

## SECULAR PERSPECTIVE OF SALVATION

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### INTRODUCTION - SECULAR PERSPECTIVE OF SALVATION

There is an ‘inextinguishable yearning’ in every human person to unite with that which is infinite, eternal, absolute, permanent, even a loving Father, that is to say, God, in order to defeat death in all its forms including despair, meaninglessness, and abandonment. Only God can and does offer human persons salvation, which enables them to surmount death. God came to earth a wholly finite, temporal, impermanent, transitory human person in order to open up humanity’s human existence, in order to lead them to the breadth and depth of His infiniteness, His absoluteness,<sup>1</sup> His love. If a person does not choose to accept the response of the One who transcends human life, then he can only seek a response within the parameters of human life. Whatever the choice, whether it be God’s redemption, his own response, or that of another person, he can only choose during his lifetime.

That for which human persons yearn they designate ‘salvation’, ‘immortality’, sometimes ‘liberation’, or by another word, depending on what they are attempting to convey. All designations contain ‘calling’, ‘redemption’, ‘conversion’, ‘justification’, ‘sanctification’, and other factors. Whatever term a person uses is influenced by one common observation above all others: a person experiences the world as one that often does not correspond to the creation of a loving God. All kinds of poverty, oppression, injustice, domination, and imaginable and unimaginable human suffering constitute signs not only of contemporary times but of all times. No matter how rich, no matter how powerful a person is, every person suffers. No person can completely isolate himself, nor gain complete immunity from suffering; nor can any person be completely satisfied with his life.

Human persons have to choose God’s or other persons’ promises of salvation. Until death, a person can choose and choose as often as he wants. All religions, including pseudo-sacred, *de facto* religions, promise people opportunities to transform themselves in this life and in whatever life exists beyond.

### 1. SECULARITY AND HUMAN SALVATION

Human persons cannot avoid temporal, impermanent, relativity of the very world in which they live. Sacred and profane, spiritual and secular designate the difference between this world and the supernatural. ‘Secularization’ ordinarily refers to socio-cultural processes that enlarge areas of life – material, institutional, and intellectual – in which the role of the sacred is progressively limited. ‘Secularity’ is the resultant state of social being. ‘Secularism’ is ideology that argues historical inevitability and progressive nature of secularization everywhere. Contemporary secularists consider the three concepts as harmoniously integrated in a global view. Some contemporary Christian scholars, however, consider secularization to be God’s will, but declare secularism ungodly.

Throughout the Bible, notions of time and history, contrasted with timeless myth, are pervasive. God's acts of creating the world require 'six days' to complete. Abraham's departure from Mesopotamia and Moses's from Egypt, are events in space and time. Jesus moves in time with his people towards his Kingdom.

In addition to notions of history, the Bible introduces early in Genesis the idea of the world as divine creation. Because they are created, earth and all things on it are separated from God and thereby subjected to human mastery.<sup>2</sup> That is to say, they are secularized. Seeds of secularization were sown in Hebrew Scripture in the form of "God who stands 'outside' the cosmos, which is His creation, but which He confronts and does not permeate."<sup>3</sup> This introduces 'historization', the self-creating activity of human persons. Transcendentalization of God together with "the disenchantment of the world" created space for history as the arena of both divine and human actions.<sup>4</sup> A third related motif is an ethical rationalization, in the sense of imposing rationality on life.<sup>5</sup>

St. Paul elaborates further significance of human action.<sup>6</sup> He points out the importance of God sending forth His Son, born of a woman under Jewish Law; that persons subject to the Law may be redeemed, and guided to graduate from being little more than slaves to sons and daughters by adoption. To attain such adoption, a person should assume responsibility of an heir. Perhaps the Christian root of secularization is found in this notion of unity in human nature of receptivity and creativity. The human person has become open to some person (God) other than human persons and to the mystery of his being in the world (heir to creation). Equally, a person is able to respond as one who can either give or withhold himself. Here is laid the basis for human lordship over the world and its powers.

