

The Danger of the Confluence of Neoplatonism and Christianity for Biblical Teachings on Salvation

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Abstract

This paper argues that Neoplatonism's aim to merge Greek Philosophy and Christianity was not without its impact on the biblical concept of salvation. This confluence presupposes a cosmic order of existence according to which the physical is of a lower order of reality than the non-physical. On the other hand, Christianity is based on Jesus Christ and the Bible, where God, depicted as personal, is both beyond this world and present in it. Neoplatonism views salvation as the soul merging with the One, a concept that is difficult to explain and stands in stark contrast to the biblical understanding of the same themes. The paper concludes by highlighting the relevance and danger of Neoplatonism on Christian believers, underscoring the weight of this argument.

Introduction

The fusion of Neoplatonism with Christianity was one of the most critical developments in Western philosophy. Augustine influenced Christian thought.¹ The ancient Greek philosophy called Neoplatonism asserts that the universe emanates from (the One), which is unspeakable: It presupposes some cosmic order of existence according to which the physical is considered inferior nature than non-physical nature.² Christianity, on the other hand

¹ Brian Gronewoller, "Augustine of Hippo," *Great Christian Jurists and Legal Collections in the First Millenium* (2019): 266-282. https://www.academia.edu/download/62296551/Gronewoller-2019-Augustine_of_Hippo.pdf.

² Jan Opsomer, "The Integration of Aristotelian Physics in a Neoplatonic Context: Proclus on Movers and Divisibility," in *Physics and Philosophy of Nature in Greek Neoplatonism*, (Brill, 2009), 189-229, <https://magrathea.endchan.net:8443/.media/d6fde386a424e3c694891733ea14fdd3-applicationpdf#page=196>.

is centered and founded upon Jesus Christ as found in the Bible wherein God hence revealed both personally beyond Creation yet immanent within it.³

Saint Augustine, one of the most important Christian theologians and philosophers in general terms, was another author who borrowed significantly from Neoplatonist thought.⁴ We see him working with these thoughts in his writings about God and salvation, for example. Dogmatic belief in eternal and unchanging Supreme Being: echo of this doctrinal dualism is to be seen in Augustine's robust mystical doctrine that God must necessarily possess "that which he could not change from, since it was necessary for earth never would return him thence" the notion also figures markedly into his view of salvation as being human soul merging with the One. This synthesis has enormously influenced the course of Christian theology and shaped theological orthodoxy for centuries.

However, the lapsed, we must admit with honesty, are free to adopt Neoplatonism only at a heavy price — and the introduction of its prey into Christianity has also more than ample vice. The embedding of Neoplatonic concepts into the exegesis of Scripture becomes a perversion of the Christian faith, including salutary doctrines.⁵ For Augustine, salvation involves the soul being reintegrated with a transcendent divinity that is not of this world. Again, on the Bible's end of things, we have a God who exist outside history, yet within it, He works within time. This biblical idea is

³ Ravi Zacharias, *Jesus Among other Gods: The Absolute Claims of the Christian Message* (Thomas Nelson, 2002), viii, 125. <http://www.cgygfellowship.com/Topical/AmongOtherGods.pdf>.

⁴ Sundar J. M. Brown, "Saint Augustine of Hippo," https://www.academia.edu/41628113/Considering_St_Augustine_of_Hippo?auto=download&auto_download_source=social-news.

⁵ Richard R. Hopkins, *How Greek Philosophy Corrupted the Christian Concept of God* (Cedar Fort Publishing & Media, 2023), <https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=Tx2uEAAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PT13&dq=When+Neoplatonic+ideas+are+introduced+into+the+interpretation+of+scripture+they+can+actually+corrupt+the+very+fundamentals+of+Christian+belief+including+the+concepts+of+salvation&ots=cts5LfEDg7&sig=ggCGkn9tWGhguJO-vh2bLzVbMEQ>.

in danger of being erased by the work done later, especially that interaction between Neoplatonism and Christianity, which results first in Augustine (with his more abstract if not more rationalist notions) but then also throughout history as essence-talk seeks to trump person-relational salvific truths.

This article considers the implications of identifying Neoplatonism with orthodox Christianity, asking how deeply Neoplatonist Augustine's theology was and what other dangers this synthesis poses to scriptural understandings of salvation. Let's have a brief overview of Neoplatonism.

