

God's Grandest Scheme of Salvation

THE THEONOUMENON AND
THE MESSIANIC PHENOMENA

A Study in Biblical Soteriology



Pastor Baltazar A. Niangar

Pastor Emeritus, Th.B., A.B., D.D

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DEDICATION

*To the Holy Triune Lord God,
whose Grandest Scheme of Salvation
spans eternity past to eternity future
and centres on His only begotten Son,*

*To my beloved Estrella —
my queen Esther, the star of my hard life
in this sin-broken world.*

*To my firstborn son, Dr. Ellaazar,
and to my only daughter, Zarelle Grace,
whose patient love gives courage to these pages.*

*To the pastors and lay leaders of HELP, Inc.,
faithful servants who proclaimed this gospel
before it was written.*

*And to Miss Joycelyn Paulo,
whose faithful hands prepared the final manuscript.*

Soli Deo gloria.

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"Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!"

— Romans 11:33

Preface

Salvation is the grandest scheme of God. Not merely the grandest religious idea, nor the grandest theological system, nor the grandest moral program — but the grandest scheme: the *σχῆμα*, the comprehensive divine pattern and purpose that encompasses the whole of created existence from its first beginning to its final consummation.

This volume is an attempt to trace the shape of that scheme — to hold the whole of God’s saving purpose in a single view, the way a photographer holds a landscape in a single frame. The author has coined two terms to describe this total picture: the *The noumenon* (from the Greek *theos*, God; *nous*, mind; *menon*, thing), which refers to God’s eternal mind on salvation; and the *Messianic Phenomena* (from the Hebrew *massiach*, Messiah, and the Greek *phenos*, appearance), which refers to the progressive historical manifestation of that eternal purpose in and through Jesus Christ.

This is not primarily a polemical work. The debates between Supralapsarians and Infralapsarians, between Calvinists and Arminians, between paedo-baptists and credo-baptists, are real debates with real stakes — and this volume touches on them. But the deeper aim is constructive: to give the reader a biblical, Christ-centred, Spirit-illuminated map of the whole of God’s saving purpose, so that the many disputed questions about salvation can be located and evaluated within their proper context.

The method throughout is hermeneutical: the Old Testament is read as containing the New, the New as explaining the Old; the Gospels as recording what the Epistles expound; and the testimony of Jesus Christ before Pilate — “I am a king” (John 18:37) — as the key that unlocks the spirit of all prophecy (Rev. 19:10).

"For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy."

— Revelation 19:10

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Introduction

The Grandest Scheme

*"Declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done,
saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose.'"*

— Isaiah 46:10

Salvation or redemption is the grandest scheme of God because it encompasses the whole treatment of humanity's greatest problem: inherited sin and inescapable death. It is not a plan conceived in response to an emergency, not a solution improvised after the fall of Adam. It is the eternal purpose of the Holy Triune God, purposed before the foundation of the world, progressively revealed through the whole course of redemptive history, and consummated in the glorious return of the Lord Jesus Christ.

To understand the grandeur of this scheme, we must approach it from the right altitude. Viewed too closely — through the lens of a single doctrine, a single controversy, or a single generation of Church history — the scheme appears fragmentary and contested. Viewed from the altitude of eternity, from God's own vantage point, the picture becomes clear: a vast and beautiful mosaic, every piece precisely placed, every controversy eventually resolved, every saint ultimately glorified.

The author employs two conceptual tools to help the reader gain this altitude. The first is the Theonoumenon — God's eternal mind on salvation, conceived not as a temporal sequence of decisions but as an eternal, simultaneous, circular decree, like a photograph taken of the whole landscape at once rather than a drawing made line by line. The second is the Messianic Phenomena — the progressive historical unfolding of that eternal purpose through the person and work of Jesus

Christ, from His eternal election through His incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, and glorification, to the final consummation of all things.

These two tools together — the Theonoumenon and the Messianic Phenomena — provide a framework for understanding the whole of salvation: its eternal ground, its historical unfolding, its present application in the lives of believers, and its future consummation in the glory of God.

*"For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever.
Amen."*

— Romans 11:36

CHAPTER 1

Biblical Salvation

Definition and Hermeneutics

"The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy."

— Revelation 19:10

Salvation or redemption — properly understood in its full biblical scope — is so wide, so mysterious, and so full of twists and turns that it may rightly be likened to a great maze in the history of humanity: from God's creation of the universe THROUGH the course of time called History TO the great climax of Christ's glorious second coming. It may also be likened to a massive jigsaw puzzle whose pieces, scattered across the centuries of Scripture and Church history, can only be correctly reassembled by the one who has the picture on the box — and that picture is Jesus Christ Himself.

Before we can assemble the puzzle, we must define our terms. The vocabulary of salvation is rich and contested, and clarity at the level of terminology is the precondition for clarity at every other level.

A. Salvation

Salvation derives from the verb "to save" — to deliver from. But the full biblical meaning of salvation is comprehensive, not merely punitive. It is the divine deliverance of God's elect from sin and all its effects: spiritual separation from God, despair, hardship, anxiety, hopelessness, sorrow, guilt, and the ultimate consequence of death and judgment. Salvation is not merely the rescue of souls from hell. It is the restoration of the whole person — and ultimately the whole creation — into right relationship with the holy God.