## **2. DOMAINS OF GOOD AND EVIL**

For a thousand years, ancient Hebrews and their predecessors struggled with the dualism of good and evil. The Babylonian myth of Marduk and Timat had influenced Hebrew thinking, followed by the ancient Persian dualism of the good God and a prince of darkness. In the creation myth, Chaos, the adversary of the Creator of heaven and earth, played an important role. Adam and Eve encountered Satan, the tempter, who appeared as a serpent, reminiscent of the primeval dragon. Satan challenged God and severely tested Job. Even Jesus while in the desert for forty days was tempted three times by Satan.

The Judeo-Christian tradition focused on the presence of evil alongside God:

I have set before you life and prosperity, death and doom. If you obey the commandments of . . . God, which I enjoin on you today, loving him, and walking in his ways, and keeping his commandments, statutes, and decrees, you will live and grow numerous, and . . . God will bless you . . . If . . . you turn away your hearts and will not listen, but are led astray and adore and serve other gods, I tell you now that you will certainly perish.

The underlying reality of two domains of action – good and evil, God and Satan - is emphasized in Christian Scripture, which speaks of God's things and Caesar's things,<sup>7</sup> and about two swords.<sup>8</sup> Jesus is said to have acknowledged that he was a king to Pontius Pilate. He clarified, however, that his kingdom was not this world.<sup>9</sup> Emperor Constantine, after he became a Christian, brought these two worlds together publicly and politically. The Judeo-Christian tradition had by then turned the concept on its head.

The unique achievement of the Judeo-Christian tradition is that it turned God-Satan dualism into dialectic. The Spirit of God broods over primeval chaos and makes it the womb from which well-ordered creation emerges. Satan was not able to destroy the first parents in their Fall. Instead, the Fall inspired God to provide a most generous redemptive plan for entire creation. In the story of Job, trials caused by Satan only tested and confirmed fidelity of the true believer. Jesus' firm response to the threefold temptation of pleasure, pride, and power only serve to reaffirm the threefold Deuteronomic law<sup>10</sup> that a person has to love God with his whole heart, whole soul, and whole strength.<sup>11</sup>

The unique cornerstone of Christian civilization provided by Jesus is that he transformed divine dialectic into a framework of personal relationships that form the foundation of all human relationships, and of a comprehensive world order.

Popes, claiming a mandate from Peter, considered earthly government an instrument subordinate to the 'City of God'. St. Augustine characterized this dichotomy as two cities having been "formed by two loves: the earthly by love of self, even to contempt of God, the heavenly by love of God, even to the contempt of self."<sup>12</sup> Opposition conveyed in this declaration reflects the negative, early Christian judgment of the secular world brought under the power of Satan. St. Augustine did not condemn civil authority, but considered the need for it a departure from the ideal of human affairs. At the end of the fifth century, Pope Gelasius clarified the relationship of the two domains by designating priestly power as much more important than royal power because it must account for kings of human persons at the final, divine tribunal.<sup>13</sup>

After Gelasius and through the Middle Ages (700-1550), popes increasingly assumed the role of temporal governors of Rome and surrounding areas. The Church in Rome created a successor-empire allied with Frankish kings, and then identified with the whole of organized society. Kings sought and received sanctification from bishops; governments came to depend upon the supernatural for legitimation. Even notions of human worthlessness and impotence generated a reaction, as the Roman Church, not only the papacy, became more involved in secular matters. Sacred kings turned out to be fragile. As R. W. Southern points out:

The growing complexity of society . . . called for organized government rather than ritual for the solution of its problems . . . In the long run this discovery helped to enlarge the area of secular action pointed forward to a purely secular state . . . Moreover, with secularization of the lay ruler, the whole broad spectrum of society that he particularly represented – the laity – suffered a corresponding demotion.<sup>14</sup>

The Roman Church strengthened its hold over government through the late 11<sup>th</sup> and early 12<sup>th</sup> centuries by providing specialized knowledge via growing numbers of secular clergy. The ecclesiastical hierarchy, inevitably, came into conflict with civil hierarchies. Development of local secular governments and even of nation-states accelerated. Each hierarchy typically tried to establish an ordered Christian society, but from its own perspective, in which the religious and secular could be combined. By the 14<sup>th</sup> century, papal doctrine denied kings a clerical character. Secular authorities regularly questioned clerical supremacy and even papal secular pretensions. Collapse of the uneasy relationship of ecclesiastical and secular hierarchies signalled the end of the Middle Ages.<sup>15</sup>

Salvation, an all-encompassing point of view, impacts all theological themes. With collapse of the partnership of 'Church and State' and increasing power of the state, it

acquired a secular hue. The exact interpretation of salvation – what is it? How is it realized and acquired? – impacts on every theological project. In the East, salvation is understood as divinization of humankind in grace. God became a human person so that the human person could become God. Through the long process of salvation history, God educates, transforms, and renders human persons like unto God.

