual Formation and Leadership (Friends University in Wichita, Kansas).*

### **The Good Life, Good Person, and Good Teacher: Dallas Willard and the Great Questions of Life**

In light of the recent call that theology attend more closely to the core questions of human existence and respond in generative ways that bring forth the flourishing of humans and all creation, one voice worth listening to is American philosopher and theologian Dallas Willard (1935-2013). Starting around the year 2000, a frequent theme for Willard was "The Four Great Questions of Life," which he considered to be a summary of the basic, existential questions that all individuals and societies must answer. This paper will explore the

soteriological implications and missiological relevance of his reflections on these questions for the church today. I will specifically focus on Willard's Christocentric approach to the traditionally philosophical big questions of human life, which integrates the pursuit of the good life with the process of becoming a good person and addresses how such a good life is attained – through active apprenticeship to Jesus – as well as how it is part and parcel of the good news of the gospel.

## **15. Lap Yan Kung**

*Dr., Hong Kong, Chinese University of Hong Kong.*

### **Salvation as Initiating a Liberating Course of Karma: Experiences of the Blind and Visually Impaired in Hong Kong**

This study attempts to challenge a Chinese version of dis/ableism characterized by a folk belief in Paoying (a belief in retribution for what one does) and Cán Fèi (deformity and uselessness), with reference to the Hildesheim Mission in Hong Kong. The blind and visually impaired are believed to be Cán Er Bu Fèi (disabled but not unworthy), and their mystery of touch is seen as a liberating course of Karma rather than an experience of retribution from the Karma of their ancestors and/or previous lives. The practice of initiating a liberating course of Karma helps development of an embodied Christian mission in three ways, namely, enhancing the quality of life, emerging as a communion, and progressing a theology of senses.

## **16. Ross Lockhart**

*Dean of St. Andrew's Hall. Professor of Mission Studies, Vancouver School of Theology, Canada.*

### **Ruler of all nature?**

### **Environmentalism, Soteriology and Mission in Vancouver, Canada**

Vancouver, Canada is recognized both for its stunning natural beauty (wedged between North Shore mountains and the Pacific Ocean), as well as being a highly diverse, modern and secularized Pacific-Rim city of 2.6 million inhabitants. This paper draws upon the author's ongoing research into theology, mission and organizational culture in Vancouver, and reflects upon the contested public discourse on "the good life" in light of colonialism and climate crisis in the lower mainland of British Columbia. This paper will have a specific focus on the identified value of Indigenous culture, and its corresponding environmental awareness, in the general population in order to discern, identify and propose an effective response by Christian initiatives for the sake of mission.



## **17. Theo Pleizier**

*Assistant Professor of Practical Theology, PThU, the Netherlands.*

### **Death-talk**

#### **Recovering the art of dying in 21st Century Christian practices**

How do 'visions of the good life' connect with the undeniable reality for any human being: the end of life? The end of life will not always be good, yet preparing for death belongs to good living. Or does death distort our vision of what a good life might be? The paper brings these question into conversation with a few core ecclesial practices, such as pastoral care and preaching. Is death still part of Christian speech, and if so, how? The final part of the paper presents offers a research perspective on thanatology for theological research.

## **18. Bert Roor & Evelien van Duffelen**

*Lectorate Theology, Christian University of Applied Sciences – Ede (CHE), the Netherlands.*

### **Mapping Experiences of Salvation and Good Life in New Faith Communities**

Our lectorate focusses on 'salvation' in faith communities. What do participants experience of the good life when they get involved? In what ways is participation meaningful to them? What lessons can we learn from their experiences for mission in the West? To map the answers, we developed a holistic research model of dimensions of meaning based on modern perspectives in social sciences and healthcare. How does this 'Compass of Meaning' help in the hermeneutical challenge to understand the impact of (new) faith communities on the lives of people? We will share the results based on research within six different emerging faith communities.

## **19. Sake Stoppels**

*Lectorate Theology, Christian University of Applied Sciences – Ede (CHE), the Netherlands.*

### **The missional mindset of pastors and pioneers in the Protestant Church in the Netherlands**

In 2020 and 2021 the Protestant Church in the Netherlands (PKN) did research among its pastors and pioneers. 40 pastors and 20 pioneers were interviewed. The research project focused mainly on the missional mindset of these pastors and pioneers. What is their theological motivation for being missional? Who is Jesus Christ in their missional thinking? What are the unique elements of Christian tradition, if any? How do pastors and pioneers work out the concept of salvation?

From a theological point of view, the PKN is a very broad church. The outcome of the research reflects this breadth. However, in the variety of answers, one can also see some

threads. The first is that classic dogmatic phrases and thoughts are lacking. For example, Jesus is not primarily seen as the Saviour who redeems us from an eternal penalty by his suffering and death. The redemption that He does give is his proximity. He is with us, in days of joy and in days of suffering. A second thread is related to the first one: eternity is not a focus in the missional mindset of the interviewees. Charles Taylor's immanent frame is recognizable in the results.

In the paper I want to present the results of both research projects and reflect on the theological positions found.

