

Salvation in the Block Universe

Does time really pass? Should theology mould itself to fit with the findings of physics and philosophy? How should the interdisciplinary dialogue between science and religion proceed? In *Salvation in the Block Universe*, Emily Qureshi-Hurst tackles these important questions head-on. She offers a focused treatment of a particular problem – the problem of salvation in the block universe – and a broader exploration of a theological methodology that makes ‘science and religion’ not only possible but desirable. That is, Paul Tillich’s method of correlation. By bringing time and salvation into dialogue, Dr Emily Qureshi-Hurst’s original insights move the ‘science and religion’ conversation forward into new and productive territory. Qureshi-Hurst also provides tools for other theologians and philosophers to do the same. Essential reading for anyone interested in the interactions between philosophy, religion and science, she asks: without the reality of change, is personal salvation during one’s lifetime even possible?

EMILY QURESHI-HURST is based at the University of Oxford as Junior Research Fellow at Pembroke College and College Lecturer in Philosophy at Oriel College. The author of *God, Salvation, and the Problem of Spacetime*, she has published on a range of philosophical issues and has appeared on BBC Radio, *New Scientist* events, podcasts, and popular YouTube channels to discuss her work.

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Emily Qureshi-Hurst, Foreword by Alister McGrath
Frontmatter
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Salvation in the Block Universe

Time, Tillich, and Transformation

EMILY QURESHI-HURST

University of Oxford



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O sweet spontaneous
earth how often have
the
doting

 fingers of
prurient philosophers pinched
and
poked

thee,
has the naughty thumb
of science prodded
thy

 beauty how
often have religions taken
thee upon their scraggy knees
squeezing and

buffeting thee that thou mightest conceive
gods

 (but
true

to the incomparable
couch of death thy
rhythmic
lover

 thou answerest
them only with

 spring)

—*e. e. cummings* '[O sweet spontaneous]'

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Foreword

This important monograph represents an original, timely, and generative exploration of how God can be said to relate to temporal reality. Although it is generally agreed that any specific understanding of the nature of time has important consequences for religious understandings of God's interaction with the temporal order, including the question of human transformation, surprisingly little attention has been paid to this question by those working in fields such as philosophy of religion, theology, and science and religion. Existing discussions tend to focus on the doctrine of the incarnation, considering how a 'timeless' God can be said to become 'incarnate'. Although these have been illuminating, they are somewhat limited and are clearly in need of expansion.

Emily Qureshi-Hurst here sets out a rigorous and highly original exploration of the relation of spatiotemporal reality and a specific Christian doctrine – the nature of salvation. Many theological accounts of salvation rest on an ultimately intuitive perception or subjective experience of the forward flow of time. Since salvation involves change and transformation, it is thus assumed that the actuality of salvation requires ontological or relational changes to take place within the flow of time. But what if our experience of the flow of time is an illusion, an impression we form that does not have a secure basis in reality?

In this highly significant study, Dr Qureshi-Hurst explores contemporary understandings of the nature of time, using the 'block universe' model of spatiotemporal reality to open up some significant theological questions focusing on the doctrine of salvation. Her theological dialogue partner here is Paul Tillich, whose doctrine of personal salvation is rigorously analysed in light of what contemporary metaphysics and physics suggest about the nature of

time. In effect, Dr Qureshi-Hurst is inviting her readers to take part in the kind of ‘thought experiment’ popularised by Albert Einstein. If the ‘block universe’ model is right, what are its philosophical and theological consequences? How can we reinterpret Tillich within this particular hypothetical framework? And what of other understandings of the nature and dynamics of salvation?

Whilst this monograph makes some important analytic and synthetic moves, there is much more that remains to be explored. Dr Qureshi-Hurst has opened up a fresh avenue of discussion that shows considerable promise and will hopefully be taken further by those working in the fields of science and religion, the philosophy of religion, and Christian theology.

Professor Alister E. McGrath
University of Oxford

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My darling Jack, your patience, love, and support during all these years have helped me more than you can ever know. Without you, none of this would have been possible.