"For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

— Luke 19:10

B. Sin

Sin has no single adequate etymology, but Scripture uses a cluster of terms to illuminate its nature: the Hebrew words for iniquity (moral twistedness), transgression (crossing a boundary), and rebellion (active revolt against authority); the Greek hamartia (missing the mark); and the general concepts of omission and commission in relation to God's law. At its root, sin is the creature's discontent with its creaturely lot — the primordial pride of Lucifer who said, "I will be like the Most High," and the consequent choice of Adam and Eve who reached for a knowledge and autonomy that belonged to God alone.

"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

— Romans 3:23

C. Redemption and Atonement

Redemption is the rescue from bondage through the payment of a price. The Hebrew word kaphar — to cover — underlies the Old Testament concept of atonement: the covering of sin through the blood of an innocent substitute. The first act of atonement in Scripture is God's clothing of Adam and Eve in the skins of a slain animal (Gen. 3:21) — a proto-type of the Anti-type, the Lord Jesus, the Lamb of God, whose blood covers and cleanses the sin of all who trust in Him.

The New Testament distinguishes two dimensions of Christ's redemptive work using two Greek verbs that are critically important. In 2 Peter 2:1, false teachers are described as "bought" (agoradzein) — purchased in the slave-market of sin, but left in their sin. In Acts 20:28, Christ is said to have "bought" (exagoradzein) His church — purchased in and taken completely out of the slave-market, given true spiritual freedom. This distinction supports the classic Reformed understanding of Christ's atonement as simultaneously unlimited in its sufficiency and limited in its effectual application.

"The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

— Mark 10:45

D. The Scheme — Schema

The word “scheme” transliterates the Greek schema — a word that goes beyond mere morphe (form or pattern) to denote both the form and its contents: a comprehensive, purposive outline that contains within it the full substance of what it represents. God’s “scheme” of salvation is not a contingency plan. It is the comprehensive eternal purpose of the omniscient, omnipotent, sovereign God — the THEONOUNENON, the divine mind on salvation.

E. The Hermeneutical Key

The correct interpretation (hermeneutics) and explanation (exegesis) of this grand scheme requires a Christocentric lens. As the late Dr. Oscar Cullmann argued with great force, Biblical Christology must be the central focus of theology. Christ is the one in whom “all the promises of God find their Yes” (2 Cor. 1:20). The whole of the Old Testament points to Him; the whole of the New Testament explains Him. The testimony of Jesus Christ is the spirit of prophecy (Rev. 19:10): not merely His words about Himself, but His very person and work as the fulfillment of all that the prophets foretold.

"For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory."

— 2 Corinthians 1:20

Furthermore, the Bible must be interpreted by itself — Scripture interpreting Scripture — through the first intended meaning of the writers under their one Author, the Holy Spirit. The student who would enter this maze must first be a regenerate child of God, spiritually mature enough to receive the Spirit’s illumination, as the author of Hebrews teaches (Heb. 5:14–6:1). Only then, and only through Christ, can the great puzzle of salvation be correctly reassembled.

Reflection Questions — Chapter 1

- 1.** What is the difference between a merely punitive understanding of salvation (rescue from hell) and the comprehensive biblical understanding (restoration of the whole person into right relationship with God)? How does this difference shape the way you understand and proclaim the gospel?
- 2.** What is the significance of the two Greek words for “buy” in Acts 20:28 and 2 Peter 2:1? How does this distinction illuminate the Reformed understanding of unlimited/limited atonement?
- 3.** How does a Christocentric hermeneutic — reading all of Scripture as pointing to and being explained by Jesus Christ — change your approach to reading and interpreting the Bible?

CHAPTER 2

The Fourfold Image of God in Mankind

"So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them."

— Genesis 1:27

The doctrine of the *imago Dei* — the image of God in humanity — is not merely an anthropological statement. It is a soteriological one. To understand what salvation restores, we must first understand what sin has damaged. And to understand what sin has damaged, we must understand what God originally created in His image. The image of God in humanity is spiritually fourfold: mental, moral, modal, and managerial.

First: The Mental Aspect — Wisdom and Knowledge

Human beings are created with minds that bear the image of the divine mind: the capacity for wisdom, for knowledge, for reasoning, for understanding the created world and its Creator. This mental dimension of the *imago Dei* is displayed supremely in Christ Himself, who as the incarnate Son grew in wisdom and stature (Luke 2:52), who was filled always with true spiritual wisdom by the Holy Spirit, and who became for us “wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption” (1 Cor. 1:30).

"And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man."

— Luke 2:52

The twelve apostles, formed by years of life with the incarnate Son, became the embodiment of this mental aspect of the image of God restored: men who once did not understand were taught by the Spirit to

know and proclaim the whole counsel of God. Salvation, in this dimension, is the restoration of the human mind to its proper orientation — toward truth, toward wisdom, toward the knowledge of God.

Second: The Moral Aspect — Holiness and Righteousness

The moral dimension of the *imago Dei* means that human beings were created as moral agents — capable of distinguishing good from evil, accountable for their choices, and called to reflect the holiness and righteousness of their Creator. Holiness, in its deepest sense, is wholeness or integrity — the undivided moral perfection of God expressed in creaturely form.

"Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!"

— Isaiah 6:3

Righteousness refers specifically to God's dealings in justice — His just condemnation of fallen angels and humans in reprobation, and His just justification of His church, the elect, through the atoning work of His Son. The restoration of the moral image is the work of sanctification — the Spirit's progressive conforming of the believer to the moral character of God, culminating in the perfect holiness of the glorified state.

Third: The Modal Aspect — The Life of Maleness and Femaleness

God has eternal and perfect maleness and femaleness — not in a biological or sexual sense, but in the sense that the fullness of human personhood, as created in His image, reflects something of the richness and diversity of His own personal Being. Scripture speaks of God in both masculine and feminine figures: as a mighty warrior, as a mother eagle teaching her young to fly, as a woman nursing her child, as a hen gathering her chicks under her wings.

The wrath of God reveals something more than humanly masculine in its intensity and justice; the longsuffering of God reveals something more than humanly feminine in its patience and tenderness. Together,

these scriptural figures point to a God whose personal richness transcends the categories of human gender even while they are reflected in those categories. Salvation restores this modal dimension of the imago Dei: the redeemed person is restored to the fullness of human personhood as God originally designed it.

Fourth: The Managerial Aspect — Lordship and Servanthood

The managerial dimension of the imago Dei reflects God's own exercise of authority over His creation. Humanity was created to exercise dominion — to be God's vice-regent in the created world, managing and stewarding it under His authority. This dominion is expressed in two modes that correspond to the two Greek titles of Christ: despotes (ruling king) and kurios (redeemer king and kinsman). Christ is the Visible Image of the Invisible God (Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:3) who demonstrates what true managerial lordship looks like: not domination but service, not self-exaltation but self-giving.

"Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant."

— Philippians 2:5–7

Salvation in this dimension is the restoration of the human calling to dominion-through-service: the recovery of the vocation to be God's wise and faithful stewards in the world, no longer distorted by the pride and self-assertion of the fall, but shaped by the pattern of the Servant-Lord who came not to be served but to serve and to give His life a ransom for many (Mark 10:45).

Reflection Questions — Chapter 2

1. Which of the four dimensions of the imago Dei — mental, moral, modal, managerial — do you find most illuminating for your understanding of salvation? Which do you find most challenging?

- 2.** How does the modal dimension of the imago Dei (God's "maleness and femaleness" expressed in Scripture through multiple figures) challenge both a purely masculine and a purely feminine understanding of God?
- 3.** In what ways does your own life reflect the managerial calling of the imago Dei? Where does that calling need to be more fully surrendered to the pattern of Christ's servant-lordship?

CHAPTER 3

The Theonoumenon

God's Eternal Mind on Salvation

"I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end."

— Revelation 22:13

The Theonoumenon is the author's coined term for God's eternal mind on salvation — from the Greek *theos* (God), *nous* (mind), and *menon* (thing). It refers not to a sequence of divine decisions unfolding in time but to the eternal, simultaneous, comprehensive divine purpose that encompasses the whole of redemptive history in a single, unbroken act of divine knowing and willing.

God declares through the Prophet Isaiah: "Declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done" (Isa. 46:10). Note the direction: from the end to the beginning. God does not plan the way humans plan — from a starting point toward a hoped-for destination. He declares the end first, because He is eternal and His purpose is eternal. The Theonoumenon is therefore not a line drawn from a beginning to an end, but a circle: the Alpha and the Omega together, the beginning and the end simultaneously present to the eternal mind of God.

"Declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose.'"

— Isaiah 46:10

A. The Twelve Points of the Theonoumenon

Viewed from the human perspective, which is conditioned by the sequence of time and the unfolding of history, the Theonoumenon has

twelve identifiable points on the circumference of its eternal circle. These twelve points — moving counter-clockwise from the divine perspective, or clockwise from the historical perspective — together encompass the whole of God's saving purpose:

1. **Election** — Purposed in election, apparently read in Ephesians 1:3–5. The elect are chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world.
2. **Creation** — God's creation of the universe and of humanity in His image (Gen. 1:1; Col. 1:16; Acts 17:24). The creation is the theatre of redemption.
3. **Fall to Sin** — Mankind's fall through Adam (Rom. 5:12; 3:23). The occasion of redemption.
4. **Messianic Prophecy** — The promises and prophecies of the coming Redeemer, from the Proto-Evangelium of Genesis 3:15 through Isaiah 53 and the whole prophetic witness.
5. **Incarnation** — The personalization of the scheme in Christ's incarnation — the Word becoming flesh (John 1:14; Phil. 2:5–10; 1 Tim. 3:16).
6. **Crucifixion** — The procurement and provision of salvation through Christ's atoning death — the centre and focus of the entire scheme (John 1:14–18; Acts 20:28; Isa. 53:7–11; Rev. 13:8).
7. **Preaching of the Gospel** — The proclamation of Christ crucified, risen, and coming again (1 Cor. 15:1–5; Acts 8:4; Acts 17:30; Matt. 28:18–20).
8. **Justification** — The forensic declaration of righteousness for all who believe (Rom. 3:24; 5:1).
9. **Sanctification** — The progressive transformation of believers into the image of Christ by the Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 3:18; Phil. 1:6; 2:12–13).
10. **Transformation / Perfection** — The completed renewal of the believer at death or at Christ's return (Phil. 3:20–21; 1 Thess. 4:15–17).