Plotinus Contribution to Neoplatonism

Plotinus, often hailed as the pioneer of Neoplatonism, drew significant inspiration from his study of Plato. This influence, a testament to the continuity and evolution of philosophical thought, is evident in his intricate spiritual cosmology, which revolves around three fundamental entities: the One, the Intelligence, and the Soul. According to Plotinus, all existence stems from the harmonious unity of these three Beings.⁶ Born in Alexandria, a hub of intellectual activity in the ancient world, Plotinus was well-versed in classical philosophy, encompassing Pythagoras, Plato, Aristotle, Epicurus, and the Stoics. He discerned Platonism as the most reliable source of truth from these diverse strands and used his interpretation of Plato's ideas as his benchmark, critiquing the rest.⁷

Plotinus's doctrine that the Soul is composed of a higher and a lower part—the higher part being unchangeable and divine, while the lower part is the seat of the personality—led him to neglect the ethics of the individual human being in favor of a mystical

⁶ Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, "Plotinus," accessed DATE?, <https://iep.utm.edu/plotinus/> What does Plotinus say about beauty? – Stylesubstancesoul.com; <https://stylesubstancesoul.com/uncategorized/what-does-plotinus-say-about-beauty/>. Retrieved November 12, 2024.

⁷ Samuel Enoch Stumpf, *Socrates to Sartre A History of Philosophy* (NY: McGraw-Hill, 1966), 125.

or esoteric doctrine of the Soul's ascent to union with its higher part.⁸ This doctrine of the Soul is modeled after the platonic two-worlds theories, which posit the existence of two separate realms: the intelligible realm of Forms, which is eternal and unchanging, and the sensible realm of the material world, which is constantly changing. The higher part of the Soul is akin to the Forms, while the lower part is associated with the material world.⁹

Plotinus, a man of profound spiritual idealism, was known for his moral and spiritual force. This force, a driving inspiration behind his work, influenced his contemporaries and profoundly impacted later thinkers, notably Augustine.¹⁰

Plotinus' philosophy was distinctive because he combined a speculative description of the system of reality with the religious doctrine of salvation.¹¹ He described the world and gave an account of its source, man's place in it, and how man overcame his moral and spiritual difficulties.¹²

Plotinus pursued a line of thought Plato outlined in his vivid myth and allegories to understand man's nature. He was struck by Plato's comprehensive treatment of reality, including his account of the Demiurge fashioning matter into the world, the doctrine that the Idea of the Good is like the rays of light emanating from the sun, the notion that the soul existence before it enters the body, is a prisoner in the body, and struggles to escape from its captivity and

⁸ Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, "Plotinus," <https://iep.utm.edu/plotinus/>.

⁹ The Philosophy of Plotinus and His Influence on Augustine and Christian Theology – excerpts from Diogenes Allen's "Philosophy for Understanding Theology," *Project Augustine*, <https://projectaugustine.com/theology/confessions-by-st-augustine/the-philosophy-of-plotinus-and-his-influence-on-augustine-and-christian-theology-excerpts-from-diogenes-allens-philosophy-for-understanding-theology/>.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Marie Guthrie, "Robert A. Heinlein: A Philosophical Novelist," (1985): <https://core.ac.uk/download/43651874.pdf>; <https://stylesubstancesoul.com/uncategorized/what-does-plotinus-say-about-beauty/>.

¹² Ibid.

return to its source, and that the actual reality is to be found not in the material but in the spiritual world. Plotinus took these basic ideas, emphasizing the central platonic theme that only the spirit is actual reality and reformulating Plato's ideas into a new form of Platonism called Neoplatonism.¹³

The God of Augustine

Among these, the most crucial influence of Neoplatonism is in St. Augustine's concept of God. Augustine's vision of the eternal, unchanging God corresponds to Neoplatonic influence on his thought. In theological and philosophical constructions, God is considered eternal due to His transcendence temporally, i.e., timelessness, or atemporal (was not from the start but has since existed) by traditional divine characteristics.¹⁴ A timeless God does not live through the past; present, and future as realities or events. However, he exists in an eternal presence of itself; thus, it holds time to be a creation and cannot subjugate the creator. The idea here is that God has the attribute of eternity, and with our common sense understanding of change having a different state for one moment than another, this makes him immutable. Timelessness is the opposite of temporality, as beings exist in time and experience it linearly. The issue of God's vastness has been a contentious one for theologians in part because it raises fundamental questions

¹³ Stumpf, 124; See also Steven L. Kimbler, "Plotinus and Aquinas on God" (MA Thesis, Ohio University, OH: June 2010), [https://etd.ohiolink.edu/acprod/odb_etd/ws/send_file/send?accession=ohiou1275619376&disposition=inline#:~:text=From%20the%20above%2C%20Plotinus%20conceives,not%20apply%20to%20it%20\(VI..](https://etd.ohiolink.edu/acprod/odb_etd/ws/send_file/send?accession=ohiou1275619376&disposition=inline#:~:text=From%20the%20above%2C%20Plotinus%20conceives,not%20apply%20to%20it%20(VI..)

