

## PERSONAL AND ETERNAL SALVATION AND HUMAN REDEMPTION

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The purpose of this paper is simply to expose some ideas which can guide us to reflect on the subject herewith proposed.

Lately the church has been faced with great political-social problems which have become especially aggravated in the so-called countries of the "Third World." As in other epochs of ecclesiastical history, theology has not been immune to the ideas which prevail in the social milieu and in one way or the other it finally reflects these ideas in sizing up the contemporaneous scene.

Finally, we are asked today, is the Gospel extramundane or intramundane? Is Christianity only "vertical," turned towards heaven, or is it "horizontal," at the service of the total man within the context of human society? Is our proclamation fundamentally futuristic or presentistic? Is it a message for here and now, or only a promise for the beyond? Is our attitude one of escape or absenteeism or that of social compromise? Is it true that it is intended to divide man in two or three constitutive parts of his being and only preach the "salvation of the soul" apart from taking any interest in his temporary needs? Is the Christian message redemption, in the widest sense of this term, or is it the opium of the people?

From these and other similar questions we will reflect on the nature of Christian mission and what the church represents in the world of today. Is the church only called to care for souls or should it more and more integrate in the society and fight to radically transform it in its economic and political structures?

In the light of the Scriptures, it is worth our while to study some of the replies to these questions.

### *Theology of Redemption*

No one can ignore the distressed, desperate, and heart-rending drama in which the great majority of mankind is living. There is a great difference between preaching on Sunday morning to a congregation of well-fed and well-clothed Christians and announcing the Gospel to a multitude of persons who hardly succeed in subsisting and covering their nudity. Last year a prominent political leader of South America said that it profoundly touched him to see that among the peasants of his country many toothless mouths cry, "Viva Liberty." When reporting on the Fourth Conference of the Non-Aligned Countries, which took place in Algiers in September 1973, the Madrilenian magazine *Hechos y Dichos* comments:

"There were 76 countries represented as members, twelve more as observers, three (Austria, Sweden and Australia) as guests, and sixteen movements of libera-

tion which still fought against colonialism. And behind these representatives are 2,600 million inhabitants of the earth, 70% of the world population. 16% of the total income of the whole planet comes from capitalist countries which represent only 21% of the population of the world but realizes 66% of the world product. All these countries which met in Algiers were united by the lacerating preoccupation with the abyss which widening, separates the developed countries from the marginal ones."

In the year 2,000, the 4,500 million inhabitants of the "Third World" will receive only \$300 of income "per capita" while the 1,500 million of rich nations will enjoy \$5,000 to \$10,000. These convenors were united by the common humiliations, the gags and the exploitations.

The fact that such a meeting was held is symptomatic of the awakening of the poor nations to their condition of disadvantage as contrasted with the great and mighty of the financial world. Being conscious of these realities, some Catholic and Protestant thinkers have devoted themselves to formulating a theology of liberation.

The term *liberation*, possesses for these theologians a conflicting and political dilemma which suggests the failure of the economic development as a pretended reply to the problem of dependent nations. Hugo Assman, for instance, considers the theology of liberation a Latin American form of political theology which was born in the revolutionary leftism. After denying that the liberating theology had spontaneously arisen with the postconciliar leftist reformism, Assman says:

"The language of the revolutionary leftists (the marxist vocabulary of the "new marxism" latinamerican) discrepant from the reformism of the communist parties of the moscovite line, the language of the student movement, influenced more or less directly. A certain influence, presumably more indirect for Latin America, was exerted by H. Marcuse (Un ensayo sobre la liberacion) and by international meetings on the 'dialéctica de la liberacion.'"

There is no time or space for us to make a short study of the currents of theological thinking which open the channel of the theology of liberation. Of course, the liberationist theologians believe they have overcome the theologies commonly called vanguards but which do not originate from the social reality of the under-developed countries. Such would be the case of the "new European theology" of Metz and Moltmann, the theology of "secularization" and the theology of Rahner and Küng, who are considered to be alienated from social praxis, excessively reactionaries on the political level. Assman believes that "the revolution of the Third World exceeds, in its structure of ideas, both the middle class revolution in 1769 and its similar subproducts, and the proletarian revolution of 1917 in Russia."

