

completely fulfilled) can be only vaguely perceived by this generation, but this aspiration even now inspires their commitment.¹

This quest poses questions and challenges to the Christian faith. What the faith says about itself will demonstrate its relationship to this goal of the people who are struggling for the emancipation of others and of themselves. Indeed, an awareness of the need for self-liberation is essential to a correct understanding of the liberation process. It is not a matter of "struggling for others," which suggests paternalism and reformist objectives, but rather of becoming aware of oneself as not completely fulfilled and as living in an alienated society. And thus one can identify radically and militantly with those—the people and the social class—who bear the brunt of oppression.

In the light of faith, charity, and hope, what then is the meaning of this struggle, this *creation*? What does this option mean? What is the significance of *novelty* in history and of an orientation towards the future? These are three pertinent questions,² three indicators which contemporary theology haltingly pursues; but above all, they are three tasks to be undertaken.

Chapter Nine

LIBERATION AND SALVATION

What is the relationship between salvation and the process of human liberation throughout history? Or more precisely, what is the meaning of the struggle against an unjust society and the creation of a new humanity in the light of the Word? A response to these questions presupposes an attempt to define what is meant by salvation, a concept central to the Christian mystery. This is a complex and difficult task which leads to reflection on the meaning of the saving action of the Lord in history. The salvation of the whole man is centered upon Christ the Liberator.

SALVATION: CENTRAL THEME OF THE CHRISTIAN MYSTERY

One of the great deficiencies of contemporary theology is the absence of a profound and lucid reflection on the theme of salvation.³ On a superficial level this might seem surprising, but actually it is what often happens with difficult matters: people are afraid to tackle them. It is taken for granted that they are understood. Meanwhile, new edifices are raised on old foundations established in the past on untested assumptions and vague generalities. The moment comes, however, when the whole building totters; this is the time to look again to the foundations. This hour has arrived for the notion of salvation.⁴ Recently various works have appeared attempting to revise and deepen our understanding of this idea.⁵ These are only a beginning.

We will not attempt to study this criticism in detail, but will only note that a consideration of this question has revealed two focal points; one follows the other in the manner of two closely linked stages.

From the Quantitative . . .

The questions raised by the notion of salvation have for a long time been considered under and limited by the classical question of the "salvation of the pagans." This is the quantitative, extensive aspect of salvation; it is the problem of the number of persons saved, the possibility of being saved, and the role

which the Church plays in this process. The terms of the problem are, on the one hand, the universality of salvation, and on the other, the visible Church as the mediator of salvation.

The evolution of the question has been complex and fatiguing.⁴ Today we can say that in a way this evolution has ended. The idea of the universality of the salvific will of God, clearly enunciated by Paul in his letter to Timothy, has been established. It has overcome the difficulties posed by various ways of understanding the mission of the Church and has attained definite acceptance.⁵ All that is left to do is to consider the ramifications, which are many.⁶

Here we will briefly consider one important point and leave for later a treatment of the repercussions of this idea on ecclesiological matters. The notion of salvation implied in this point of view has two very well-defined characteristics: it is a cure for sin in this life; and this cure is in virtue of a salvation to be attained beyond this life. What is important, therefore, is to know how a person outside the normal pale of grace, which resides in the institutional Church, can attain salvation. Multiple explanations have attempted to show the extraordinary ways by which a person could be assured of salvation, understood above all as life beyond this one. The present life is considered to be a test: one's actions are judged and assessed in relation to the transcendent end. The perspective here is moralistic, and the spirituality is one of flight from this world. Normally, only contact with the channels of grace instituted by God can eliminate sin, the obstacle which stands in the way of reaching that life beyond. This approach is very understandable if we remember that the question of "the salvation of the pagans" was raised at the time of the discovery of people belonging to other religions and living in areas far from those where the Church had been traditionally rooted.

... to the Qualitative

As the idea of the universality of salvation and the possibility of reaching it gained ground in Christian consciousness and as the quantitative question was resolved and decreased in interest, the whole problem of salvation made a qualitative leap and began to be perceived differently. Indeed, there is more to the idea of the universality of salvation than simply asserting the possibility of reaching it while outside the visible frontiers of the Church. The very heart of the question was touched in the search for a means to widen the scope of the possibility of salvation: persons are saved if they open themselves to God and to others, even if they are not clearly aware that they are doing so. This is valid for Christians and non-Christians alike—for all people. To speak about the presence of grace—whether accepted or rejected—in all people implies, on the other hand, to value from a Christian standpoint the very roots of human activity. We can no longer speak properly of a profane world.⁷ A qualitative and intensive approach replaces a quantitative and extensive one. Human existence, in the last instance, is nothing but a yes or a no to the Lord: "Persons already partly accept communion with God, although they do not explicitly

confess Christ as their Lord, insofar as they are moved by grace (*Lumen gentium*, no. 16), sometimes secretly (*Gaudium et spes*, nos. 3, 22), renounce their selfishness, and seek to create an authentic fellowship among human beings. They reject union with God insofar as they turn away from the building up of this world, do not open themselves to others, and culpably withdraw into themselves (Mt. 25:31-46)."⁸

From this point of view the notion of salvation appears in a different light. Salvation is not something otherworldly, in regard to which the present life is merely a test. Salvation—the communion of human beings with God and among themselves—is something which embraces all human reality, transforms it, and leads it to its fullness in Christ: "Thus the center of God's salvific design is Jesus Christ, who by his death and resurrection transforms the universe and makes it possible for the person to reach fulfillment as a human being. This fulfillment embraces every aspect of humanity: body and spirit, individual and society, person and cosmos, time and eternity. Christ, the image of the Father and the perfect God-Man, takes on all the dimensions of human existence."⁹

Therefore, sin is not only an impediment to salvation in the afterlife. Insofar as it constitutes a break with God, sin is a historical reality, it is a breach of the communion of persons with each other, it is a turning in of individuals on themselves which manifests itself in a multifaceted withdrawal from others. And because sin is a personal and social intrahistorical reality, a part of the daily events of human life, it is also, and above all, an obstacle to life's reaching the fullness we call salvation.

The idea of a universal salvation, which was accepted only with great difficulty and was based on the desire to expand the possibilities of achieving salvation, leads to the question of the intensity of the presence of the Lord and therefore of the religious significance of human action in history. One looks then to this world, and now sees in the world beyond not the "true life," but rather the transformation and fulfillment of the present life. The absolute value of salvation—far from devaluing this world—gives it its authentic meaning and its own autonomy, because salvation is already latently there. To express the idea in terms of Biblical theology: the prophetic perspective (in which the Kingdom takes on the present life, transforming it) is vindicated before the sapiential outlook (which stresses the life beyond).¹⁰

This qualitative, intensive approach has undoubtedly been influenced by the factor which marked the last push toward the unequivocal assertion of the universality of salvation, that is, the appearance of atheism, especially in the heart of Christian countries. Nonbelievers are not interested in an otherworldly salvation, as are believers in other religions; rather they consider it an evasion of the only question they wish to deal with: the value of earthly existence. The qualitative approach to the notion of salvation attempts to respond to this problem.¹¹

The developments which we have reviewed here have allowed us definitively to recover an essential element of the notion of salvation which had been

overshadowed for a long time by the question of the possibility of reaching it. We have recovered the idea that salvation is an intrahistorical reality. Furthermore, salvation—the communion of human beings with God and among themselves—orients, transforms, and guides history to its fulfillment.