¹⁴ Dirk Evers, "God, Time and Eternal Life," *The Evolution of Time: Studies of Time in Science, Anthropology, Theology* 1 (2013): 139. http://sr21.physics.auth.gr/Times/Dialogue/Evers_final.pdf.

about the role of God in this world and His ability to answer prayer as well as act within history.¹⁵

Augustine's Understanding of God

The work of Plotinus is also evident in the Neoplatonism present in Augustine's take on God. According to Augustine, God is the omnipotent Creator or the Supreme Being beyond space and time. From the beginning, Augustine knew that God was always "Ipsum Esse"—the act of existence for He created all things.¹⁶ For our present purposes, this conception of God fits neatly with the Neoplatonic image of the One as an absolute static origin that underpins all existence.

Similarly, —Augustine wonders about his immutability, simplicity, and eternity in works such as the Confessions. Augustine says, "Thou wast before all things; but how wast Thou? Not in time through any temporal motion, for God have made Thee." But even if the question is of time, Augustine wants to ensure that neither does not limit God.

Augustine also teaches simplicity among the divine attributes and God's eternity because neither can be divided into parts since "God himself" is undivided from His divinity. Augustine insisted that love, justice, and power are not "in" God but idealized with his

¹⁵ John Kenneth Mozley, *The Impassibility of God: A Survey of Christian Thought* (CUP Archive, 1926), <https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=gTE9AAAAIAAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PA1&dq=The+immensity+of+God+has+been+contentious+in+theology+since+it+impacts+the+role+of+God+in+the+world+and+His+capability+to+answer+prayer+and+act+in+history.&ots=s9IW59NuyR&sig=9d-c7k7ry-z9G5aalGjR16TIg96E>.

¹⁶ James F. Anderson, *St. Augustine and Being: A Metaphysical Essay* (Springer, 2012), <https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=NeQl-BAAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PA1&dq=Augustine+always+referred+to+God+as+the+%E2%80%9CIPsum+Esse,%E2%80%9D+the+act+of+existence+since+He+was+the+one+responsible+for+the+existence+of+all+things&ots=rWM7szjA9A&sig=4nwJc37-BDuy8tTtlKKc9GsZRBI>.

being; they are simply “God,” equivalent to the divine essence.¹⁷ This means that God is not only Immovable but also inherently whole, which explains his eternity.

Another point of setting Neoplatonism, which Augustine adapted to the conception that God holds the highest place in the hierarchy of reality as Creation. In parallel, anything else is of reduced existence. This pyramid shorthand encapsulates Augustine’s assertion that God lies outside the universe of physical and temporal space. By the way, Augustine holds that God is timeless and sees all time as one thing since he considers space as well to be part of calculation.¹⁸

Is Augustine’s God Timeless?

If one admits that Augustine took a timeless view of God, he naturally went for the Neoplatonic concept of God. Thus, Augustine developed the idea of a God existing in eternity, who perceives past, present, and future as a single, unchanging whole. This concept pertains well to the Neoplatonic notion of The One as the above dimensions, time, and change.

However, this raises serious questions regarding the general notion of God’s timelessness according to Christian theology. God is depicted in the biblical text as inside this continuity -- a God

¹⁷ Paul Weithman, “Augustine’s Political Philosophy,” *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine* (2001): 234-252, <https://www3.nd.edu/~pweithma/My%20Papers/Augustine%27s%20Political%20Thought.pdf>.

¹⁸ Simo Knuuttila, “Time and Creation in Augustine,” *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine* (2001): 103-115, <https://eclass.uoa.gr/modules/document/file.php/PHS325/%28Cambridge%20Companions%20to%20Philosophy%29%20Eleonore%20Stump%2C%20Norman%20Kretzmann-The%20Cambridge%20Companion%20to%20Augustine%20-Cambridge%20University%20Press%20%282001%29.pdf#page=115>.

of personalities, prayers, and actual events.¹⁹ For example, it is written that he walked with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, covenanted to Abraham, and liberating the Israelites from Egypt during the exodus. The concept of the Incarnation, coming down into the world to redeem it, is a history-shattering model for God in history that is all contained within this one character: Jesus Christ.