The theologians of the liberation profess that the origin of the liberating language is due to the fact that the poor nations have become conscious of their being maintained in underdevelopment, as nations dominated by others. To the criticism that in this language some criteria are established that are neither theological nor biblical, they reply that the message of the Scriptures is liberating and that Jesus Christ himself was a sign of protest against the unjust order of his time. They make frequent recourse to the Israelite exodus as being a paradigm of the liberating process although the hermeneutics they employ in the study of this theme leave much to be desired.

In reality, the origin of the theology of liberation is not the Bible but the economical-social-political analysis of the infrahuman situation in which millions of persons are living throughout the world.

According to the liberational theologians, the mission of the church is to compromise with the political-social liberation. To this end it must denounce every dehumanizing situation, question the *status quo*, and render the masses conscious and political. Gutierrez believes that becoming converted means embracing the cause of the poor and that "in the present Latin American context it should be said that the church must politize when evangelizing."

The call tends more for revolutionary action than for theological reflection. Action comes first, theology afterwards. Gutierrez admits that there are chapters of theology which will be written later, on the way to liberation. In the end, there are no established doctrinal norms for the church. "The Bible," says Assman, "is not a direct text of criterions." However, the theology of liberation is "theology," they say, insofar as it discovers in the revolutionary practice the presence of the Christian faith.

According to P. Blanquart's view of the revolutionary, "Faith does not speak to him about revolution but it is precisely in the heart of his revolutionary action that the Word of God enters in a direct manner." The use of violence is licit in this liberating action.

Another of the main characteristics of theological liberationism is its great emphasis on the social dimension of sin. Much is said about the unjust structures, but very little about sinning individuals. Above all, it is the society which must change.

The injustices of the dominant classes are denounced, but not that of the oppressed classes. The latter must free themselves from their slavery, freeing at the same time their oppressors, by whose agency the devil is acting in the world. However, they do not underline personal or social culpability of which the oppressed must free themselves.

In reality, the theology of liberation is a form of revolutionary humanism and a utopia (in the traditional sense of this term), although now the utopia comes in the name of "scientific analysis" and "social practice."

For the liberationist theologians there exists the danger of looking for the maximum wellbeing in economic prosperity as if man himself were only food and clothing, and did not live for other things apart from material bread. Also, they run the risk of converting the Gospel into a revolutionary ideology, or making sacred a political system (whatever it may be) which, although speaking in the name of the oppressed, is nonetheless imperfect and transitory.

To sum up, the liberationist theology does not have its point of origin in the Bible, but in the economical-social situation of the underdeveloped nations. It lacks adequate hermeneutics for the study and application of the Scriptures. It is radically humanistic in its anthropology. It tends to reduce the mission of the church to political activism and it is in constant danger of sanctifying the social-economical-political system which has given it strength. And it gives way to a leftist triumphalism and constantinism, without permitting any criticism from

outside, or other possibilities for the expression of social justice which are demanded by the Gospel.

#### *Liberation in the New Testament*

Having examined the theme in the light of the theology described in broad terms in the previous chapter, it is worth our while approaching the New Testament, trying to find at least some code for the study of salvation as the total liberation of man.

a. *Testimony of Christ.* When beginning his ministry in Galilee, Christ said, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord" (Luke 4:18, 19).

The words extracted from the prophecy of Isaiah are definitely messianic (Isa. 61:1,2). Fully conscious of the seriousness of his proclamation, Jesus of Nazareth says that in him all that has been announced by the prophet is fulfilled. He is the Liberator, the *Ruomenos* of Israel (Rom. 11:26) and of all nations. The name of Jesus signifies Savior (*soter*), and the Savior has the function of Liberator.

Proof is abounding that Jesus of Nazareth is what he says he is. For instance, note the reply he gives to the emissaries of John the Baptist (Matt. 11:4,5). The liberation he brings is total. He not only forgives sinners, he also cures the body, snatching it from the clutches of sickness and in some cases even from the power of the devil (Luke 13:16). Even death is defeated by the power of the Messiah.