In the West, beginning with Augustine's struggle against Pelagianism, salvation is considered as forgiveness of sins. Due to influence of the Reformation, dialectic of salvation and human action is considered in terms of three alternatives:

- (1) Salvation by God's hand or by deeds of free self-realization,
- (2) Salvation as pure transcendence or as manifested in immanence,
- (3) Salvation of the transcendent soul or good fortune understood materially.

The Enlightenment and the critique of religion by Feuerbach, Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud emphasize the second alternative above. The basis for this is the objection that the doctrine of the supernatural of religion is an empty promise to those persons who are exploited and who, therefore, are incapable of self-liberation.

Salvation is key to the Church's teaching. According to Vatican II, the Church universal itself is understood as the sacrament of salvation in the world.<sup>16</sup> It exercises its service of salvation in preaching and the sacraments.<sup>17</sup> Of particular significance for salvation are baptism and baptism of desire,<sup>18</sup> or the sacrament of penance on the part of persons who have fallen after baptism.<sup>19</sup> Although salvation comes only from God's grace, human persons are empowered to cooperate, since grace sets in motion a new morality.<sup>20</sup>

Because there is grace outside the Church universal,<sup>21</sup> salvation is possible for innocent atheists and adherents of other religions who do not know Christ.<sup>22</sup> The basis for salvation's universality is the Incarnation: according to the creed, "He came down from heaven for us and for our salvation."<sup>23</sup>

Contemporary theological ideas of salvation are largely determined by efforts to respond critically to the Marxist objection. Thus salvation proclaimed that Jesus' message - of the Kingdom of God that sets human persons free - should be understood as overcoming structural injustice and power. This has been the project of political and liberation theology. By adapting observations and findings of psychology and sociology to pastoral care, human persons have become more aware of salvation's social, cultural, and political dimensions. Salvation is also sanctification. Thus it has to occur in areas of experience of self and interpersonal relations. Instead of a purely religious and interior view of salvation, Vatican II calls the Church universal's to serve the world,<sup>24</sup> although the relationship between salvation and world is not always clear. Salvation's theological dimension, nevertheless, should not be understood as a play of opposites. God's relationship to human persons is universal. God in Christ is humankind's salvation. Human persons are individuals, not only networks of relationships. Thus, the theological definition of salvation is transcendent in character. Human persons are related to God in dialogal events of sacramental life in the Church universal as community and in prayer. While eternal life is now hidden from human persons, it is actually present. In death it will be revealed fully, when persons are raised up to God.

Salvation, however, is also experienced in relationships that constitute everyday existence. Thus a vital service of both laity and institutional church is to work for change in anything within political or social orders that is mere pretense and not conducive to building up human persons.<sup>25</sup> Conditions of human life, however, can never be changed to the point of constructing a definitive 'paradise on earth'. Suffering and death do remain. Eternal life begins on earth but is fully realized only after death to earthly life. Suffering, consequently, is the primary problem; it is inherent in human life. Its salvific value remains a mystery.

Biblical faith is not at all concerned with asking of what does salvation consist or in recommending techniques, whether mystical or ethical, by which salvation may be attained. It is concerned rather with proclamation of the fact of salvation, and thus it differs from all 'religions' by being kerygmatic in character. The Bible is concerned with the fact that God actually has in concrete historical fact saved His people from destruction (from destroying themselves). The Bible proclaims that historical salvation thus attested is but the foreshadowing of the 'type' of salvation that is to come. This is the theme of both Hebrew and Christian Scripture. God is God of salvation: this is the Gospel of both Hebrew and Christian faith. God has saved His people and He will save them. In the Bible, salvation is both a historical and eschatological reality. "Son of God," one of Jesus' names, means 'savior'. Salvation is the central theme of the entire Bible and as such is related to every other biblical theme.