HISTORY IS ONE

What we have recalled in the preceding paragraph leads us to affirm that, in fact, there are not two histories, one profane and one sacred, "juxtaposed" or "closely linked." Rather there is only one human destiny, irreversibly assumed by Christ, the Lord of history. His redemptive work embraces all the dimensions of existence and brings them to their fullness. The history of salvation is the very heart of human history. Christian consciousness arrived at this unified view after an evolution parallel to that experienced regarding the notion of salvation. The conclusions converge. From an abstract, essentialist approach we moved to an existential, historical, and concrete view which holds that the only human being we know has been efficaciously called to a gratuitous communion with God. All reflection, any distinctions which one wishes to treat, must be based on this fact: the salvific action of God underlies all human existence.¹² The historical destiny of humanity must be placed definitively in the salvific horizon. Only thus will its true dimensions emerge and its deepest meaning be apparent. It seems, however, that contemporary theology has not yet fashioned the categories which would allow us to think through and express adequately this unified approach to history.¹³ We work, on the one hand, under the fear of falling back again into the old dualities, and, on the other, under the permanent suspicion of not sufficiently safeguarding divine gratuitousness or the unique dimension of Christianity. Although there may be different approaches to understanding it, the fundamental affirmation is clear: there is only one history—a "Christo-finalized" history.

The study of two great Biblical themes will allow us to illustrate this point of view and to understand better its scope. The themes are the relationship between creation and salvation and the eschatological promises.

Creation and Salvation

The Bible establishes a close link between creation and salvation. But the link is based on the historical and liberating experience of the Exodus. To forget this perspective is to run the risk of merely juxtaposing these two ideas and therefore losing the rich meaning which this relationship has for understanding the recapitulating work of Christ.

Creation: the First Salvific Act

The Bible does not deal with creation in order to satisfy philosophic concerns regarding the origin of the world. Its point of view is quite diverse.

Biblical faith is, above all, faith in a God who gives self-revelation through

historical events, a God who saves in history. Creation is presented in the Bible, not as a stage previous to salvation, but as a part of the salvific process: "Praise be to God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. . . . In Christ he chose us before the world was founded, to be dedicated, to be without blemish in his sight, to be full of love; and he destined us—such was his will and pleasure—to be accepted as his sons through Jesus Christ" (Eph. 1:3-5).¹⁴ God did not create only in the beginning; he also had an end in mind. God creates all to be his children.¹⁵ Moreover, creation appears as the first salvific act: "Creation," writes Von Rad, "is regarded as a work of Yahweh in history, a work within time. This means that there is a real and true opening up of historical prospect. No doubt, creation as the first of Yahweh's works stands at the very remotest beginnings—only, it does not stand alone, other works are to follow."¹⁶ The creation of the world initiates history, the human struggle, and the salvific adventure of Yahweh. Faith in creation does away with its mythical and supernatural character. It is the work of a God who saves and acts in history; since humankind is the center of creation, it is integrated into the history which is being built by human efforts.

Second Isaiah—"the best theologian among Old Testament writers"¹⁷—is an excellent witness in this respect. His texts are frequently cited as one of the richest and clearest expressions of the faith of Israel in creation. The stress, however, is on the saving action of Yahweh; the work of creation is regarded and understood only in this context: "But now this is the word of the Lord, the word of your creator, O Jacob, of him who fashioned you, Israel: Have no fear; for I have paid your ransom; I have called you by name and you are my own" (43:1; cf. 42:5-6). The assertion is centered on the redemption (or the Covenant). Yahweh is at one and the same time Creator and Redeemer: "For your husband is your maker, whose name is the Lord of Hosts; your ransom is the Holy One of Israel who is called God of all the earth" (54:5). Numerous psalms sing praise to Yahweh simultaneously as Creator and Savior (cf. Pss. 74, 89, 93, 95, 135, 136). But this is because creation itself is a saving action: "Thus says the Lord, your ransom, who fashioned you from birth: I am the Lord who made all things, by myself I stretched out the skies, alone I hammered out the floor of the earth" (Isa. 44:24; cf. also Amos 4:12ff.; 5:8ff.; Jer. 33:25ff.; 10:16; 27:5; 32:17; Mal. 2:10). Creation is the work of the Redeemer. Rendtorff says: "A more complete fusion between faith in creation and salvific faith is unimaginable."¹⁸

Political Liberation: Human Self-Creation

The liberation from Egypt—both a historical fact and at the same time a fertile Biblical theme—enriches this vision and is moreover its true source.¹⁹ The creative act is linked, almost identified with, the act which freed Israel from slavery in Egypt. Second Isaiah, who writes in exile, is likewise the best witness to this idea: "Awake, awake, put on your strength, O arm of the Lord, awake as you did long ago, in days gone by. Was it not you who hacked the Rahab in pieces and ran the dragon through? Was it not you who dried up the

sea, the waters of the great abyss, and made the ocean depths a path for the ransomed?" (51:9-10). The words and images refer simultaneously to two events: creation and liberation from Egypt. Rahab, which for Isaiah symbolizes Egypt (cf. 30:7; cf. also Ps. 87:4), likewise symbolizes the chaos Yahweh had to overcome to create the world (cf. Pss. 74:14; 89:11).¹² The "waters of the great abyss" are those which enveloped the world and from which creation arose, but they are also the Red Sea which the Jews crossed to begin the Exodus. Creation and liberation from Egypt are but one salvific act. It is significant, furthermore, that the technical term *bara*, designating the original creation, was used for the first time by Second Isaiah (43:1, 15; cf. Deut. 32:6) to refer to the creation of Israel. Yahweh's historical actions on behalf of the people are considered creative (41:20; 43:7; 45:8; 48:7).¹³ The God who frees Israel is the Creator of the world.

The liberation of Israel is a political action. It is the breaking away from a situation of despoliation and misery and the beginning of the construction of a just and comradely society. It is the suppression of disorder and the creation of a new order. The initial chapters of Exodus describe the oppression in which the Jewish people lived in Egypt, in that "land of slavery" (13:3; 20:2; Deut. 5:6): repression (Exod. 1:10-11), alienated work (5:6-14), humiliations (1:13-14), enforced birth control policy (1:15-22). Yahweh then awakens the vocation of a liberator: Moses. "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard their outcry against their slave-masters. I have taken heed of their sufferings, and have come down to rescue them from the power of Egypt. . . . I have seen the brutality of the Egyptians towards them. Come now; I will send you to Pharaoh and you shall bring my people Israel out of Egypt" (3:7-10).