Augustine's eternal God does not fit in this temporal portrayal of God. How can a timeless God engage in temporal things? How else can He gain a going in God's affairs or answer the prayers that come to Him from His people? These are the questions arising from such a significant conflict between idolatry and the Augustinian idea of God in Neoplatonism, which still seems consistent with the Biblical version.

One of the ways Augustine addresses this tension is through on his doctrine of divine providence. Augustine disagrees by saying that while God is transcendent, He always knew all things in time and foreordained them. Thus, God's actions are temporal and eternal to God's divine plan.²⁰ This raises more questions about human agency and God as a creator. If God rules beyond time and space, what role is there for human action? More absurdly, God exists outside time, so how can he have an interpersonal relationship with people?

Implication of a Timeless God

The prominent consequences relate to Christian doctrine in general, how it behaves toward the world, and where God takes

¹⁹ Todd J. Billings, *The Word of God for the People of God: An Entryway to the Theological Interpretation of Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2010), https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=N7j9kydpB-tEC&oi=fnd&pg=PR9&dq=God+is+described+in+the+biblical+text+as+being+present+in+the+existing+time+order+and+interacting+with+people,+listening+to+their+prayers+and+participating+in+history&ots=HW5LxR6TU4&sig=oPBhbPEFj7fmKhEf_fgPwKajHX0.

²⁰ Amy Lydia Daniels, "Justice in Augustine's City of God," (PhD diss., Stellenbosch: Stellenbosch University, 2012), https://scholar.sun.ac.za/bitstream/10019.1/71609/1/daniels_justice_2012.pdf.

part in his redemption. For Augustine, an eternal God is essentially externalized from the time-bound world. This perspective so clearly contrasts with the biblical image of a God who is immanent, invested in history, and actively answering prayer.

According to the Biblical record, such Neoplatonic identification with a God who is indeed Himself explicitly personal and relational is said to imply blurring/soft-pedaling those features of deity. This is where readers come face-to-face with a God not just of the universe but actually outside it and further made manifest within and caring for this locality. By insisting that God is eternal instead of timeless, we get a far richer portrait of God as portrayed in the Bible than implied by Augustine.

Similarly, the idea of an eternal God can raise exciting implications for salvation. Salvation is not a loving meeting between the divine and human; if predestination were true, God would be beyond time.²¹ This could potentially paint a deterministic view of salvation, marginalizing human free will and belief as relational.

Augustine's Idea of Salvation

Augustine of Hippo's hugely complex doctrine of salvation originates from his theology and Neoplatonism. This is where we find his soteriology and its utter focus on the beatific vision—the final end for which humans have been created: an eternally abiding with God. In the following section, we will explore Augustine's doctrine of salvation and Neoplatonism in his thought before examining briefly how these ideas are essential to Christian theology.

The Ultimate End: Salvation in the Beatific Vision

This is why, in the thinking of Augustine, salvation has more to do with transforming one's soul so that it becomes oriented toward

²¹ Ivor J. Davidson and Murray A. Rae, eds., *God of Salvation: Soteriology in Theological Perspective* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011), <https://repository.divinity.edu.au/bitstreams/341c8376-9448-4ba3-ab62-fbfce431fb2b/download>.

God and sees God than being saved from irrevocable damnation. The privilege of being united to God by the immediate exercise of an inchoate vision will not depend on any future merit. However, nothing has begun.²² The beatific effect is that God would be the fulfillment all things and the ultimate outcome of life will find its fruition beyond earthly encounters. Alternatively, the beatific effect is that God will be all things, and salvation's attainment will be fully realized, leading to the ultimate fruition beyond earthly experiences. This vision is not movie watching or passive observation, but the final stage when a soul joins God as truth, sound, and beauty.

This is a state that Augustine calls to rest, or the soul being solidly in God with no more lusts nor desires. In his *Confessions*, Augustine says, "You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you."²³ As Augustine points out, human beings are also unhappy because they are made in the image of God: this means that a being oriented toward the supreme Good is not resting in matter. Thus, the beatific vision can only fulfill/reveal this longing.