In Hebrew Scripture, the determinative experience of Yahweh's salvation was deliverance from Egyptian bondage, the miracle of the Red Sea, and subsequent experience of God's Fatherly care in the wilderness.

### **3. SALVATION AS AN ESCHATOLOGICAL CONCEPTION**

Considering salvation as an eschatological event intends more than that it is a future event or reality. An eschatological reality is one that is presently real, active, yet not fully realized or made visible (except to faith), or consummated. Human persons live in an intermediate state, 'between the times'. By faith, they know already salvation that is theirs, although they have not fully appropriated or finally apprehended it. In Hebrew Scripture, Israel's salvation is already assured, for it was achieved in the exodus from Egypt and ratified by the everlasting covenant that God made with Moses on Mt. Sinai. According to teaching of the prophets, God's salvific act salvifically at the Red Sea in Israel's history. It was a continuing redemption, delivering God's people from Assyrian invasion and Babylonian exile, among other things. It would be consummated in the final redemption of God's people at the end of the age, the day of creation of new heavens, and a new earth. It is especially in the prophecy of Deutero-Isaiah that this doctrine is most fully developed and clearly expressed.

There is no divorce or contradiction between the historical and the eschatological, because the former, by becoming active in the present and no mere past-and-gone event, is the matrix and type of the latter. Eschatological salvation, even now active in the present, is final realization beyond history of that which historical redemption foreshadowed and promised. Past, present, and future constitute not three deliverances, but one deliverance. To consider the biblical view of time as linear is misleading if it obscures this truth.

### **4. SALVATION AS HISTORICAL DELIVERANCE**

In Christian Scripture, as in Hebrew Scripture, salvation is accomplished by God's action in human history. Human persons are saved neither by wisdom nor correct knowledge,<sup>26</sup> nor by merit nor right actions,<sup>27</sup> nor by mystical absorption into the divine,<sup>28</sup> but by God's actions in the composite birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ. Human persons are saved by Christ's entire life from conception to ascension. The Christian message accordingly is neither a philosophy, nor an ethical code, nor a technique of mystical practice. Rather, it is kerygma, preaching, and evangelization in the Isaianic sense of proclaiming human liberation.<sup>29</sup>

In contemporary society, spiritual needs appear less immediate than material needs. Salvation, as eternal life in the Kingdom of God, has broken into this world with salvific events of Jesus' life. The institutional church teaches Christians that union with God in the Kingdom will be fully realized at the final judgment at the time of the general resurrection. A common assumption among Western people and many Christians is that they have all they can do to deal with problems of daily living – monthly bills, children's education, medical insurance, taxes, and pension plans, etc. The 'hereafter' will have to wait!

If persons understand, however, that salvation is eternal life in union with God and that there is no present, past, or future in eternity, then such unity can commence here and now on earth. God came to human persons in life on earth in Jesus the carpenter from Nazareth. It is this union with the divine for whom human persons have an inextinguishable yearning. In some way, persons become more complete, more fully human, more perfect in union with the divine. Salvation, therefore, signifies 'completeness' and 'human perfectibility',<sup>30</sup> a realization people receive when they accept Jesus Christ as Lord and God. What salvation appears to be in this life depends very much on a personal or societal point of view. Meaning of salvation can be considered as contextual, that is, dependent on a person's or a society's particular circumstances. Consider a recent example.

It was mentioned above that persons experience a world that often does not correspond to what people conceive as a world of a good God. Poverty, oppression, all kinds of unjust domination, and suffering of just and innocent persons are signs of the times and of all times. A particular theology, liberation theology, developed out of such circumstances in Latin America. Human persons and certainly Christians should not acquiesce in such an unjust situation. Liberation theologians deduced that the situation had become untenable and could be surmounted only by changing secular structures, which are structures of sin and evil.