Sent by Yahweh, Moses began a long, hard struggle for the liberation of the people. The alienation of the children of Israel was such that at first "they did not listen to him; they had become impatient because of their cruel slavery" (6:9). And even after they had left Egypt, when they were threatened by Pharaoh's armies, they complained to Moses: "Were there no graves in Egypt, that you should have brought us here to die in the wilderness? See what you have done to us by bringing us out of Egypt! Is not this just what we meant when we said in Egypt, 'Leave us alone; let us be slaves to the Egyptians'? We would rather be slaves to the Egyptians than die here in the wilderness" (14:11-12). And in the midst of the desert, faced with the first difficulties, they told him that they preferred the security of slavery—whose cruelty they were beginning to forget—to the uncertainties of a liberation in process: "If only we had died at the Lord's hand in Egypt, where we sat round the fleshpots and had plenty of bread to eat" (16:3). A gradual pedagogy of successes and failures would be necessary for the Jewish people to become aware of the roots of their oppression, to struggle against it, and to perceive the profound sense of the liberation to which they were called. The Creator of the world is the Creator and Liberator of Israel, to whom is entrusted the mission of establishing justice: "Thus speaks the Lord who is God, he who created the skies, . . . who fashioned the earth. . . . I, the Lord, have called you with righteous purpose

and taken you by the hand; I have formed you, and appointed you . . . to open eyes that are blind, to bring captives out of prison, out of the dungeons where they lie in darkness" (Isa. 42:5-7).

Creation, as we have mentioned above, is regarded in terms of the Exodus, a historical-salvific fact which structures the faith of Israel.¹⁴ And this fact is a political liberation through which Yahweh expresses love for the people and the gift of total liberation is received.

Salvation: Re-Creation and Complete Fulfillment

Yahweh summons Israel not only to leave Egypt but also and above all to "bring them up out of that country into a fine, broad land; it is a land flowing with milk and honey" (3:8). The Exodus is the long march towards the promised land in which Israel can establish a society free from misery and alienation. Throughout the whole process, the religious event is not set apart. It is placed in the context of the entire narrative, or more precisely, it is its deepest meaning. It is the root of the situation. In the last instance, it is in this event that the dislocation introduced by sin is resolved and justice and injustice, oppression and liberation, are determined. Yahweh liberates the Jewish people politically in order to make them a holy nation: "You have seen with your own eyes what I did to Egypt. . . . If only you will now listen to me and keep my covenant, then out of all peoples you shall become my special possession; for the whole earth is mine. You shall be my kingdom of priests, my holy nation" (19:4-6). The God of Exodus is the God of history and of political liberation more than the God of nature. Yahweh is the Liberator, the *goel* of Israel (Isa. 43:14; 47:4; Jer. 50:34). The Covenant gives full meaning to the liberation from Egypt; one makes no sense without the other: "The Covenant was a historical event," asserts Gelin, "which occurred in a moment of disruption, in an atmosphere of liberation; the revolutionary climate still prevailed: an intense spiritual impulse would arise from it, as often happens in history."¹⁵ The Covenant and the liberation from Egypt were different aspects of the same movement,¹⁶ a movement which led to encounter with God. The eschatological horizon is present in the heart of the Exodus. Casalis rightly notes that "the heart of the Old Testament is the Exodus from the servitude of Egypt and the journey towards the promised land. . . . The hope of the people of God is not to return to the mythological primitive garden, to regain paradise lost, but to march forward towards a new city, a human and comradely city whose heart is Christ."¹⁷

Yahweh will be remembered throughout the history of Israel by this act which inaugurates its history, a history which is a re-creation. The God who makes the cosmos from chaos is the same God who leads Israel from alienation to liberation. This is what is celebrated in the Jewish passover. André Neher writes: "The first thing that is expressed in the Jewish passover is the certainty of freedom. With the Exodus a new age has struck for humanity: redemption from misery. If the Exodus had not taken place, marked as it was by the twofold sign of the overriding will of God and the free and conscious assent of

men, the historical destiny of humanity would have followed another course. This course would have been radically different, as the redemption, the *geulah* of the Exodus from Egypt, would not have been its foundation. . . . All constraint is accidental; all misery is only provisional. The breath of freedom which has blown over the world since the Exodus can dispel them this very day."²¹ The memory of the Exodus pervades the pages of the Bible and inspires one to reread often the Old as well as the New Testament.

The work of Christ forms a part of this movement and brings it to complete fulfillment. The redemptive action of Christ, the foundation of all that exists, is also conceived as a re-creation and presented in a context of creation (cf. Col. 1:15-20; 1 Cor. 8:6; Heb. 1:2; Eph. 1:1-22).²² This idea is particularly clear in the prologue to the Gospel of St. John.²³ According to some exegetes it constitutes the foundation of this whole Gospel.²⁴

The work of Christ is a new creation. In this sense, Paul speaks of a "new creation" in Christ (Gal. 6:15; 2 Cor. 5:17). Moreover, it is through this "new creation," that is to say, through the salvation which Christ affords, that creation acquires its full meaning (cf. Rom. 8). But the work of Christ is presented simultaneously as a liberation from sin and from all its consequences: despoliation, injustice, hatred. This liberation fulfills in an unexpected way the promises of the prophets and creates a new chosen people, which this time includes all humanity. Creation and salvation therefore have, in the first place, a Christological sense: all things have been created in Christ, all things have been saved in him (cf. Col. 1:15-20).²⁵

Humankind is the crown and center of the work of creation and is called to continue it through its labor (cf. Gen. 1:28)—and not only through its labor. The liberation from Egypt, linked to and even coinciding with creation, adds an element of capital importance: the need and the place for human active participation in the building of society. If faith "desacralizes" creation, making it the area proper for human work, the Exodus from Egypt, the home of a sacred monarchy, reinforces this idea: it is the "desacralization" of social praxis, which from that time on will be the work of humankind.²⁶ By working, transforming the world, breaking out of servitude, building a just society, and assuming its destiny in history, humankind forges itself. In Egypt, work is alienated and, far from building a just society, contributes rather to increasing injustice and to widening the gap between exploiters and exploited.

To dominate the earth as Genesis prescribed, to continue creation, is worth nothing if it is not done for the good of humanity, if it does not contribute to human liberation, in solidarity with all, in history. The liberating initiative of Yahweh responds to this need by stirring up Moses' vocation. Only the *mediation of this self-creation*—first revealed by the liberation from Egypt—allows us to rise above poetic expressions and general categories and to understand in a profound and synthesizing way the relationship between creation and salvation so vigorously proclaimed by the Bible.

The Exodus experience is paradigmatic. It remains vital and contemporary due to similar historical experiences which the People of God undergo. As

Neher writes, it is characterized "by the twofold sign of the overriding will of God and the free and conscious consent of humans." And it structures our faith in the gift of the Father's love. In Christ and through the Spirit, persons are becoming one in the very heart of history, as they confront and struggle against all that divides and opposes them. But the true agents of this quest for unity are those who today are oppressed (economically, politically, culturally) and struggle to become free.²⁷ Salvation—totally and freely given by God, the communion of human beings with God and among themselves—is the inner force and the fullness of this movement of human self-generation initiated by the work of creation.