Paul had taught that Christians won the race not for a gold medal but to behold God; Augustine took this message and said all human life is entirely about crossing the line first, and with every late bell start loudly declared there would be no place on his podium except one reward: The beatific vision. It is a state of being that has nothing to do with sin and can look at God in all His glory. Think of this vision as the telos (goal) of sanctification, a process byproduct of reversing our soul back to God so that even sins have perished when we stand before Him; the beatific vision

²² Theodor E. Mommsen, "St. Augustine and the Christian Idea of Progress: The background of the City of God" In *Augustine and Modern Law* (Routledge, 2017), 299-327, <https://www.hist.pku.edu.cn/pub/bjdxlsx/attachments/6196da3dc1d442e2bce5fce6bdd43083.pdf>.

²³ Saint Augustine, *The Confessions of St. Augustine*, vol. 1 (JH Parker, 1838), <https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=AwfCRBll-DoYC&oi=fnd&pg=PA1&dq=Confessions,+Augustine++You+have+made+us+for+yourself+and+our+hearts+are+restless+until+they+rest+in+you&ots=1fND1T4LqE&sig=H15JqwyRUWXB-t0hN6qwMnEPVJ0w>.

is, therefore, the culmination of human experience; it is that by which a person exists at the summit, even as love and knowledge within God.²⁴

Neoplatonism and Salvation in Augustine

This is a very Neoplatonic view of salvation, on the soul's passage and end-goal of union with the divine enshrined in Augustine. Plotinus, the initiator of Neoplatonism, maintains that everything flows forth from a single fundamental source, one Supreme (the One).²⁵ Material life is the manifest reflection of this higher reality, and the soul's intention should be to ascend through these stations until it gathers with or becomes one with God.

This thought influenced Augustine's philosophy about the soul and its divine relationship. As much as the pilgrimage of the soul is a will to be saved and not in eternal torment or locked out from heaven — neither accessible nor belonging there, for Augustine, salvation occurs at base with its associations with the one.²⁶ Neoplatonism presupposed the hierarchy of values (the material world is inferior to the spiritual one, and we must elevate our souls in order to move closer God), which has made Augustine conclude that this ascension was possible only through liberation from everything earthly. Accompanying this ascent is a movement away from worldly pleasures or achievements, which impede the soul's union with the divine. So, Augustine took hold of this Neoplatonic

²⁴ Ovie Valentine Aghoghophia, "Augustine on Angelic Knowledge," *Warszawskie Studia Teologiczne* 34, no. 2 (2021): 212-235, <https://biblioteka-nauki.pl/articles/2007392.pdf>.

²⁵ Christian Wildberg, "Neoplatonism," (2016), <https://plato.stanford.edu/ENTRIES/neoplatonism/>.

²⁶ Matthew Levering, *The Theology of Augustine: An Introductory Guide to his Most Important Works* (Baker Books, 2013), <https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=Iqy3vcVmV-cC&oi=fnd&pg=PA13&dq=For+Augustine,+salvation+is+not+merely+about+avoiding+eternal+punishment+or+securing+a+place+in+heaven+but+is+primarily+about+the+soul%E2%80%99s+ascent+to+God.&ots=mv2hHChsdI&sig=Ymaj9aLf-T3HHYWhf1jLF6CH21o>.

notion — the idea that for our soul to see God, it must be refined and purified.

In addition, the beatific vision, as understood by Augustine has further roots in Platonic and Neoplatonist images and therefore quite distinct from Monotheistic revelation. Additionally, the God we see as the ultimate reality and then ascend to actualize our desires through this entity corresponds to Neoplatonism, desiring for all good things to be realized only after death's passing, following self-sacrifice. In each system, the perfect end lies in complete union with the divine planes of existence — transcending this world until one is entirely at peace and satisfied.

Implications for Christian Theology

In many ways, Augustine taught Christians to view salvation as God's seeing. This serves to justify the reason for man's Creation and how he is going through a process of sanctification to fulfill it. Sanctification and holiness are constitutive aspects of the Christian life, and this notion has been largely pervasive within Western Christianity.

Still, Augustine's Neoplatonist account of salvation raises questions about redemption and, specifically, the place of Jesus Christ in it. The stress placed on the 'climbing' of souls to God in Augustine's formulation may seem excessive, suggesting that final happiness comes only through the final vision of God, even for the incarnate Christ who was crucified and risen.

In the New Testament, we find a covenantal understanding of salvation—where man is united to God and joins in the historical act of Christ's death and resurrection through faith. This relational aspect of salvation is, in fact, one of the major narratives that runs throughout the Bible, narrating God's relationship to His people, among other things embodied and accomplished through Jesus.