However, his liberating action is selective. He does not heal all the sick people at the pool of Bethesda, nor even less all those in Palestine who were spiritually and physically slaves of the Evil One. The time of universal health had seemingly not yet come. The ministry of Christ is directed fundamentally to individuals. Even when preaching to multitudes he hints that he expects from any one of his listeners a personal decision. He does not free the masses, but only certain individuals.

It is obvious that the emphasis of his mission and teaching is spiritual. In John 8:31-36 he uses the verb *eleutheroo* (to free), but he uses it above all in relation with the spiritual and moral liberty. "Everybody who sins," is a slave who needs to be freed by the Son of God (v. 34). It is a fact that sin has individual and social dimensions; however, it is not in the sense of "liberation of oppressing structures," that is at once perceived in this passage. The reference to the contrast between the slave and the son in the society of the first century (v. 35) only serves to illustrate the sad condition of him who is slave of sin, but not to fight directly against the institution of slavery as such.

The word translated "liberty" in Luke 4:18, 19, is not *eleutheria* but *aphesis* which is also used with regard to the pardon of sins. According to this last point, Christ would especially announce a spiritual liberation. However, we have already outlined the messianic character of the passage. Jesus does not deny, rather he confirms, the eschatological liberation promised in the Old Testament. It is not necessary to wait for someone else. He is the Messiah announced to Israel. His credentials

are authentic and the hope of total freedom is not vain. But to the surprise of those who crave to be freed immediately on the political and social level, Christ does not act as the political Messiah; he does not call for a general rebellion.

We must take into consideration that in those times Palestine was in the orbit of the Roman Empire. Each day the inhabitants of Jerusalem could see in the streets of the holy town the heathen soldiers. The Israelite nation was victim of imperialism and colonialism. The masses were like sheep without a shepherd. There were too many who exploited them, there was no one who was nourishing or defending them. The misfortunes inherent in poverty were many. Slavery was an institution protected by laws and justified by hate. The militant politicians — Herodians, Sadducees — were corrupt, defending their own corrupt interests. Guerrilla zealots formed a gang of desperadoes who could not succeed in uniting the whole nation against the military power of the Romans. The economic, social, and political structures cried for a profound, radical change. The climate seemed most propitious for a popular rebellion and the multitude in Galilee searched for Jesus to proclaim him King. However, he, being conscious of the immediate objective of his mission and of the political consequences of the proposal that the people were making to him, refused to raise the banner of rebellion against the Empire.

What a strange Messiah was this! He even went to the extreme of not opposing payment of the tribute to Caesar.

He did not change unjust structures of society. He did not abolish the thrones of the mighty or raise the humble to royal power. He did not shower good things on the poor or strip the rich of their possessions (Luke 1:52, 53). The powers of the evil of this world seemed to smash him in the dark hours of Calvary. It was certain that he would rise on the third day from the dead. Then he ascended to heaven and left the earthly scene in the same miserable condition in which he had found it. He did not free his people from the oppressor. The legions of Caesar were not vanquished.

There are some who insist that Jesus was a politician who compromised in the cause of the economical-social liberation of the disinherited. They say that his birth had political significance (which would explain the violent reaction of Herod), that his teaching was a challenge to the structures of the political and religious power, that his attitude of criticism of the established order and the presence of at least one publican zealot among his disciples identified him with the Palestine guerrilla, and that his death had a political motive, because the title on the Cross indicated that he was "the King of the Jews."

Neither do we have time nor space to go more thoroughly into these themes which Oscar Cullmann discusses fully in some of his writings. It will be sufficient for now to say that it cannot be proven, on the basis of the New Testament, that Christ incited the masses to violently subvert the political-social order of his time. Cullmann says that Christ does not consider the State "an ultimate divine donation; however, on the other hand, he accepts it and he radically refutes every attempt to destroy it."