## **20. Daniel Tai-yin Tsoi**

*Candidate of Doctor of Theology and Ministry (DThM) at Durham University & Ordinand of the Church of England. Cranmer Hall, St John's College, Durham & Department of Theology and Religion, Durham University, England.*

### **“Body of Christ broken for you” – What can the Eucharist mean to the diaspora Iranian Christian converts from Islam in Britain concerning their salvation and lived experiences? *A preliminary report of a theological qualitative study***

Since the 1979 Islamic Revolution, many Iranian Muslims have converted to Christianity, and many have come to Britain and attended various churches. One key element in their new Christian faith is establishing their identity, focusing on their “Persian-ness”. Hence, the political-cultural context significantly shapes their new faith. Closely related is a history of trauma and suffering, both in Iran and Britain, as asylum seekers and refugees. My previous research suggests these traumatic experiences help these converts identify with Christ's suffering and sacrifice. There are complex intertwining factors in these Iranians' faith and salvation, including their identities after religious conversions, their traumatic experience and Iranian cultural heritage.

One way to establish their Christian identity is through rituals. The Eucharist, which signifies Christ's broken body, has been linked with trauma, liberation, and racial injustice. This perspective is particularly relevant to these Iranian Christian converts. The intertwining factors influence how these Iranians understand and experience the Eucharist.

This paper reports a study investigating the meaning and experience of the Eucharist among the Iranian Christian converts. This study is doctorate research in practical theology, using qualitative research methods to understand their lived experiences. The aim is to complexify and develop a potential Iranian Eucharistic theology. The paper outlines the complexity of these intertwining factors and presents preliminary emerging themes from the qualitative data: the centrality of the Eucharist and personal faith among the Iranian converts and the obliviousness of the communal aspect of the Eucharist among the Iranians.

## **21. Karen Zwijze-Koning, Hans Schaeffer & Jenny van der Aa**

*Department of Practical Theology, Theological University of Kampen|Utrecht, the Netherlands.*

### **Salvation and Church Renewal: An Investigation into Practices of Sourcing and Sharing**

Salvation is more than a concept – it is a divine practice that can be experienced in its transformative power both within local church communities, and beyond. This paper describes a framework of six fields of Christian practice, and its use in several Dutch churches that engage in a renewal process towards the year 2030 ([www.kerk2030.nl](http://www.kerk2030.nl)). These fields of practice, which form a coherent framework informed by research on lived theology, can be described as means by which Christians experience and embody salvation in a church setting, with an eye to their missiological task for society.

Churches that participate in the church renewal program ‘Kerk2030’ are asked to build an infrastructure of continuous reflection on these six practices, which helps them grow in their sustainability and vitality towards the year 2030. Here we (1) present and critically discuss the six fields of practices regarding their internal and external empowerment, and (2) reflect on some preliminary findings from the empirical research. We also scrutinize some of the possibilities in which reflections on these six fields of practices may be used by churches to foster their own transformation so they can become more ‘Christ-like’ (3). Lastly, we will reflect on the question what the terminology of ‘salvation’ may bring for this infrastructure of reflection (4).

## **22. Annemiek de Jonge**

*Educational manager at Social Work and Theology and senior-researcher Spiritual Care, lectorate Zorg en Zingeving, Christian University of Applied Sciences Viaa – Zwolle, the Netherlands.*

### **Soteriological views of practitioners in evangelical missionary practice**

Soteriology is a theme that is not often discussed in the practice of missionary work. Many practitioners find the very word incomprehensible. Yet it is important to bring up soteriology in missionary practice because missiology is always rooted in conceptions of salvation. In this paper, based on my PhD research, I describe the soteriological views of pioneers in two evangelical missionary practices. In the theological reflection that follows, I explore the questions and tensions that arise when practitioners' views are juxtaposed with the more institutional understandings of soteriology present in the evangelical movement. In this way the paper provides insight into the specific questions and tensions surrounding the contextualisation of evangelical soteriology in a secularising Western society.

<b>PAPER PRESENTATIONS 1 –</b>						
<b>Thursday June 9, 11.15-12.15</b>						
		<b>Zaal 3</b>		<b>Zaal 4</b>		<b>Zaal 8</b>
Ronde 1	1	Paper Asserhed (4)	3	Panel Berge-Meulen-Toren-Lekkerkerker (8)	5	Paper De Jonge (22)
Ronde 2	2	Paper Dekker (10)	4		6	Paper Azdajic (5)
<b>PAPER PRESENTATIONS 2 –</b>						
<b>Thursday June 9, 15.15-16.15</b>						
Ronde 1	7	Paper Adebayo (2)	9	Paper Scheele-Goedhart (11)	11	Paper Kragt Bakker (6)
Ronde 2	8	Paper Aldous (3)	10	Paper Keasler (14)	12	Paper Tsoi (20)
<b>PAPER PRESENTATIONS 3 –</b>						
<b>Thursday June 9, 19.30-21.00</b>						
Ronde 1	13	Paper Abrahamse (1)	16	Paper Bartholomä (9)	19	Paper Zwijze-Van der Aa-Schaeffer (21)
Ronde 2	14	Paper Kung (15)	17	Paper Lockhart (16)	20	
Ronde 3	15	Paper Hovde (13)	18	Paper Barentsen (7)	21	
<b>PAPER PRESENTATIONS 4 –</b>						
<b>Friday June 10, 11.15-12.15</b>						
Ronde 1	22	Paper Den Hertog (12)	24	Paper Roor/ v Duffelen (18)	26	
Ronde 2	23	Paper Stoppels (19)	25	Paper Pleizier (17)	27	