11. **Glorification** — The final glorification of the redeemed with Christ (Rom. 8:29–30; Rev. 21:3–4).
12. **The Father's Glory** — The return of all glory to the Father through the Son, the ultimate end of all things (Phil. 2:11; John 17:1).

"And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified."

— Romans 8:30

B. All Points Point to the Centre

Every point on the circumference of the Theonoumenon points toward the centre: the Lord Jesus Christ. He is eternal — “Before Abraham was, I am” (John 8:58). He is the one in whom all things hold together (Col. 1:17). He is the one to whom all Scripture bears witness (John 5:39). He is the one who declares Himself to be the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end (Rev. 22:13).

This is the Christocentric logic of the Theonoumenon: not merely that Christ is important within the scheme of salvation, but that He is the scheme. The whole of God’s eternal purpose is summed up in Him. To know Christ is to know the Theonoumenon. To proclaim Christ is to proclaim the whole counsel of God.

"He is before all things, and in him all things hold together."

— Colossians 1:17

Reflection Questions — Chapter 3

1. The Theonoumenon is described as a circle rather than a line — God’s eternal mind on salvation as a simultaneous whole rather than a sequential plan. How does this understanding differ from the way you typically think about God’s “plan” of salvation? What difference does it make?

- 2.** Which of the twelve points of the Theonoumenon is most vivid and meaningful in your own Christian experience? Which is most remote or abstract? What might that reveal about the areas of your theological understanding that need development?
- 3.** How does the statement “all points point to Christ” shape your understanding of the unity of Scripture, the nature of preaching, and the goal of Christian living?

CHAPTER 4

Salvation and the Christian World-Life View

"For in him we live and move and have our being."

— Acts 17:28

A Christian World-Life View is the comprehensive account of reality — of God, creation, humanity, sin, redemption, and consummation — that the Christian faith generates in those who hold it seriously. It is not a luxury for the theologically advanced; it is a necessity for every Christian who wishes to live faithfully and think clearly in the complex world God has made. And it flows directly from a correct understanding of God's grandest scheme of salvation.

The author structures the Christian World-Life View as a series of concentric circles, each encompassing and giving shape to those within it.

A. The Outer Circumference: Divinity

The outermost circumference of the Christian World-Life View is what the author calls Divinity — the four great doctrines that govern everything within them:

1. **Divine Decree** — God's eternal sovereign purpose, declared in Isaiah 46:10 — not a response to events but the ground of all events.
2. **Divine Creation** — God's creation of the universe ex nihilo, celebrated in Genesis 1:1, Colossians 1:16, and Acts 17:24. The

creation is good, and God's redemptive purpose for it is comprehensive.

3. **Divine Providence** — God's continuous governance of all things for the good of His people and the glory of His name, taught in Psalm 16; Acts 17:28; Romans 8:28; 11:28–36.
4. **Theodicy** — God's righteous governance in the face of evil, treated in Romans 9:14–29. He is not the author of evil; He is the sovereign Governor who works even evil toward His ultimate purposes.

"And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose."

— Romans 8:28

B. The Controlling Centre: Biblicality

At the controlling centre of the Christian World-Life View stands Biblicality — the fourfold commitment to the biblical standard in all things:

1. **Biblical Revelation** — The authority, inerrancy, and sufficiency of Holy Scripture (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:20–21).
2. **The Biblical God** — The Triune God revealed in Scripture as Father, Son, and Spirit — distinct from all human projections and all pagan alternatives (Heb. 1:1–3; 1 Tim. 3:16; John 1:1–4, 14–18).
3. **The Biblical Christ** — The Christ of the Scriptures in His full person and work — fully divine, fully human, crucified, risen, and coming again (Phil. 2:6–11).
4. **The Biblical Gospel** — The gospel as Paul received and transmitted it: Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, was buried, and was raised on the third day (1 Cor. 15:1–5).

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes."

— Romans 1:16

C. The Four Quadrants: The Complementary Subjects

Surrounding the controlling centre are the four quadrants of human existence, each of which is addressed and transformed by the gospel:

1. **Intellectuality and Wisdom** — The life of the mind and its proper ordering under the lordship of Christ. Every intellectual discipline has its place within the Christian World-Life View when submitted to the authority of Scripture and the wisdom of God.
2. **Physicality** — The body and the physical creation, affirmed as God's good creation and destined for resurrection and renewal, not escape or destruction.
3. **Sociability and Society** — The social dimensions of human life — family, community, culture, economics, politics — all of which fall under the comprehensive lordship of Christ.
4. **Spirituality** — The life of the spirit, formed by the Word and the Spirit, expressing itself in worship, prayer, and holy living.

"So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God."

— 1 Corinthians 10:31

The Christian who understands salvation in its full scope — as the Theonoumenon, God's grand eternal scheme — will naturally develop a Christian World-Life View that is comprehensive, coherent, and Christ-centred. Such a person will not be content with a faith that addresses only the "religious" dimension of life; she will bring the whole of her existence under the lordship of Christ and the authority of Scripture, knowing that "in him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28).