Consequently, when we assert that humanity fulfills itself by continuing the work of creation by means of its labor, we are saying that it places itself, by this very fact, within an all-embracing salvific process. To work, to transform this world, is to become a man and to build the human community; it is also to save. Likewise, to struggle against misery and exploitation and to build a just society is already to be part of the saving action, which is moving towards its complete fulfillment. All this means that building the temporal city is not simply a stage of "humanization" or "pre-evangelization" as was held in theology until a few years ago. Rather it is to become part of a saving process which embraces the whole of humanity and all human history. Any theological reflection on human work and social praxis ought to be rooted in this fundamental affirmation.

Eschatological Promises

A second important Biblical theme leads to converging conclusions. We refer to the eschatological promises. It is not an isolated theme, but rather, as the former one, it appears throughout the Bible. It is vitally present in the history of Israel and consequently claims its place among the People of God today.

Heirs according to the Promise

The Bible is the book of the Promise, the Promise made by God to human beings, the efficacious revelation of God's love and self-communication; simultaneously it reveals humankind to itself. The Greek word which the New Testament uses to designate the Promise is *epangelia*, which also means "word pledged," "announcement," and "notification"; it is related to *evangelion*.²⁸ This Promise, which is at the same time revelation and Good News, is the heart of the Bible. Albert Gelin says that "this Promise lies behind the whole Bible, and it makes it the book of hope, the slight hope stronger than experience, as Péguy said, which persists through all trials and is reborn to greater strength after every setback."²⁹ The Promise is revealed, appeals to humankind, and is fulfilled throughout history. The Promise orients all history towards the future and thus puts revelation in an eschatological perspective.³⁰ Human history is in

truth nothing but the history of the slow, uncertain, and surprising fulfillment of the Promise.

The Promise is a gift accepted in faith. This makes Abraham the father of believers. The Promise was first made to him (cf. Gen. 12:1-3; 15:1-16) that he and his posterity would be, as St. Paul says in a vigorous and fertile expression, "the heirs of the world" (Rom. 4:13).³⁸ For this reason Jesus, John the Baptist (Luke 3:8; 13:16; 16:22; 19:9), and Paul (Gal. 3:16-29; Rom. 4; Heb. 11) place Abraham at the beginning of the work of salvation.³⁹ This Promise is "given to those who have such faith" in Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:22). The Promise is fulfilled in Christ, the Lord of history and of the cosmos. In him we are "the 'issue' of Abraham, and so heirs by promise" (Gal. 3:29). This is the mystery which remained hidden until "the fullness of time."

But the *Promise* unfolds—becoming richer and more definite—in the *promises* made by God throughout history. "The first expression and realization of the Promise was the Covenant."⁴⁰ The kingdom of Israel was another concrete manifestation. And when the infidelities of the Jewish people rendered the Old Covenant invalid, the Promise was incarnated both in the proclamation of a New Covenant, which was awaited and sustained by the "remnant," as well as in the promises which prepared and accompanied its advent. The Promise enters upon "the last days" with the proclamation in the New Testament of the gift of the Kingdom of God.⁴¹

The Promise is not exhausted by these promises nor by their fulfillment; it goes beyond them, explains them, and gives them their ultimate meaning. But at the same time, the Promise is announced and is partially and progressively fulfilled in them. There exists a dialectical relationship between the Promise and its partial fulfillments. The resurrection itself is the fulfillment of something promised and likewise the anticipation of a future (cf. Acts 13:23); with it the work of Christ is "not yet completed, not yet concluded"; the resurrected Christ "is still future to himself."⁴² The Promise is gradually revealed in all its universality and concrete expression: it is *already* fulfilled in historical events, but *not yet* completely; it incessantly projects itself into the future, creating a permanent historical mobility. The Promise is inexhaustible and dominates history, because it is the self-communication of God. With the Incarnation of the Son and the sending of the Spirit of Promise this self-communication has entered into a decisive stage (Gal. 3:14; Eph. 1:13; Acts 2:38-39; Luke 24:29). But by the same token, the Promise illuminates and fructifies the future of humanity and leads it through incipient realizations towards its fullness.⁴³ Both the present and future aspects are indispensable for tracing the relationships between Promise and history.

Eschatology: The Future and the Historical Present

In recent years the eschatological dimension of revelation—and consequently of Christian existence—has been rediscovered.

According to traditional dogmatic theology, the treatise on the "last things" (death, judgment, heaven, hell, the end of the world, the resurrection of the dead) was a kind of appendix not too closely related to the central themes. This

treatise began to be referred to as eschatology.⁴⁴ Its etymology suggested its appropriateness: *escatos*, "last," and *logos*, "treatise."⁴⁵

Toward the end of the nineteenth century, the eschatological theme appeared in liberal Protestant theological studies (Johannes Weiss, Albert Schweitzer) on the message of Jesus and the faith of the primitive Christian community. Moltmann points out the impact of the rise of this line of thinking, but recalls also the pointlessness of these first efforts.⁴⁶ "Dialectical theology" came onto this scene from another vantage point and made eschatology the center of its thinking. The "first" Barth is its best representative. Under the influence of Kant, Barthian eschatology is what Urs von Balthasar calls "transcendental eschatology": eternity is the form of true being; time is nothing but appearance and shadow; the ultimate realities are the first principle of everything⁴⁷ and therefore the limit of all time.⁴⁸ It was this viewpoint, according to Moltmann, "which prevented the break-through of eschatological dimensions in dogmatics."⁴⁹

But the eschatological theme has continued to gain in importance.⁵⁰ The term is controversial;⁵¹ the notion much debated.⁵² One idea, however, has emerged: the Bible presents eschatology as the driving force of salvific history radically oriented toward the future. Eschatology is thus not just one more element of Christianity, but the very key to understanding the Christian faith.

Basing his study on a rigorous exegesis of the Old Testament, Von Rad has completed an important attempt at clarification in this area. He believes it is inaccurate to think of the eschatological sphere as a "consistent body of ideas, made up of complex cosmic and mythological expectations about the future, from which the prophets drew what they wanted."⁵³ To reserve the term *eschatological* to designate the end of time, the fulfillment of history, that is to say, extrahistorical events, he thinks is not enough.⁵⁴ For Von Rad, the prophets have "eschatologized" Israel's conceptions of time and history. However, what is characteristic of the prophets is, on the one hand, their orientation toward the *future* and, on the other, their concern with the *present*.