Nevertheless, it would not be biblical to say that his incarnation, death, and resurrection did not produce any changes in the march of history. The cross became an instrument of judgment against the prince of this world (John 12:31; Col. 2:14,15). Christ has seated himself at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven such as a king who, after victory, occupies the throne awaiting all his enemies to come and prostrate themselves at his feet (Psa. 110:1; Matt. 22:44, Heb. 1:13, etc.). Furthermore, the presence of his church in the world and the proclamation of the message of reconciliation to all nations are realities which cannot be ignored if there is to be an impartial analysis of this era called Christian.

Also, it is necessary to recall that in the teaching of Christ there exists a ferment of deep social transformation. The principles which speak of the dignity of human being, of the justice, mercy, peace, equality, liberty, and fraternity, did not fail to have repercussions on the conscience of our civilization over nearly two thousand years and, directly or indirectly, they have produced social changes for the benefit of humanity.

In Christian apologetics even the premillenarians frequently resort to the argument that the teaching of Christ has favorably influenced occidental culture and the whole contemporary world. We cite positive examples of this influence, such as the claim of the rights of women and children, the abolition of slavery, and the incorporation of Christian principles in the ideas of the big movements of social transformation. We have repeated that modern science originated from and flourished in the Christian context. In other words, we believe that the doctrine of Christ has exerted clear influences on the historical future of our nations and on the structures of human society. We believe that, in one way or another, the first coming of the Savior also changed the course of history.

However, fearing to be called "horizontalists" or, even worse, "leftists," we do not ask if these principles which produced so good an influence on the people of past generations ought not also to influence our generation in favor of economic-social liberation. We do not ask why we continue to permit others to proclaim, in their own manner, the Christian truths which we, who claim that we follow the living God, ought to proclaim on the strength of his Word and Spirit. It is undeniable that some banners of freedom which we have dropped on the way have been picked up by others, not in the name of God but, sometimes, against God.

On the other hand, it is imperative not to forget that even social changes, inspired sometimes by Christian principles, have not themselves solved the spiritual problem of man. For example, the abolition of slavery in the Western world does not signify that the chains of sin, in the hearts of those who suffered such a shameful yoke or of those who have oppressed them, have been broken. Christ said that all evil comes out of the heart of man, and that he has to be born again.

When citing Isa. 61:1,2, and Luke 4:18,19, Jesus omits the words which speak about judgment. This omission may point to the right way of interpreting the earthly ministry of Christ. He had not come to judge,

but to save (John 3:17). The term *Ruomenos*, liberator (Rom. 11:26) has strong Old Testament roots, evoking the figure of the *gaal*, the close parent who redeems, who brings freedom by paying the required ransom. It is suggested in the Old Testament that the liberation of the Exodus, the type of the future great redemption, was also a ransom made possible by the divine Gaal, Jehovah of the armies (Exod. 6:6, Psa. 74:2).

When at the beginning of his ministry Christ declared he was sent to free the captives, he is aware of the thought of the cross. Some time afterwards he said, "Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom (lutron) for many" (Matt. 20:26). There can be no real *eleutheria* (liberation) without the corresponding *lutron* (ransom). The prophecies relative to the Messiah suffering had to be fulfilled (Psa. 2; Isa. 53). The objective of God with regard to redemption would not remain frustrated (Eph. 1:13,14; I Pet. 1:17-21; Rev. 13:8).

The *Ruomenos* had to die on the cross. This is, therefore, the divine message for man today that Christ died for our sin, that he was resurrected, and that he will return to establish throughout the world his reign of justice and peace. All authentically Christian liberation bases itself on that proclamation. Every actual liberation in Christ confirms to us the promise of the cosmic liberation which is to come, the regeneration which the Son of Man will bring (Matt. 19:28), and the restoration of all things which God has revealed through his prophets (Acts 3:21). Meanwhile we are called upon to live and serve in the dynamics of this new and glorious hope.

b. *Testimony of Paul.* One of the prominent themes in Pauline theology is liberty or liberation, the one which the believers in Christ are enjoying now, and the one which will manifest itself when he comes again.