Reflection Questions — Chapter 4

1. In what areas of your life has your Christian World-Life View been most fully developed? In what areas has it been least applied? What would it look like to bring those under-developed areas more fully under the lordship of Christ?

- 2.** The author places Biblical Revelation, the Biblical God, the Biblical Christ, and the Biblical Gospel at the controlling centre of the Christian World-Life View. How do these four commitments function as a corrective against the distortions of contemporary Christianity?
- 3.** How does the doctrine of Divine Providence — God's continuous, wise, and good governance of all things — shape your response to the suffering, injustice, and confusion that you encounter in the world around you?

CHAPTER 5

The High Priestly Prayer and Christian Unity

"I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me."

— John 17:20–21

The High Priestly Prayer of John 17 is the heart of Christ's intercessory work on behalf of His people. Prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane on the night of His arrest, it looks both backward — to the glory He had with the Father before the world was created (John 17:5) — and forward — to the consummated glory that He will share with all those the Father has given Him (John 17:24). It is the fullest expression in the Gospels of the theological framework that Paul will later develop in Ephesians 4.

The unity for which Christ prays is not an organizational unity — not the result of denominational mergers or ecumenical commissions. It is a spiritual, mystical, trinitarian unity: the unity of those who are genuinely in Christ, sharing in the mutual indwelling of the Father and the Son by the power of the Holy Spirit.

A. The Threefold Unity of Ephesians 4

Paul's exposition in Ephesians 4:3–13 develops the same threefold structure that undergirds Christ's prayer in John 17:

1. **Twofold Practical Spiritual Unity (v. 3)** — The unity we are enjoined to maintain — the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. This is the present, practical expression of the spiritual reality we share in Christ.

2. **Sevenfold Present Positional Unity (vv. 4–6)** — One body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all. These seven unities are not aspirations; they are present realities to be recognized, celebrated, and built upon, even amid all our differences of interpretation and practice.
3. **Prospective Eschatological Unity (vv. 7–13)** — The perfect maturity and unity toward which the whole Church is moving by the work of the Spirit through the ministry of apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers.

"...until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ."

— Ephesians 4:13

B. Non-Denominational in Spirit, Denominational in Fellowship

The practical implication of this understanding of Christian unity is the author's carefully defined position: Christians ought to be non-denominational in attitude toward fellow believers — not highly opinionated, biased, or easily offended by human doctrinal positions — while remaining denominational in fellowship, attending and serving a particular local church for the sake of discipleship, accountability, and growth.

This is not indifferentism. The author is clear that the local church one attends ought to be evangelical, reforming and reformed, practicing church discipline, concerned for the surrounding community's need of Christ, and showing forth practical holiness and love. But within that framework, the spirit of humble, charitable engagement with fellow believers across denominational lines is the fruit of a correct understanding of the Theonoumenon — the recognition that God's electing purpose reaches beyond any single denomination to encompass all who are truly in Christ.

"Great peace have those who love your law; nothing can make them stumble."

— Psalm 119:165

Reflection Questions — Chapter 5

1. How does Christ's prayer in John 17 — that His people would be "one as we are one" — challenge your own attitude toward Christians in other denominations or theological traditions?
2. What is the difference between the sevenfold positional unity described in Ephesians 4:4–6 and the practical unity we are called to maintain in verse 3? How does confusing these two lead to either an unrealistic utopianism or a lazy indifference?
3. What qualities does the author identify as marks of a healthy local church? Do these describe your own congregation? Where is there room for growth?

CHAPTER 6

The Scheme of God

Theonoumenon and Messianic Phenomena

"He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you."

— 1 Peter 1:20

Without the scheme of salvation or redemption orchestrated by the Holy Triune Lord God — with the Father behind the divine purpose, the eternal Son as the centre and focus and truth of that purpose, and the Holy Spirit as the personal power to execute it — no human being, however wise or intelligent, could ever fathom the depth of the riches of God's wisdom and knowledge. The Theonoumenon is, by definition, beyond human ingenuity. It can only be known because God has been pleased to reveal it.

The Messianic Phenomena is the author's complementary term for the progressive historical unfolding of the Theonoumenon through the person and work of Jesus Christ — coined from the Hebrew *massach* (Messiah) and the Greek *phenos* (appearance) and *menon* (thing). It refers to the whole sequence of Messianic appearances, typologies, prophecies, and fulfillments through which the eternal divine purpose has made itself progressively manifest in history.

A. The Eleven Dimensions of the Messianic Phenomena

The Messianic Phenomena, viewed historically, encompasses eleven successive dimensions from creation to consummation:

1. **Election** — The Father's eternal election of the Church in Christ (Eph. 1:3–5).
2. **Creation** — The world created as the theatre for the unfolding of redemption.
3. **Fall to Sin** — The occasion that made redemption necessary (Rom. 5:12).
4. **Messianic Prophecy** — The progressive unveiling of the Coming One through the prophets (Isa. 53; Gen. 3:15).
5. **Incarnation** — The eternal Son taking on human flesh (Phil. 2:5–10; John 1:14; 1 Tim. 3:16).
6. **Crucifixion and Resurrection** — The procurement of salvation, the defeat of death, the vindication of the Son (Mark 10:45; Heb. 9:22; 1 Cor. 15:12–20).
7. **Gospel Proclamation** — The announcement of the accomplished work to all nations (Acts 8:4; Matt. 28:18–20).
8. **Justification and Sanctification** — The application of redemption to the lives of God's people by the Spirit (Rom. 3:24; 2 Cor. 3:18).
9. **Perseverance** — The preservation of the Church until Christ's return (Phil. 1:6; 2 Pet. 1:3–11).
10. **Parousia** — The glorious bodily return of Christ for His people (1 Thess. 4:15–17; Rev. 19).
11. **Consummation** — The final glorification of all the redeemed with Christ, the judgment of the wicked, and the new creation (Rev. 21:3–4).

