

Human Salvation in Early Christianity

Human salvation has been at the heart of Christian theological debate ever since the earliest centuries of Christianity. In this period, some Christians argued that because all of humanity falls in Adam, the incarnation of Christ, who is the second Adam, must also have a universal effect. Ellen Scully here presents the first historical study of early Christian theology regarding physicalist soteriology, a logic by which Christ's incarnation has universal effects independent of individual belief or consent. Analyzing the writings of Athanasius, Hilary of Poitiers, Marius Victorinus, Gregory of Nyssa, Cyril of Alexandria, and Maximus the Confessor, she offers an overview of the historical rise and fall of the theological logic of physicalist soteriology. Scully also provides an analysis of how early Christian theological debates concerning ascetism and ensoulment models have caused Christian narratives of salvation history to become individualistic, and suggests how a contemporary study of physicalist soteriology can help reverse this trend. This title is also available as Open Access on Cambridge Core.

Ellen Scully is Associate Professor of Undergraduate Theology at Seton Hall University. She has authored *Physicalist Soteriology in Hilary of Poitiers* (2015) and coedited *New Narratives for Old: The Historical Method of Reading Early Christian Theology* (2022).

Book endorsements for *Human Salvation in Early Christianity: Exploring the Theology of Physicalist Soteriology*

Ellen Scully has made a genuinely new and genuinely imaginative contribution to the study of early Christian theology. Terms such as “deification” and “participation” have become increasingly popular, but often without clear definition. Scully’s argument forces theologians – and nontheological students of early Christian soteriology – to think far more clearly about how such concepts are handled, and it does so by arguing that a knot of concepts constitutes a distinct tradition of “physicalist soteriology” within early Christian thought. Scully ably traces this knot of concepts through a set of figures, focusing on some of the most important theologians of the ever-important fourth century. All students of early Christian thought will need to engage this fascinating book.

—Lewis Ayres, Durham University

Among Paul’s most important contributions to Christian soteriology was his description of Christ as the Second Adam. Both death and deliverance from death passed to humanity through a union with and in both Adam and Jesus. This was simply a given in early Christian thought. Yet there was not an explicit attempt to explain *how*. Without such an account, the logic of Paul’s Adam typology is open to serious doubt. Ellen Scully’s rich research covers the breadth of the fourth-century “physicalist” tradition to illustrate how theologians from Marius Victorinus to Maximus the Confessor intuited the logic implicit to Paul’s claim. As such, she provides not only a valuable historical study of early Christian theology but also a vital resource for contemporary interpretations of the Pauline language – and with it the idea of human nature. She also provides an invitation to retrieve the biblical idea of corporate sin for speaking about the ravages of social inequalities and environmental degradation as well as the claim of Christian orthodoxy that through the death and resurrection of one man many might receive life.

—J. Warren Smith, Duke University

Physicalism is the most prominent soteriological theme in early Christian theology that is almost completely forgotten today. In this book Ellen Scully provides a thoughtful and careful examination of the logic of physicalism in ancient theories of salvation and highlights its significance for contemporary theology. At a time when we are being reminded more regularly than ever before of the common humanity we all share, a retrieval of this notion is to be warmly welcomed.

—Matthew Crawford, Australian Catholic University

In recent years there has been a small uptick in studies elucidating the breadth of early Christian understandings of salvation. Still, much work remains. In this fascinating text Ellen Scully pulls back the curtain on a theory of redemption that suddenly rose to prominence in the late fourth century – in, for example, Athanasius, Hilary, and Nyssen – only to disappear just as quickly by the end of the seventh century. This book is required reading for those interested in the different modes of logic at play in early soteriology and those interested in constructing contemporary soteriologies that take seriously the corporate nature of humanity.

—Anthony Briggman, Emory University

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Exploring the Theology of Physicalist Soteriology

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I have spent the last fifteen years championing early Christian physicalist soteriology. I hope that with this book, many others will join me in recognizing the historical existence and continuing value of physicalist soteriology.

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While our children might not appreciate the theological complexity of dinner-table conversation in our house, being married to another scholar of early Christianity has been my own key to success. Everything – from idea to writing to revision – benefits immeasurably from the deep mind, wealth of knowledge, and careful reading of Jason Scully.