We have already discussed the concept of *Ruomenos* in Rom. 11:26. According to this passage, Christ will be the deliverer of Israel, and that the deliverance will have far-reaching effects is obvious from the Scriptures. As an example, (i) the Son of God will deliver his church from the future wrath (I Thess. 1:10); (ii) the body of the believer will be redeemed finally (Rom. 8:23). The ideas of deliverance and redemption are closely linked in the Bible.

The believer is redeemed in all dimensions; spiritual, mental, and physical. In the salvation plan of God there is no antithesis between the soul and the body such as we generally apply and which has conveyed the impression that our Christianity is, in this aspect, docetic, or without body. The exegetes and theologians have pointed out that certain wrong ideas which have been introduced in the church with respect to the body are Greek, not Christian. Paul highly esteems the body of the believer; he sees it in its present glory (temple of the Spirit, instrument of justice), and in its future glory (I Cor. 15:35-38, Phil. 3:20,21).

(iii) The creation itself will be delivered "from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God" (Rom. 8:21). This suggests the cosmic liberation already mentioned above which cannot include all sinners because many of them will "suffer the punish-

ment of eternal damnation" (II Thess. 1:9). Humanistic and universalistic sentimentalism, which overlooks the justice of God, lacks Biblical backing. It is a fact that God loves the world (John 3:16), and is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (II Pet. 3:9).

However, there will always be those who prefer to treasure up "unto themselves wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God" (Rom. 2:5). The warning of this judgment should more often accompany the proclamation of the Gospel.

In Christ, liberty is the promise for the remote future and reality for today. Paul teaches that the believer is already fundamentally delivered due to the new relationship he has with Christ and to the new position which he enjoys in him. Identifying himself with Christ in his faith, the sinner is reborn to the liberty of the sons of God. Significantly, the Apostle indicates that the believer has been delivered from the domination of sin (Rom. 6:6, 12, 14-23), from the domination of law (Rom. 7:1-6; Gal. 3:5), from the law of sin and death, and from all damnation (Rom. 8:1, 2).

It is hoped that this deliverance will show reality in the life of the redeemed. It is necessary to leave the servitude of sin and to live justly (Rom. 6:11-13, 19-22) in the private experiences of every day and in all relationships either of family or society. We are called to live "as free, and not using our liberty for a cloak of maliciousness, but as the servants of God" (I Pet. 2:16). Christianity, it is recognized, has a lot of paradoxes.

Paul says, "to be free from everybody," however, he becomes a "servant to everybody" in order to win the greatest number (I Cor. 9:19). Martin Luther has majestically explained this paradox in his famous treatise on Christian liberty.

Christ, "who gave himself for our sins that he might deliver us from this present evil world," (Gal. 1:4) meaning the world system which is full of evil. However, the apostle also affirms that in our personal relationships, we should not avoid the sinners, "for then must ye needs go out of the world" (I Cor. 6:10). This coincides with the teaching of our Master in his holy prayer (John 17). He personified his doctrine when he received sinners and ate with them.

The exhortations of verses such as Rom 12:2, and I John 2:12-17 are still valid. However, Christ will deliver us practically not only before the world but in the world. The dualism "Christian world," which we have underlined without taking into account other aspects of biblical worldliness and which has made the evangelical Church in many places retire from the social scene, may be ascetic but not Christian. Neither is the secularism "Christian" which tries to *sacralize* the world and make the Church mundane. However, if Christ wishes to deliver us in the world, what are the oppressing forces from which he will deliver us?

When Paul refers to the fight of the Christian, he emphasizes the spiritual. Our battle is not "against flesh and blood" (Eph. 6:10-20), and the weapons of our warfare are not carnal (II Cor. 10:4). However, recognizing the presence and activity of the Satanic world does not mean spiritualizing the problems of man in such a manner that it will

make it impossible for him to become conscious of the social reality in which he lives.