*"He who was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels,
proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory."
— 1 Timothy 3:16*

B. The Ordo Salutis — The Order of Salvation

The *ordo salutis* is the theological account of the order in which the benefits of Christ's redemption are applied to the individual believer. The Reformed tradition orders these benefits as follows: election, effectual calling, regeneration, faith and repentance, justification, adoption, sanctification, perseverance, and glorification. This is not a temporal sequence, as if each step follows the previous one in time; it is a logical ordering that reflects the relationships among the various aspects of salvation.

The author insists that salvation is settled objectively in Christ — in His redemptive death at the Cross and glorious bodily resurrection — and not in the decision of the sinner. The gospel is therefore to be proclaimed as a divine commission, not offered as an invitation for sinners to decide whether to accept it. God calls effectually; His sheep hear His voice (John 10:11–18). This does not diminish human responsibility; it grounds it in divine grace.

"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand."

— John 10:27–28

Reflection Questions — Chapter 6

1. The author distinguishes between the Theonoumenon (God's eternal mind on salvation) and the Messianic Phenomena (the historical unfolding of that purpose). How does keeping both in view guard against both a cold abstractness and a shortsighted historicism in one's understanding of salvation?
2. How does the *ordo salutis* — the order of salvation — help you understand your own Christian experience? Can you trace these elements in your own journey of faith?
3. The author argues that salvation is to be proclaimed as a divine commission, not offered as a human invitation. What is the practical difference between these two postures in evangelism? Which more faithfully reflects the biblical pattern of apostolic preaching?

CHAPTER 7

The Seven Churches and the Course of Redemption

"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

— Revelation 2:7

The seven letters to the seven churches in Revelation 2–3 are among the most practically urgent passages in all of Scripture. They are addressed to seven actual congregations in Asia Minor — real communities of real believers wrestling with real challenges — and they are simultaneously representative of the spiritual conditions of individual Christians and Christian churches across the whole span of Church history. Seven is the number of completeness; these seven churches represent the complete picture of Christ's Church in its varied spiritual conditions.

Each letter follows a recognizable pattern: Christ identifies Himself by a title that speaks to that congregation's specific condition; He declares "I know your works"; He commends what is praiseworthy, rebukes what is deficient, warns of consequences, and promises rewards to those who overcome. The pattern reveals a Christ who is intimately acquainted with the actual state of His churches — not a distant Sovereign but an engaged, caring, searching Lord.

The Seven Churches and Their Spiritual Profiles

1. **Ephesus — Orthodoxy Without Love (Rev. 2:1–7)** — Commended for doctrinal fidelity and labor; rebuked for losing their first love. A sobering warning to churches that are

theologically sound but evangelistically cold. The lesson: orthodoxy without love is a body without warmth.

2. **Smyrna — Faithful Under Persecution (Rev. 2:8–11)** — Praised without criticism; comforted in the face of external opposition. The pattern of persecuted Christians in communist and Islamic regimes throughout Church history.
3. **Pergamum — Perseverance Compromised by False Teaching (Rev. 2:12–17)** — Commended for holding to Christ; rebuked for tolerating the doctrines of Balaam and the Nicolaitans. The lesson: genuine perseverance cannot coexist with doctrinal indifference.
4. **Thyatira — Love and Service Mixed with Tolerated Heresy (Rev. 2:18–29)** — Praised for love, faith, service, and patient endurance; condemned for tolerating a false prophetess. The pattern of the medieval church — genuine devotion mixed with deep doctrinal corruption.
5. **Sardis — Reputation for Life, Reality of Death (Rev. 3:1–6)** — “You have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead.” The pattern of post-Reformation churches that have retained the forms of the Reformation while losing its spirit and power.
6. **Philadelphia — Faithful and Fruitful (Rev. 3:7–13)** — Praised without criticism; encouraged and promised an open door. The pattern of mission-minded, gospel-oriented churches throughout the missionary age.
7. **Laodicea — Lukewarm and Self-Satisfied (Rev. 3:14–22)** — “You are neither hot nor cold.” The sobering portrait of a prosperous, comfortable church that has confused material blessing with spiritual health. Christ stands at the door and knocks — addressing true believers within the congregation who have grown complacent.

“Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.”

— Revelation 3:20

Summing up Revelation 2–3, Christ praises the churches in Smyrna and Philadelphia without negative criticism. He praises but also rebukes the rest — all except those in Laodicea who are so thoroughly lukewarm that His rebuke is the most urgent of all. Yet even to Laodicea, He does not give up; He stands at the door and knocks. This is the character of the redeeming Lord: fiercely honest about the condition of His Church, and infinitely patient in His pursuit of those within it.