It is due to their posture toward the *future* that the prophets are the typical representatives of the Yahwist religion. What is characteristic of the prophets' message is that the situation they announce "cannot be understood as the continuation of what went before."⁵⁵ Their starting point is an awareness of a break with the past; the sins of Israel have rendered it unacceptable; the guarantees given by Yahweh are no longer in force. Salvation can come only from a new historical action of Yahweh which will renew in unknown ways the earlier interventions in favor of the people; the signs announcing this action come to be dimly seen by the prophets' rereading those earlier events. The Exodus is a favorite theme of the prophets; what they retain of it is fundamentally the break with the past and the projection toward the future.⁵⁶ This causes Von Rad to conclude that "the message of the prophets has to be termed eschatological whenever it regards the old historical bases of salvation as null and void," and he notes that "we ought then to go on and limit the term. It should not be applied to cases where Israel gave a general expression of her

faith in the future, or . . . in the future of one of her sacred institutions." Von Rad ends by saying that "the prophetic teaching is only eschatological when the prophets expelled Israel from the safety of the old saving actions and suddenly shifted the basis of salvation to a future action of God." The core of eschatological thought is in this tension towards that which is to come, towards a new action of God. Hope in new acts of God is based on Yahweh's "fidelity," on the strength of his love for his people which was manifested in the past initiatives on their behalf. These new actions lead to and are nourished by an act to take place at the end of history.⁴³

But there is another facet of the prophetic message which we have already considered and which will help us—despite its apparent opposition to the orientation toward the future which we have just mentioned—to pinpoint the notion of eschatology. We refer to the prophets' concern for the present, for the historical vicissitudes which they witness. Because of this concern the object of their hope is very proximate. But, this "closeness" does not exclude an action of Yahweh at the end of history. Indeed, the prophetic message proclaims and is realized in a proximate historical event; at the same time, it is projected beyond this event. This has been perceptively and clearly explained by Steinmann with respect to messianism in his comments on Isaiah's oracle of the "soul." The author distinguishes two meanings in this prophecy: the first, the only one comprehensible to his contemporaries, points to something "immediately offered by Yahweh to remedy the tragic situation created in Jerusalem by the onslaught of the Syro-Ephraimitic League";⁴⁴ this is the birth of a new heir to the crown. The second sense is but dimly perceived by the prophet: "It is through the gift of a child that Yahweh will save the world."⁴⁵ The eschatological prophecy refers, therefore, to a concrete event, and in it to another fuller and more comprehensive one to which history must be open.⁴⁶ What is especially important for an accurate understanding of eschatology is the relationship between these events. The relationship is found in the projection towards the future included in the present event. From a similar point of view, Von Rad interprets Deuteronomy, the book which contains the theology of the Covenant: "It is certain, literally, that Deuteronomy comes from the time after the conquest, for it speaks of the people on Mt. Horeb; thus it functions as fiction; because they had been living on the land for a long time. But here we see a clearly eschatological feature which permeates the whole. All the salvific benefits which it mentions, including a life of 'rest,' are proposed to the community again, now that it is called to decide for Yahweh. We are faced with one of the most interesting problems of Old Testament theology: the promises which have already been realized historically are not invalidated, but continue to be true in a new context and somewhat different form. The promise of the land was preached again without interruption as a future good, even after it had been achieved."⁴⁷ This interpretation allows him to speak of the eschatological scope of Deuteronomy, an opening to the future which is not only not suppressed by the implementations in the present, but is rather affirmed and dynamized by them.

The historical implementations of promises in the *present* are—insofar as they are ordered toward what is to come—as characteristic of eschatology as the opening to the *future*. More precisely, this tension toward the future lends meaning to and is expressed in the present, while simultaneously being nourished by it. It is thus that the attraction of "what is to come" is the driving force of history. The action of Yahweh in history and at the end of history are inseparable. It has been said often in recent years that the expression used in Exod. 3:14 (*Ehyeh asher 'ehyeh*) is correctly translated not as "I am who am," which can be interpreted within our categories in the sense of a vigorous but static assertion of God's transcendence, but rather as "I will be who will be." A new kind of transcendence is emphasized: God is revealed as a force in our future and not as an ahistorical being.⁴⁸ Grammatically both translations are valid. It would be better perhaps to use an expression which emphasizes the characteristic of permanence: "I am he who is being." But the use of similar expressions (thirty-one times throughout the Bible) and the context of the Covenant in which the above passage is found, lead us rather to stress the active sense of the terminology employed. "To be" in Hebrew means "to become," "to be present," "to occupy a place." "I am" would mean "I am with you," "I am here ready to act" ("When I put forth my power against the Egyptians and bring the Israelites out from them, then Egypt will know that I am the Lord" [Exod. 7:5]). "I am the Lord, I will release you. . . . I will rescue you. . . . I will adopt you as my people. . . . I will lead you to the land. . . . I will give it to you for your possession" (Exod. 6:6-9; cf. also 3:10, 17; 8:18).⁴⁹

The full significance of God's action in history is understood only when it is put in its eschatological perspective; similarly, the revelation of the final meaning of history gives value to the present. The self-communication of God points towards the future, and at the same time this Promise and Good News reveal humanity to itself and widen the perspective of its historical commitment here and now.

Eschatological Promises: Historical Promises

What has been said will help us to frame better a classic question regarding the interpretation of Old Testament texts. We refer to the so-called spiritualizing influence which the New Testament has on them.⁵⁰

According to this hypothesis, what the Old Testament announces and promises on the "temporal" and "earthly" level has to be translated to a "spiritual" level. A "carnal" viewpoint kept the Jewish people from seeing the hidden, figurative sense of these announcements and promises, which is revealed clearly only in the New Testament. This hermeneutical principle is strongly held in Christian circles. And it is not new. A famous text of Pascal's echoes this ancient tradition: "The prophecies have a hidden and spiritual meaning to which this people were hostile, under the carnal meaning which they loved. If the spiritual meaning had been revealed, they would not have loved it."⁵¹

Let us take as a recent and representative example of this line of interpretation the opinion of a well-known exegete. Regarding the prophetic promises,

Grelot asserts with his usual precision that there is a fundamental misunderstanding of the object of these promises. "On the one hand," he writes "they seem to refer to the *temporal redemption* of Israel, freed from secular oppression and reestablished in its past status in such a way that all nations participate in its privileges and enjoy with it the earthly goods promised at the time of the first Covenant. But on the other hand, they also seem to refer to the *spiritual redemption* of all men, as can be inferred from some of the brightest pages, not the longest but the purest."⁶⁷ In order to clarify this ambiguity, it is necessary to argue from the principle that the true object of the promises is veiled by the figurative language used by the prophets. The problem at hand, therefore, is to discover "what has to be taken literally and what is to be understood figuratively."⁶⁸ The answer is clear: the object of these promises is the "permanent *spiritual* drama of humanity which touches directly on the mystery of sin, suffering, and salvation, which constitutes the substance of its destiny"; the texts which transmit these promises to us, however, have only an "accidental relationship with *political* history."⁶⁹ The true sense is therefore the "spiritual" one. The New Testament will make this sense perfectly clear.⁷⁰

But is this really a true dilemma: either spiritual redemption or temporal redemption? Is there not in all this an "excessive spiritualization" which Congar advises us to distrust?⁷¹ All indications seem to point in this direction. But there is, perhaps, something deeper and more difficult to overcome. The impression does indeed exist that in this statement of the problem there is an assumption which should be brought to the surface, namely a certain idea of the spiritual characterized by a kind of Western dualistic thought (matter-spirit), foreign to the Biblical mentality.⁷² And it is becoming more foreign also to the contemporary mentality.⁷³ This is a disincarnate "spiritual," scornfully superior to all earthly realities. The proper way to pose the question does not seem to us to be in terms of "temporal promise or spiritual promise." Rather, as we have mentioned above, it is a matter of partial fulfillments through liberating historical events, which are in turn new promises marking the road towards total fulfillment. Christ does not "spiritualize" the eschatological promises; he gives them meaning and fulfillment today (cf. Luke 4:21);⁷⁴ but at the same time he opens new perspectives by catapulting history forward, forward towards total reconciliation.⁷⁵ The hidden sense is not the "Spiritual" one, which devalues and even eliminates temporal and earthly realities as obstacles; rather it is the sense of a fullness which takes on and transforms historical reality.⁷⁶ Moreover, it is only in the temporal, earthly, historical event that we can open up to the future of complete fulfillment.