We can learn much from the teaching and the example given by the Apostle about the attitude the Christian must assume in the presence of worldly powers. Let us consider three concrete causes: (i) concerning religion, it is evident that from the day of his meeting Christ, Saul of Tarsus chose a path that would lead him always further away from the institutional Judaism of the synagogue, the temple, the sects of the Scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees, and Herodians.

The total breach becomes inevitable. The Jewish leaders declare lethal warfare on Paul. He weeps for the spiritual condition of his Israelite brothers (Rom. 9:1-5), but he does not renounce his liberty in Christ or tolerate the slightest mixture of Judaistic legalism with the Gospel of the grace of God. The epistle to the Galatians has been called "the letter of Christian freedom."

In the case of heathen religions, the attack of Paul is direct without any trace of palliative. According to the letter to the Romans, by not glorifying God the heathen have lost understanding, have fallen into idolatry and the most repugnant immorality (1:18-32). The tumult in Ephesus (Acts 19) gives us an idea of the deep-rootedness of the heathen cult in the mentality of the masses. Some philosophers, such as Seneca, were biting in their criticism of idolatry, but nevertheless, for social convenience sake, they practiced it. The Roman Empire was tolerant of the religions of the conquered nations, but the time came when they were required to give homage to the emperor. It would be impossible to bring into harmony their heathen religion with Paul's gospel. For the apostle, Christ and not Caesar is the Master.

(iv) The mention of Caesar brings us to reflect on the attitude Paul adopted before the civil power. Chapter 13 of Romans has given rise to much controversy. It is certain, moreover, that the apostle was not an anarchist. Neither did he believe that the state was divine in itself, although he confers on the state a certain dignity as having been ordained by God. However, he did not regard civil power as autonomous with the Creator. Caesar is not equal to God, or over God, but underneath God. His authority comes from above (John 19:11). Consequently, the Christian owes obedience to the state as long as the state does not demand what belongs to God. There came a time many Christians had to elect between adoring Caesar or suffering martyrdom.

It is interesting to note that Paul, who did not conspire against civil power or incite others to destroy it, died as if he were an enemy of the state. However capricious the sentence of the empire was, it is undeniable that the apostle had been condemned to die because he was Christian.

(v) One of the most acute social problems in those days was that of slavery. However, in Pauline literature, or in any other part of the New Testament, there does not exist any exhortation to insurrection among the slaves, who were certainly numerous in the Empire. On the contrary, Paul exhorted them to obey in all ways and to serve faithfully their worldly masters (Eph. 6:5-7; Col. 3:22-25; I Pet. 2:18-25).

He told the masters to treat well their slaves because there is a Lord in heaven to whom they would have to give account (Eph. 6:9; Col. 4:1). But he does not ask them to free their slaves for the glory of the Gospel. Apparently Paul's Christ had not come to free the captives, at least not in the form many had hoped for. It is necessary to take into account that Christianity was in constant danger of being confused with the Zealot movement or with some other subversive group. This is a danger harassing us also at the present time. Following the steps of the Lord, with regard to social problems, Paul was not mistaken.

However, in his teaching there are seeds of freedom which in due time, would germinate and give abundant fruit. For example, the idea that the free as well as servants are the slaves of the Master. The strong affirmation that in Christ there are neither slaves nor free men could not help but rouse firm convictions about human dignity and the equality of all men in the presence of God. The letter to Philemon abounds in implications about freedom. Within the framework of the most refined Christian courtesy, this document possesses an enormous abolitionist potential.

The passage in I Cor. 7:20-24 is difficult to translate and to interpret, but it gives enough light on the problem which occupies us. According to A. Biber, the correct translation would be, "Even when you have the possibility of freeing yourself you should rather remain slave." More reasonable seems to be the concept of W. Rees regarding this verse: "It would be better to take it as parenthesis ('However, if you can obtain your liberty, take it'). Others think that Paul recommends that one should continue in the condition of slavery even if one could become emancipated. This seems to be an unreasonable demand because the desire for liberty is innate to man and slavery might constitute an obstacle to the practice of religion."