Reflection Questions — Chapter 7

1. Which of the seven churches does your own congregation most resemble? What does Christ's letter to that church commend, and what does it challenge?
2. The Sardis church had "a reputation of being alive" while actually being dead. What are the warning signs of this condition in a congregation? How is it diagnosed, and how is it addressed?
3. Christ's promise in Revelation 3:20 is often used as an invitation to non-Christians to "invite Jesus into their hearts." But in context, it is addressed to a lukewarm Christian congregation. How does understanding the context change the application of this passage?

CHAPTER 8

The Christian World-and-Life View Summarized

"For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority."

— Colossians 2:9–10

Having traced the grandest scheme of God's salvation through its biblical definitions, its eternal structure as the Theonoumenon, its historical unfolding as the Messianic Phenomena, its comprehensive framework as the Christian World-Life View, its communal expression in the Church, and its varied historical manifestations in the seven churches of Revelation — we are now in a position to summarize the whole and to draw out the personal and communal implications that follow.

A. The Three Key Concepts Revisited

The three key concepts that structure this volume are: the Theonoumenon (God's eternal mind on salvation), the Messianic Phenomena (the historical unfolding of that purpose through Christ), and the Christian Personal Existence and Experience (the individual believer's living encounter with the saving work of God).

These three are not sequential stages but complementary perspectives on the single reality of God's salvation. The Theonoumenon gives us God's eternal view — the bird's-eye perspective from which the whole scheme is simultaneously visible. The Messianic Phenomena gives us the historical view — the progressive unfolding of that eternal purpose in real events and real persons at real times. The Christian Personal Existence and Experience gives us the existential view

— the encounter of the individual believer with the living Christ through the Spirit and the Word.

"I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."

— Galatians 2:20

B. The Threefold Understanding of the Church

The three Greek words for church illuminate the comprehensive dimensions of Christian community within God's saving scheme:

1. **Kuriakon / Kuriake** — That which belongs to the Lord — the community of those purchased by the blood of Christ and therefore owned by Him (Acts 20:28; John 10:11–17).
2. **Ekklesia** — The called-out people of God — those whom the Father has given to the Son, who hear His voice and follow Him (John 10:15–16; Eph. 1:3–5).
3. **Koinonia** — The fellowship of the called-out, belonging people — the community of shared life in Christ, expressing itself in mutual love, worship, service, and witness (1 John 1:3, 7).

"...that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ."

— 1 John 1:3

C. Simply Christians

The destination of this whole study is a simple but profound conclusion: those who understand God's grandest scheme of salvation become simply Christians — believers and disciples who are non-denominational in their attitude toward fellow believers (not highly opinionated, biased, or easily offended by human doctrines) while remaining faithful members of a particular local fellowship for the sake of discipleship, accountability, and growth.

This is not indifference to truth. It is the fruit of seeing truth from the altitude of the Theonoumenon — the recognition that God’s electing grace reaches beyond any single tradition, that the Church is one Body with many members, and that the great peace of Psalm 119:165 is the inheritance of all who love God’s law, in whatever tradition God has placed them.

"Great peace have those who love your law; nothing can make them stumble."

— Psalm 119:165

Reflection Questions — Chapter 8

1. How does the concept of “simply Christians” — non-denominational in spirit, denominational in fellowship — differ from either religious indifferentism on the one hand or sectarian exclusivism on the other?
2. The Eternal Security of salvation is objective and in God alone; the Assurance of salvation is subjective and grows through Christian maturity. Do you have assurance of your salvation? What biblical grounds does the author point to for that assurance?
3. How does the comprehensive vision of God’s grandest scheme of salvation — the Theonoumenon — change the way you think about your own place in Church history, your denomination, and your local congregation?

Conclusion

Great Peace — Yahweh Shalom

"Great peace have those who love your law; nothing can make them stumble."

— Psalm 119:165

We have reached the end of a long journey — and arrived, as all genuine theological journeys must, at worship. The basic knowledge for all sound philosophy, all true science, and all praiseworthy art is the assertion that there is the Holy Loving Triune God, the Lord over all existence. The climax of that basic knowledge is the same Triune Lord who is also the Saviour, the Redeemer, the Author of the grandest scheme in the universe: the salvation of a people for Himself from every tribe and tongue and nation.

Then, and only then, having understood something of this grandest scheme — having traced its eternal structure as the Theonoumenon, its historical unfolding as the Messianic Phenomena, its comprehensive framework as the Christian World-Life View, its communal expression in the Church, and its ultimate destination in the glorification of the redeemed with Christ — we have reached the great peace that our Lord declares in Psalm 119:165.

"Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

— Romans 5:1

This is the peace from God, spoken of in Romans 5:1 and Romans 8:1–4. It is the peace of the God of Peace, our eternal Shalom, commended in Philippians 4:9. It is the answer, at last, to the Heidelberg Catechism's opening question and answer: "What is your only comfort

in life and in death? That I am not my own, but belong — body and soul, in life and in death — to my faithful Saviour, Jesus Christ.”