However, it may still need to be discovered even when Augustine's influence of Neoplatonism and the Beatific vision are considered. It may be traded for a pietistic and ultimately self-serving view of the Christian life. However, in reviewing these

arguments, realizing that the beatific vision is a momentous and laudable inner dynamic for any Christian is essential. The beatific vision is a believer's ultimate peak of faith and this innermost instant fulfillment in experiencing divinity. However, this is seen within the context of salvation, where Christ mediates. It involves his relationship between God and man.²⁷ Because of this, the beatific vision should not detract from an understanding of salvation as relational and covenantal but instead enhance it by emphasizing that God has brought himself close to complete unity with his people through Christ.

The Impact on Biblical Teaching

Due to the integration of Neoplatonic philosophy with Christianity through Augustine of Hippo, there are biblical implications regarding God and the concept of the Savior. Still, however critical Augustine's thought remains to Christianity, there are also dangers in overemphasizing Neoplatonism within his theology: the notion of divine immanence and, hence, a theoretical agreement between Neoplatonist perspectives on salvation and Scriptural ones. In this section, we will describe and analyze immanence in the Bible, narrate its salvific functions, and compare it to Neoplatonic views.

Scriptural Teaching on the Immanence of God

The Bible presents a God who is both transcendent and immanent simultaneously.²⁸ An omnipotent and transcendent God who is interested in and involved with the world He has created. The thematic sign of God's power in the Bible is his immanence

²⁷ Hans Boersma, "Becoming Human in the Face of God: Gregory of Nyssa's Unending Search for the Beatific Vision," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 17, no. 2 (2015): 131-151, <https://www.hansboersma.org/s/Becoming-Human-in-the-Face-of-God-IJST-2015.pdf>.

²⁸ Stanislaus J. Grabowski, "St. Augustine and the Presence of God," *Theological Studies* 13, no. 3 (1952): 336-358, <https://theologicalstudies.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/13.3.2.pdf>.

that God achieves things by being with his people and working among them.²⁹

In the Old Testament, God's presence is seen in His covenants with individuals and the nation of Israel through critical people such as Abraham, Moses, and David. For example, in the book of Exodus, God's accompaniment of the Israelites when they fled Egypt is an evident sign that He intercedes in matters concerning His people. The tabernacle, and even more so the temple, corresponded to the concept of the presence of God among His people. The prophets also emphasized God's closeness to His people, as seen in passages like Isaiah 7:14, where God is described as "Immanuel," meaning "God with us."

The New Testament also espouses the idea of God's immanence, this time through the incarnation of the Son of God. The Incarnation, expressing that God is embodied in human flesh (or any mouth body), represents an ultimate immanence. The acts of Jesus Christ: His birth, his death on the cross for our sins, and then resurrection from the dead all symbolize what business name can be viewed as God directly intervening in saving humanity. The New Testament teaching that the Holy Spirit indwells believers likewise confirms God's immanence, for Christians live their daily lives in response to impulses and guidance from the spirit.

Necessity of God's Immanence for Salvation

God's availability or presence underpins the Christian salvation experience. In Christianity, salvation is not a mere philosophical leap into some highest form, but an interactive and redemptive

²⁹ Jeong-Im Yi, *What Wondrous Love Is This: Is God's Love of Election and Non-election Genuine Love?* (MA thesis, Trinity International University, Deerfield, IL: 2020), <https://search.proquest.com/openview/383260fe50d5d-c854ea8ff530b9dc7db/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=18750&diss=y>.

trajectory rooted in God's direct involvement with humanity.³⁰ Biblical salvation is seen as the process of interaction between God and His people (the believers) in which using His saving activities on behalf of each other; the incarnation of Jesus Christ lays its foundation. In becoming human, God becomes involved in the suffering of humanity so that he can save them. The crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus are, therefore, miracles by definition—that God Himself stepped into history itself in order to recover for His humanity.³¹ This covenantal element of salvation is then concretely realized in the New Testament as an organic union, exemplified by passages describing how believers are united with Christ and one another through his church (as a body). Were God simply transcendent and distanced, as in the Neoplatonic scenario, then this relational character of salvation could be jeopardized. The religious story represents God as an invested ruler of His Creation, passionately petitions the throne for mercy, intervenes in human affairs, and desires personal relationships with every individual. In other words, the immanence of God is central to biblical salvation and keeps faith from being merely theoretical instead of lived exalted divine reality.