It is not sufficient, therefore, to acknowledge that eschatology is valid in the future as well as in the present. Indeed, this can be asserted even on the level of "spiritual" realities, present and future. We can say that eschatology does not lessen the value of the present life and yet expresses this in words which might be misleading. If by "present life" one understands only "present *spiritual* life," one does not have an accurate understanding of eschatology. Its presence is an intrahistorical reality. The grace-sin conflict, the coming of the Kingdom,

and the expectation of the parousia are also necessarily and inevitably historical, temporal, earthly, social, and material realities.

The prophets announce a kingdom of peace. But peace presupposes the establishment of justice: "Righteousness shall yield peace and its fruit [shall] be quietness and confidence forever" (Isa. 32:17; cf. also Ps. 85).⁷⁷ It presupposes the defense of the rights of the poor, punishment of the oppressors, a life free from the fear of being enslaved by others, the liberation of the oppressed. Peace, justice, love, and freedom are not private realities; they are not only internal attitudes. They are social realities, implying a historical liberation. A poorly understood spiritualization has often made us forget the human consequences of the eschatological promises and the power to transform unjust social structures which they imply. The elimination of misery and exploitation is a sign of the coming of the Kingdom. It will become a reality, according to the Book of Isaiah, when there is happiness and rejoicing among the people because "men shall build houses and live to inhabit them, plant vineyards and eat their fruit; they shall not build for others to inhabit nor plant for others to eat. . . . My chosen shall enjoy the fruit of their labor" (65:21-22) because the fruit of their labor will not be taken from them. The struggle for a just world in which there is no oppression, servitude, or alienated work will signify the coming of the Kingdom. The Kingdom and social injustice are incompatible (cf. Isa. 29:18-19 and Matt. 11:5; Lev. 25:10ff. and Luke 4:16-21). "The struggle for justice," rightly asserts Dom Antonio Fragoso, "is also the struggle for the Kingdom of God."⁷⁸

The eschatological promises are being fulfilled throughout history, but this does not mean that they can be identified clearly and completely with one or another social reality; their liberating effect goes far beyond the foreseeable and opens up new and unsuspected possibilities. The complete encounter with the Lord will mark an end to history, but it will take place in history. Thus we must acknowledge historical events in all their concreteness and significance, but we are also led to a permanent detachment. The encounter is present even now, dynamizing humanity's process of becoming and projecting it beyond its hopes (1 Cor. 2:6-9); it will not be planned or predesigned.⁷⁹ This "ignorance" accounts for the active and committed hope for the gift: Christ is "the Yes pronounced upon God's promises, every one of them" (2 Cor. 1:20).

CHRIST AND INTEGRAL LIBERATION

The conclusion to be drawn from all the above is clear: salvation embraces all persons and the whole person; the liberating action of Christ—made human in this history and not in a history marginal to real human life—is at the heart of the historical current of humanity; the struggle for a just society is in its own right very much a part of salvation history.

It is fitting, nevertheless, to reconsider the question, reviewing how it has been posed and examining other aspects of it. This will allow us, furthermore, to summarize the ideas presented in this chapter.

Temporal Progress and the Growth of the Kingdom

Chapter 3 of the first part of *Gaudium et spes* begins by asking about the meaning and value of human activity (no. 33) and ends by recalling, in an often-quoted text, that "earthly progress must be carefully distinguished from the growth of Christ's kingdom. Nevertheless, to the extent that the former can contribute to the better ordering of human society, it is of vital concern to the kingdom of God" (no. 39). The terms used are intentionally general, making different interpretations possible. The history of this text can help both our exegetical efforts and—what is of special interest to us—clarification of the question it poses.

The so-called Schema 13 became the most awaited document of the Council, after the interventions of Cardinals Montini and Suenens towards the end of the first session of the Council. Its principal task was to show the attitude of the Church towards the world.⁸⁰ A preliminary text, the so-called "Schema of Zurich," was presented at the third session of the Council; it was heavily attacked both inside and outside the conciliar chambers due to what was considered a "dualistic" approach to the natural and supernatural orders.⁸¹ Its recasting produced what became known as the "Schema of Ariccia," which formed the basis for the present Constitution.

The tone of the Schema of Ariccia was very different from the former document. It vigorously stresses the unity of the human vocation (see Part 1, Chapter 4) and recalls what its principal drafter calls "this elemental but very forgotten truth that redemption embraces the totality of creation." And he adds, "This profound unity of the divine plan for humankind, creation, and the Kingdom is a leitmotiv of Schema 13."⁸² Indeed, the Schema asserts that human "history and the history of salvation are closely implicated with each other; in the present, definitive economy of salvation the order of redemption includes the order of creation" (no. 50).⁸³ Two consequences flow from this statement. The first concerns the mission of the Church: "Since redemption includes the order of creation, the ministry of the Church necessarily encompasses—from its particular point of view—the whole complex of human realities and problems" (no. 51). The phrase "from its particular point of view" seeks to establish the angle from which the scope of the mission of the Church ought to be considered. But this restriction does not detract from the strength and even the boldness of the text. The second consequence also results from "the inclusion of all creation in the order of redemption"; it refers to the unity of the Christian life: "All human activities, even the most humble, must be vivified for Christians by the Spirit of God and ordered to the Kingdom of God" (no. 52).⁸⁴ The text is based on the attitude of the prophets who "saw in injustice not a social disorder or an offense to the poor, but a violation of the divine law and an insult to the holiness of God." It emphasizes the fact that Christ not only did "not soften this doctrine; he perfected it" (no. 52). In this connection it refers to 1 John 3:14 and Matt. 25:31-46, texts which emphasize the oneness of the human attitude toward God and one's neighbor;

these texts have disappeared from the final version of the Constitution.

These texts make it very clear that the Schema of Ariccia adopts the "one history" approach. It defines, helps us to understand, and even corrects the formulation of the distinction which constitutes the immediate antecedent of no. 39 of *Gaudium et spes*: "It is clear that the perfection of the social state is of an order completely different from that of the growth of the Kingdom of God, and they cannot be identified" (no. 43). The text continues, "In all, the form of organization and government adopted by society has a great impact on the human and moral behavior of its citizens, making their entrance into the Kingdom easier or more difficult." Despite the intentions, the choice of words here is unfortunate and gives the impression of a static, extrinsicist, and even moralistic treatment of the question. In comparison, the present text, despite its general character, is better, but it lacks the context of the unified vision which the Schema of Ariccia presented.