We are truly comforted in Him — our Yahweh, our Jehovah Shalom. Not because we have resolved all the theological debates, not because we have arrived at a complete systematic theology, not because we have figured out every puzzle of the divine decree. But because we belong to the One who has already accomplished, in His eternal mind and in His historical death and resurrection, the grandest scheme that has ever been conceived: the salvation of sinners for the glory of God.

"Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."

— Revelation 21:3–4

Soli Deo gloria.

To God alone be the glory.

Personal Questions and Challenges

The following questions are offered as an invitation to bring the theological vision of this volume from the page into daily life. The grandest scheme of God is not merely a theological framework to be understood; it is a reality to be lived.

On Salvation and Hermeneutics

1. How does a comprehensive understanding of salvation — as deliverance from the full range of sin's consequences, not merely from hell — change the way you share the gospel with others?
2. Have you embraced a Christocentric hermeneutic in your own reading of Scripture? What would it mean to read every passage of the Bible as ultimately pointing to and being explained by Jesus Christ?
3. What is the distinction between “evangelism” (the doctrine of the gospel) and “evangelization” (the practice of proclaiming it)? How does getting this distinction right shape the way you engage with unbelievers?

On the Theonoumenon and Messianic Phenomena

4. The Theonoumenon is God's eternal, simultaneous, circular decree of salvation — not a sequential plan but a comprehensive purpose. How does this understanding change the way you think about

unanswered prayer, providential setbacks, and the slow progress of the kingdom?

5. Which of the eleven or twelve points of the Messianic Phenomena is most personally meaningful to you in your present season of Christian life? How does meditating on that point deepen your gratitude and hope?
6. The author argues that salvation is objectively settled in Christ, and that the eternal security of the believer is grounded in God alone. Does this truth produce in you assurance or presumption? What is the difference?

On the Christian World-Life View

7. What are the four components of the outer circumference of the Christian World-Life View (Divinity), and how do they function as a comprehensive framework for understanding reality? Which of the four is most under-developed in your own thinking?
8. The author advocates for being non-denominational in spirit while denominational in fellowship. What does this mean in practice for your own relationship to your local church and to Christians in other traditions?
9. Which of the seven churches of Revelation 2–3 best describes your spiritual condition at this point in your Christian life? What is Christ’s specific word to that church, and how does it apply to you personally?

On the Great Peace

10. The “great peace” of Psalm 119:165 is promised to those who love God’s law. Do you experience this peace? If not, what obstacles — unresolved sin, unbelief, competing loyalties — are preventing you from receiving it?

- 11.** The Heidelberg Catechism's opening question asks: "What is your only comfort in life and in death?" Can you answer this question with the confidence and the specificity that the answer requires? If not, what is missing?
- 12.** Having read this volume, what is the one theological truth that has most enlarged your understanding of God's grandest scheme of salvation? How will you allow that truth to change the way you live in the coming weeks?

Scripture Index

The following index lists every Scripture passage cited or expounded in this volume, organized by biblical book in canonical order.

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About the Author

Pastor Baltazar A. Niangar is a Pastor Emeritus who holds the degrees of Th.B. (Bachelor of Theology), A.B. (Bachelor of Arts), and D.D. (Doctor of Divinity). He has devoted his life and ministry to the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the rigorous theological formation of God's people, and the equipping of pastoral leaders for faithful and effective ministry in church and society.

Dr. Niangar served for many years as a pastor and theological educator and has been a central figure in the work of Holistic Enhancement for Lay-leaders and Pastors (HELP, Inc.) — a parachurch ministry committed to equipping the whole people of God for faithful service across every sphere of life. His monthly theological lectures to the HELP, Inc. fellowship, delivered over many years to pastors and lay leaders across multiple contexts, have formed the primary seedbed from which the volumes in the Niangar Theological Library have grown.

The present volume is the sixth in the Niangar Theological Library, a series of works published through Crossway that represents the range and depth of Dr. Niangar's theological vision. The previous volumes in the series are:

Spiritual Unity and Personal Diversity in Christ

Why God Did Decree and Allow Evil to Exist

What the Christian Church Should Be

The Reformed Theological Paradigm

The Holy Loving Triune Lord God

God's Grandest Scheme of Salvation

His theological formation reflects sustained engagement with the whole of the Reformed and evangelical tradition, from the Church Fathers through the magisterial Reformers to the modern Reformed theologians. Among those whose thought has most shaped his own are John Calvin, Abraham Kuyper, Louis Berkhof, Benjamin B. Warfield, Oscar Cullmann, Herman Dooyeweerd, Karl Barth, Paul Jewett, Francis Schaeffer, R.C. Sproul, and Ravi Zacharias. Of special importance for the present volume is the late Dr. Oscar Cullmann, whose insistence on a Christocentric reading of the whole of Scripture has most directly shaped the author's conception of the Messianic Phenomena.

Dr. Niangar is the father of Dr. Ellazar and Zarelle Grace. He is sustained in all his labors by the love and encouragement of his beloved wife, Estrella — his queen Esther, the star of his life. He continues to preach, teach, write, and intercede for the Church of Jesus Christ, until the day when the grandest scheme of salvation reaches its glorious consummation and faith gives way to the perfect vision of the God who planned it all from before the foundation of the world.

Soli Deo gloria.