Neoplatonism vs. Biblical Views on Salvation

Neoplatonism views salvation as the abstraction and metaphysical elevation of the soul. In this framework, salvation is essentially the liberation of individual souls from physicality

³⁰ David F. Ford, *Self and Salvation: Being Transformed* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), <https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=TQqfOpugy8IC&oi=fnd&pg=PR10&dq=The+Christian+understanding+of+salvation+is+not+merely+a+philosophical+ascent+to+a+higher+state+of+being+but+a+relational+and+transformative+process+rooted+in+God%E2%80%99s+direct+involvement+with+humanity&ots=IK7u4ddtu0&sig=Dsfl1avPYYyNeMo0XxFhbjkmDWU>.

³¹ Amanda Porterfield, *Healing in the History of Christianity* (Oxford University Press, 2005), https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=ioQXS8k4C-m4C&oi=fnd&pg=PR9&dq=The+crucifixion+and+the+resurrection+of+Jesus+are+miracles+that+mean+divine+intervention+in+history+to+bring+people+back+to+God.&ots=DkC6b3GtBQ&sig=YjRKU-jhxy_oM59Ngb3nrK-Fxt5c.

and their unification with The One.³² This perspective will thus compromise the importance of the material realm and history (i.e., salvation history) in favor of self-experience. In contrast, the biblical view of salvation is based on a historical event and who Jesus Christ Himself was as a Savior. Redemption is not the soul rising to heaven but God coming down and saving His Creation. In other words, the biblical narrative is attentive to materiality — embodied existence and history as integral constituents of the divine blueprint for salvation. The salvation of the body, the Creation of a new being, and renewal in all things are clear ideas based on biblical conceptions.

The issue with the Neoplatonic influence on Christian thought, as illustrated in Augustine’s work is that these themes may need to be reconciled. Suppose too much emphasis is placed on the soul leaving its earthly body and God rising above this world. In that case, it tends to play down what Scripture emphasizes with salvation, be it relational, historical, or material. This move can also lead to subjectivist and sacramental understandings of salvation where the church element and covenant component of what is going on in Scripture are veiled.

Illustrating the Difference between Neoplatonic and Biblical Salvation

Salvation was a crucial concept in Neoplatonism and Christianity, though the ways of understanding salvation differed vastly. Salvation as metaphysical ascent and identification with the One: Neoplatonism of Plotinus entirely. Nevertheless, biblical salvation is more personal and historical, whereas it contains the connection between God and man as a result of Jesus Christ. Here, we will

³² Cosmin Tudor Ciocan, “The Value of the Soul in the Religious Views: An Overview Targeting the Salvation of an Individual,” *Dialogo* 6, no. 2 (2019): 233-244, https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Cosmin-Ciocan/publication/342565861_The_Value_of_the_Soul_in_the_Religious_VIEWS/links/5f987ee6a6fdccfd7b84a936/The-Value-of-the-Soul-in-the-Religious-VIEWS.pdf.

look at how Neoplatonic and biblical salvation differ drastically from one another.

Neoplatonic Salvation: Union with the One

To Neoplatonists, the soul was saved by ascending again to its origin — namely, The One, which emanated from it. The One is the most absolute and ineffable mystery transcending every way of being or not being. Neoplatonism, however, is founded on the works of Plotinus who argued that everything originates from the ‘One,’ and the material world is the last step in this process.³³ It is born in the One, but it becomes entangled with what comes into being and must be purified from this element to ascend again unto Him who transcends everything. The soul’s separability from all other material elements and its upward journey through different regions, purifying itself at each level till it ultimately unites with the One. This perfect contemplation and rest is the soul’s journey towards a divine embrace with God, a flow-filled fullness. In this state, the ego or individual self dissolves, and the soul merges with the One, losing its separate existence. This is why salvation in Neoplatonism, a transcendentalist and individualistic type of the concept of salvation, is deeply intimate. It’s about the soul’s connection from one world to another, leading to God. Everything is about reality, and matter is seen as an obstacle to true spirituality.

Biblical Salvation: Commitment to Jesus Christ

In contrast, biblical salvation originates from Christ and is ontological and salvific-historical. Biblical salvation is not the escape of a soul from its material prison but God’s reclaiming and remaking of all that He created—including the physical universe. It was through the birth, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus (God-Man) that a man may be saved.