What Paul seems to teach is that the slave who was a slave before his conversion in Christ should not strive to free himself if it does not seem possible for the moment. However, if the opportunity comes for him to break his chains, he should do so. After all, he is already the Lord's freeman (v. 22). As for the Christian who was found by Christ as a free man, he should not make himself the servant of men (v. 23).

Paul does not sanctify, even less glorify, slavery. It is an evil rather than a good thing for humanity. The recommendation of the apostle that everyone remain "in the state in which he was found" is of a general nature and admits other possibilities. If single women and widows can change their civil status (I Cor. 7:25-40), so the slave cannot be denied the right to free himself from the oppressing yoke when this is within his reach.

In our day there is no biblical basis for a Christian who suffers any form of oppression to resign himself to remain in this without at least asking himself whether there are any possibilities of putting an end to his abject state. In former times a slave had several means of becoming a freeman. Today we do not have to accept blindly the thesis that violence is the only way of liberation.

We who have been delivered in Christ should not become servants of men (I Cor. 7:23), even if they claim to offer deliverance from our economic-social chains. We are bought with the price of the blood of the Lamb of God (John 1:29; I Cor. 6:18-20, I Pet. 1:18, 19). We are the servants of God.

#### Conclusion

Christ is the Savior; not only the liberator who comes, but the liberator who has already come. Deliverance in Christ is fundamentally related to the sin which is enchaining man in his deepest being. Therefore, the essence of the evangelistic message for every creature in the world is "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the Scriptures" (I Cor. 15:3, 4). The message of the Gospel points to the total liberation of man, in all dimensions of his personality and all his relations of his life.

Although the Gospel emphasizes the deliverance of the individual, there are evangelical principles that have been influenced and can influence here and now for the good of humanity. Even if the Church fulfills its mission faithfully to proclaim "the entire counsel of God," it cannot avoid either the auto-judgment or the trial of society because of the state of oppression in which millions and millions of human beings are living in different parts of the world.

However, deliverance will not be total until the return of Christ the Lord.

The transformation of this world in a reign of justice and peace for all human beings will not be the work of man but that of God. The Gospel is the message of hope — the hope in Christ, not in man.

## THE KINGDOM OF GOD AND THE CHURCH IN CONTEMPORARY PROTESTANTISM AND CATHOLICISM

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The scope of this study paper is naturally limited: it is based on a selective bibliography, which may not be everyone's choice; it will be largely descriptive, though having an evaluative conclusion; its form will be highly schematic, thus running the risk of exaggerating positions, though with no intention to do so; and the material will be condensed, i.e., presented without much explanatory elaboration. Despite these obvious limitations imposed by space and time, it is to be hoped that the reader will enjoy entering into what is a fascinating contemporary discussion.

### 1. *The Kingdom and the Church in Jesus' ministry and teaching*

a. Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah promised in the Old Testament Scriptures. It is the business of the Messiah to establish the Kingdom. Jesus, as Messiah, has therefore come to make actual God's victorious rule over his people (Bright).

b. The Messiah never appears alone. If Jesus is the Messiah there must be a remnant (Bright). There is no Messiah without a community. Those who are called into God's Kingdom form such a community (Ridderbos).

c. Jesus declares his intention to found a Church (not to be confused with the later, hierarchically ordered, structure) when it becomes obvious both that Israel rejects him as Messiah and the disciples accept him as such (Matt. 16:13 ff.) (Padilla).

d. According to some, it is the failure of the preaching of the Kingdom which leads Jesus to pay special attention to instructing his disciples, the *ecclesia designata* (Karrer). According to others, the Church is the calculated result of this preaching, the group of disciples forming the nucleus of the new people of the new covenant (Padilla, *Lumen Gentium*).

e. The rejection of Jesus as Messiah was basically due to his failure to re-establish the Kingdom of David. The new community which he introduced was an unprecedented new reality. The inclusion of the Gentiles within the people of God is already anticipated in Jesus' ministry (especially Luke) (Nunez).

f. Further evidence of Jesus' intention to form a Church is given by the following facts: he gathered men to himself ("follow after me") and instructed his disciples to gather more; he foretold that the gulf between this new community and the Jews would grow and