The Schema of Ariccia was discussed at the beginning of the fourth session of the Council. At this time it was asked that the distinction between the natural and supernatural orders be clarified and that the confusion between temporal progress and salvation be avoided. This was supported, both by the "minority" as well as some representatives of the conciliar "majority" (Cardinals Doepfner and Frings). There was also objection to an excessive optimism. It was asked that more stress be laid on the meaning of sin and it was feared that the autonomy of the temporal sphere was not sufficiently emphasized. The text was watered down. The present Chapter 4 of the first part of *Gaudium et spes* does not emphasize as strongly as did the Schema of Ariccia the concrete and historical unity of these two orders.⁸⁵ With this background, the distinction established in *Gaudium et spes*, no. 39, can be seen in a different light.⁸⁶

The Council refrained from delving into debatable theological questions. It did not oppose the position adopted in the Schema of Ariccia, but fell back on only those assertions which enjoyed a large consensus. This approach had been the intention of the drafters at Ariccia when they presented the text. Because these were "extremely serious questions deeply affecting the spirit of our contemporaries and at the same time referring to very difficult and unclarified problems of Christian revelation," the Mixed Commission did "not wish to espouse specific opinions; rather it preferred to limit itself to transmitting the common doctrine of the Church."⁸⁷ However, in the judgment of many persons the Ariccia text went beyond this moderate and prudent approach, and therefore its expressions had to be softened. The final text is limited to two general affirmations: there is a close relationship between temporal progress and the growth of the Kingdom, but these two processes are distinct. Those engaged in the latter not only cannot be indifferent to the former; they must show a genuine interest in and value it. However, the growth of the Kingdom goes beyond temporal progress. In short, there is close relationship but no identification. The conciliar text does not go beyond this. The field is open, within this framework, for different theological postures.⁸⁸ The dialogue among them will

allow a penetration of this question and will gradually lead to a new consensus, as has happened so often in the history of the Church.

Populorum progressio goes a step further. Integral development is regarded as the change from less human to more human living conditions: "Less human conditions first affect those who are so poor as to lack the minimum essentials for life; . . . then they affect those who are oppressed by social structures which have been created by abuses of ownership or by abuses of power, by the exploitation of the workers or by unfair business deals." This subhuman condition is characterized by sin and injustice. It is necessary to rise gradually from this position toward a more human state of things: "More human conditions of life clearly imply passage from want to the possession of necessities, overcoming social evils, increase of knowledge and acquisition of culture. Other more human conditions are increased esteem for the dignity of others, a turning toward the spirit of poverty, cooperation for the common good, and the will for peace. Then comes the human acknowledgment of supreme values and of God, their source and finality." Then comes the most important text, expressed in new terms: "Finally, and above all, are faith, a gift of God accepted by man's good-will, and unity in the charity of Christ, who calls us all to share as sons in the life of the living God, the Father of all men" (no. 21). "More human . . . finally, and above all"—not superhuman or supernatural. This is a fuller idea of what is human, the reaffirmation of the single vocation to the grace of communion with God. This is why there is no solution based on a continuity between what is "natural" and grace; rather there is a profound integration and an ordering toward the fullness of all that is human in the free gift of the self-communication of God. This text is rich in implications and has a freshness absent from other parts of the encyclical dealing with social and economic questions. These ideas are not, however, treated in depth or outlined with great detail and their ramifications are not elaborated. That is a task which still would have to be undertaken.

The Horizon of Political Liberation

The texts of the magisterium of the Church to which we have referred (with the exception of some points in *Populorum progressio*) are typical of the way contemporary theology treats this question. The approach seems to preclude the question regarding the ultimate meaning of human action in history or, to express it in the terms of *Gaudium et spes*, of the relationship between temporal progress and the growth of the Kingdom. Temporal progress is seen preferably in the dominion of nature by science and technology and in some of the repercussions on the development of human society; there is no radical challenge to the unjust system on which it is based. The conflictual aspects of the political sphere are absent; or rather they have been avoided.

Theologically, therefore, we will consider temporal progress as a continuation of the work of creation and explore its connection with redemptive action. Redemption implies a direct relation to sin, and sin—the breach of friendship

with God and others—is a human, social, and historical reality which originates in a socially and historically situated freedom.

"Creation," the cosmos, suffers from the consequences of sin. To cite Rom. 8 in this regard is interesting and does broaden our perspective, but this passage is not directly related to the question at hand. The immediate relationship between creation and redemption easily leads to a juxtaposition or to an artificial inclusion of the former into the latter, in which creation is granted autonomy and yet struggles to escape from the straitjacket it is thus put into. It will be necessary to look at the question from a greater distance, or in other terms, to penetrate it more deeply, in order to capture in a single view or to establish on a single principle the creation-redemption relationship. In the way the problem has previously been stated, there is a curious omission of the liberating and protagonistic role of humankind, the lord of creation and co-participant in its own salvation.¹⁰ As we have already pointed out in this chapter, only the concept of the mediation of human self-creation in history can lead us to an accurate and fruitful understanding of the relationship between creation and redemption. This line of interpretation is suggested by the outstanding fact of the Exodus; because of it, creation is regarded as the first salvific act and salvation as a new creation. Without the perspective of political liberation we cannot go beyond a relationship between two separate "orders," that of creation and that of redemption.¹¹ The liberation approach subverts also the very "order" involved in the posing of the question.

The human work, the transformation of nature, continues creation only if it is a human act, that is to say, if it is not alienated by unjust socio-economic structures. A whole theology of work, despite its evident insights, appears naive from a political point of view. Teilhard de Chardin is among those who contributed most to a search for a unity between faith and the "religion of the world," but he does so from a scientific point of view. He values the dominion over nature that humankind has achieved and speaks of it as the penetration point of evolution, enabling humankind to control it. Politically his vision is, on the whole, neutral.¹² This focus has had a definite impact, as could be expected, on the views of theologians of the developed world. The faith-science conflict and the application of science to the transformation of the world have sapped most of their energy. This is why concern for human society is translated into terms of development and progress.¹³ In other areas the problems are different. The concerns of the so-called Third World countries revolve around the social injustice-justice axis, or, in concrete terms, the oppression-liberation axis.¹⁴ Thus there is a great challenge to the faith of Christians in these countries. In contradistinction to a pessimistic approach to this world which is so frequent in traditional Christian groups and which encourages escapism, there is proposed in these other countries an optimistic vision which seeks to reconcile faith and the world and to facilitate commitment. But this optimism must be based on facts. Otherwise, this posture can be deceitful and treacherous and can even lead to a justification of the present order of things. In the underdeveloped countries one starts with a rejection of the existing situation,

considered as fundamentally unjust and dehumanizing. Although this is a negative vision, it is nevertheless the only one which allows us to go to the root of the problems and to create without compromises a new social order, based on justice and fellowship. This rejection does not produce an escapist attitude, but rather a will to revolution.

The concept of political liberation—with economic roots—recalls the conflictual aspects of the historical current of humanity. In this current there is not only an effort to know and dominate nature. There is also a situation—which both affects and is affected by this current—of misery and despoliation of the fruit of human work, the result of the exploitation of human beings; there is a confrontation between social classes and, therefore, a struggle for liberation from oppressive structures which hinder persons from living with dignity and assuming their own destiny. This struggle is the human activity whose ultimate goal must in the first place be enlightened by faith. Once this has been achieved, other facets will likewise be illuminated. The horizon of political liberation allows for a new approach to the problem, it throws new light on it, and it enables us to see aspects which had been but dimly perceived; it permits us also to get away from an alleged apolitical science and provides a different context for the crucial role of scientific knowledge in the historical human praxis. Other religions think in terms of cosmos and nature; Christianity, rooted in Biblical sources, thinks in terms of history. And in this history, injustice and oppression, divisions and confrontations exist. But the hope of liberation is also present.