³³ John Paul Rosheger, “Is God a “What”? Aquinas, Neoplatonism, and the Divine Essence” (Ph.D. Diss., Marquette University, Milwaukee, WI : 2000), <https://search.proquest.com/openview/9e9625b0edbe0021c921eb246179558c/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=18750&diss=y>.

It asserts that salvation is a covenantal contract between God and His people, initiated by God and fulfilled in Christ. One central belief held by most Christians, though not generally shared with others such as Jews or Muslims, centers on Jesus of Nazareth and sacrifice through His crucifixion, which was sufficient enough to cleanse humankind from sin and restore our relationship with a holy God. Therefore, Jesus' resurrection is the ultimate victory over sin and death. However, it also means that every person who believes in Him will be brought back from physical death to live with God forever.

Contrary to Neoplatonism, which sees salvation as the ascent of the soul, biblical redemption is seen in terms of union with man. In this moment, the work of Christ is perhaps the ultimate expression of divine immanence in all history: God meeting a broken world to heal it. Truly, biblical salvation touches every part of who you are—body, soul, and spirit. The resurrection and new creation doctrine likewise refined the role of the material world in God's salvation.

Salvation in the Bible was collective instead of the individualism of today's Western world. It also involves founding a new society, viz., the church or body of Christ, where believers are attached to our Lord and fellow believers. In this way, the communal nature of salvation is not merely one subplot in a larger biblical narrative; it forms part and parcel of that story by constituting how God's people live out their faith in the community to reflect the kind of communion enjoyed among divine persons.

Theological Gulf between Neoplatonic and Biblical Views

Neoplatonic and biblical views of redemption are very different. It offers historical and personal salvation in and through Jesus Christ, while Neoplatonism points to its return as the soul being lost into an impersonal absolute One. Neoplatonic salvation belongs to another world that it is spiritual and individualistic, whereas biblical salvation, while otherworldly, also engages this world or the cosmos as well, i.e., God interacting with both his Creation and humanity.

The danger in linking these two views is a potential misunderstanding of what type of salvation may occur, if any, though they proved to share more than just similarities. You get a narrative scheme out of sync with the Bible if you see Christian salvation only through the Neoplatonic scheme since it emphasizes so much one-worldly in what is essentially an emphasis on the otherworldly faith. This can contribute to a solipsistic and gnostic spirituality that devalues the material world as part of our fallen physicality in this time-space domain rather than learning how prayer manifests itself through participation within these created realities.

The Neoplatonic view of salvation can erode our understanding of the Incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection. It follows, then, to a biblical point of view, that this way, salvation was brought about in the past. There is no place in which the acts of man are metaphors or stages on his way to find so rich a dower. Instead, they are genuine yet at the same time performative, natural, and historical actions using which God takes unto Himself humanity as also all material things, thus saving them.

Conclusion

The interaction between Neoplatonism and Christianity, particularly the concept of Augustine of Hippo, is a significant point in the discussion of the history of Christian philosophy. In his theological system, Augustine enriched the Neoplatonic elements concerning the notion of the creatural divinity, the human soul, and the goal of salvation. His vision of the beatific vision, in which the soul completes identification with God, remains one of the most influential contributions to Christian thought and writing history. However, this synthesis also posed problems in their understanding of God's immanence and salvation's saving.

Neoplatonism's concept of salvation is best described as being mystical and individualistic. It offers an optimistic view of the soul rising to the level of the One instead of the world. On the other hand, the biblical view of salvation is preeminently historical-relational, especially as epitomized in Jesus Christ's life, death, and, most importantly, resurrection. For the Bible, salvation is not separation from the world but the sanctification and the renewal of the whole Creation, which underlines the immanence of God and His presence in the world.

The theological gulf between Neoplatonic and biblical views of salvation highlights the importance of critically engaging with philosophical influences in Christian thought. While Augustine's synthesis offers valuable insights, contemporary theology must remain grounded in the biblical narrative. This requires a careful balance, recognizing the value of philosophical reflection while ensuring that it does not overshadow the core tenets of the Christian faith—namely, the relational, incarnational, and communal aspects of salvation as revealed in Scripture.

Therefore, concerning the salvation issue, it is crucial to distinguish the tenets of Neoplatonism from those of the Bible to protect the spirit of Christianity. This standing also enables it to offer a more accurate and contextual theocentric understanding of the Christian faith, which respects the dual aspects of God, such as the Holy Trinity and the triune concept of salvation in Christ, which involves relationships.