Christ the Liberator¹⁴

The approach we have been considering opens up for us—and this is of utmost importance—unforeseen vistas on the problem of sin. An unjust situation does not happen by chance; it is not something branded by a fatal destiny: there is human responsibility behind it. The prophets said it clearly and energetically and we are rediscovering their words now. This is the reason why the Medellín Conference refers to the state of things in Latin America as a "sinful situation," as a "rejection of the Lord."¹⁵ This characterization, in all its breadth and depth, not only criticizes the individual abuses on the part of those who enjoy great power in this social order; it challenges all their practices, that is to say, it is a repudiation of the whole existing system—to which the Church itself belongs.

In this approach we are far, therefore, from that naive optimism which denies the role of sin in the historical development of humanity. This was the criticism, one will remember, of the Schema of Ariccia and it is frequently made in connection with Teilhard de Chardin and all those theologies enthusiastic about human progress. But in the liberation approach sin is not considered as an individual, private, or merely interior reality—asserted just enough to necessitate "spiritual" redemption which does not challenge the order in which we live. Sin is regarded as a social, historical fact, the absence of

fellowship and love in relationships among persons, the breach of friendship with God and with other persons, and, therefore, an interior, personal fracture. When it is considered in this way, the collective dimensions of sin are rediscovered. This is the Biblical notion that José María González Ruiz calls the "hamartiosphere," the sphere of sin: "a kind of parameter or structure which objectively conditions the progress of human history itself."¹⁶ Moreover, sin does not appear as an afterthought, something which one has to mention so as not to stray from tradition or leave oneself open to attack. Nor is this a matter of escape into a fleshless spiritualism. Sin is evident in oppressive structures, in the exploitation of humans by humans, in the domination and slavery of peoples, races, and social classes. Sin appears, therefore, as the fundamental alienation, the root of a situation of injustice and exploitation.¹⁷ It cannot be encountered in itself, but only in concrete instances, in particular alienations.¹⁸ It is impossible to understand the concrete manifestations without understanding the underlying basis and vice versa. Sin demands a radical liberation, which in turn necessarily implies a political liberation.¹⁹ Only by participating in the historical process of liberation will it be possible to show the fundamental alienation present in every partial alienation.

This radical liberation is the gift which Christ offers us. By his death and resurrection he redeems us from sin and all its consequences, as has been well said in a text we quote again: "It is the same God who, in the fullness of time, sends his Son in the flesh, so that he might come to liberate all men from all slavery to which sin has subjected them: hunger, misery, oppression, and ignorance, in a word, that injustice and hatred which have their origin in human selfishness."²⁰ This is why the Christian life is a passover, a transition from sin to grace, from death to life, from injustice to justice, from the subhuman to the human. Christ introduces us by the gift of his Spirit into communion with God and with all human beings. More precisely, it is because he introduces us into this communion, into a continuous search for its fullness, that he conquers sin—which is the negation of love—and all its consequences.²¹

In dealing with the notion of liberation in Chapter 2, we distinguished three levels of meaning: political liberation, human liberation throughout history, liberation from sin and admission to communion with God. In the light of the present chapter, we can now study this question again. These three levels mutually affect each other, but they are not the same. One is not present without the others, but they are distinct: they are all part of a single, all-encompassing salvific process, but they are to be found at different levels.²² Not only is the growth of the Kingdom not reduced to temporal progress; because of the Word accepted in faith, we see that the fundamental obstacle to the Kingdom, which is sin, is also the root of all misery and injustice; we see that the very meaning of the growth of the Kingdom is also the ultimate precondition for a just society and a new humanity. One reaches this root and this ultimate precondition only through the acceptance of the liberating gift of Christ, which surpasses all expectations. But, inversely, all struggle against exploitation and alienation, in a history which is fundamentally one, is an

attempt to vanquish selfishness, the negation of love. This is the reason why any effort to build a just society is liberating. And it has an indirect but effective impact on the fundamental alienation. It is a salvific work, although it is not all of salvation. As a human work it is not exempt from ambiguities, any more than what is considered to be strictly "religious" work. But this does not weaken its basic orientation or its objective results.

Temporal progress—or, to avoid this aseptic term, human liberation—and the growth of the Kingdom both are directed toward complete communion of human beings with God and among themselves. They have the same goal, but they do not follow parallel roads, not even convergent ones. The growth of the Kingdom is a process which occurs historically *in* liberation, insofar as liberation means a greater human fulfillment. Liberation is a precondition for the new society, but this is not all it is. While liberation is implemented in liberating historical events, it also denounces their limitations and ambiguities, proclaims their fulfillment, and impels them effectively towards total communion. This is not an identification.¹⁰¹ Without liberating historical events, there would be no growth of the Kingdom. But the process of liberation will not have conquered the very roots of human oppression and exploitation without the coming of the Kingdom, which is above all a gift. Moreover, we can say that the historical, political liberating event *is* the growth of the Kingdom and *is* a salvific event; but it is not *the* coming of the Kingdom, not *all* of salvation. It is the historical realization of the Kingdom and, therefore, it also proclaims its fullness. This is where the difference lies. It is a distinction made from a dynamic viewpoint, which has nothing to do with the one which holds for the existence of two juxtaposed "orders," closely connected or convergent, but deep down different from each other.

The very radicalness and totality of the salvific process require this relationship. Nothing escapes this process, nothing is outside the pale of the action of Christ and the gift of the Spirit. This gives human history its profound unity. Those who reduce the work of salvation are indeed those who limit it to the strictly "religious" sphere and are not aware of the universality of the process. It is those who think that the work of Christ touches the social order in which we live only indirectly or tangentially, and not in its roots and basic structure. It is those who in order to protect salvation (or to protect their interests) lift salvation from the midst of history, where individuals and social classes struggle to liberate themselves from the slavery and oppression to which other individuals and social classes have subjected them. It is those who refuse to see that the salvation of Christ is a radical liberation from all misery, all despoliation, all alienation. It is those who by trying to "save" the work of Christ will "lose" it.

In Christ the all-comprehensiveness of the liberating process reaches its fullest sense. His work encompasses the three levels of meaning which we mentioned above. A Latin American text on the missions seems to us to summarize this assertion accurately: "All the dynamism of the cosmos and of human history, the movement towards the creation of a more just and fraternal

world, the overcoming of social inequalities among persons, the efforts, so urgently needed on our continent, to liberate humankind from all that depersonalizes it—physical and moral misery, ignorance and hunger—as well as the awareness of human dignity (*Gaudium et spes*, no. 22)—all these originate, are transformed, and reach their perfection in the saving work of Christ. In him and through him salvation is present at the heart of human history, and there is no human act which, in the last instance, is not defined in terms of it."¹⁰²