If sin exerts its powers over structures and impoverishment is thereby programmed in them by sin, then its overthrow cannot occur by individual conversions, but only via struggle against structures of injustice. This struggle ought to be political because the structures are consolidated and preserved through politics.<sup>31</sup> Redemption thus becomes a political process. It is thereby transformed into a task that people themselves can and have taken into their own hands. At the same time, it becomes a totally practical hope. Faith, in theory, becomes praxis, that is, concrete redeeming action, in process of liberation.<sup>32</sup>

A formidable challenge facing the contemporary institutional church is finding ways to express its moral teachings in a time in which most people may not share some of the Church's moral presumptions, such as:

- (1) There are moral absolutes;
- (2) Suffering can be redemptive;

- (3) People should forego possession of material goods of this world in order to secure the good of the Kingdom of God;
- (4) Freedom is liberation from sin and the right to do what is good, rather than doing whatever a person desires.<sup>33</sup>

The issues become quite complex because all moral claims are neither absolute nor are they so considered by fair-minded people. Certainly not all suffering is redemptive. Human persons have to discern among suffering caused by themselves, by other persons, and by 'acts of God'. Material goods can become obstacles to following Christ but need not always be, and in every circumstance remain obstacles. As many people may be misguided spiritually as are materially misguided.

## 5. RIGHTS LANGUAGE

Whether there is or is not common moral discourse, there is one mode of moral discourse that seems to have a kind of universal currency – the language of 'human rights'. Universal declarations of human rights provide a background against which cross-cultural discussions of morality and politics can proceed. Since the final decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, since Pope Leo XIII, and very much during the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, 'rights' language has played almost a dominant role in Papal encyclicals about moral and political matters. There are three apparent reasons for this:

- (1) Since the American and French Revolutions, rights language has become central to moral discourse. To state the case for morality today, it is impossible to do so without recourse to rights language.
- (2) Such language includes an absolute dimension that combats the most dangerous feature of the contemporary ethos – 'relativism'. Included within the purview of relativism, as an extreme, are several features considered by many persons to be part of any contemporary notion of salvation or liberation in this life.
- (3) Democratic governments, acceding to demands of citizens, in many areas of the world and in many ways, have become progressively more responsible. Moral integrity is demanded of government officials or they can expect to receive negative publicity, be the butt of public demonstrations, prosecuted for crimes during or after their terms of office, sued for civil damages, or otherwise be discredited publicly. Sexual harassment violates a person's constitutional rights in some countries and even a President in office may be sued for violating such right. A candidate for the top military post in the U. S. was forced to withdraw his candidacy because of confessed adultery committed several years earlier while he and his wife were separated. Elected officials who have run afoul of the law are encouraged to resign.

The Church's use of rights language is compatible with the Catholic natural law tradition. Yet, use of this language is not without problems. Rights language emerged from Enlightenment political thought of thinkers such as Hobbes and Locke, whose views of the nature of the human person and God are considerably at odds with views of the Catholic Church.

There is confusion about what a 'right' is, but no more than that of what 'salvation' is. Some rights are considered 'negative' because they describe a zone of noninterference – 'right to life' and 'right to privacy' come to mind. There are few justifications for taking the life of another person or violating his right to privacy. Other 'positive' rights make claims on other people to provide something – food, shelter, clothing, and education, for example. The difference is not always clear. Is the right to a job or to medical care positive or negative? Who has the obligation to provide them?

The shift from abstract moral ideas of the Platonists and Stoics to language of rights is a significant phenomenon of the modern age. It reverses the rank individualism promoted by the Protestant Reformation. 'The naked face of my neighbour has become the supreme law of my life'.<sup>34</sup> There are no rights without God, who is both ultimate goal of human persons and key to relationships among them.

Rights talk sometimes eclipses talk of responsibility. It seems as if human persons (and not only young people) can recite a litany of rights but cannot recite corresponding obligations and responsibilities, which as citizens they might have. Part of this springs from a sense of compassion and concern for other people.

Contemporary rights talk considers liberty to be foremost. As long as persons do not directly interfere with other persons they believe that they have the unfettered liberty to pursue their own concept of good. In *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*, the U. S. Supreme Court declared, "At the heart of liberty is the right to define one's own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life."<sup>35</sup> Although the ability of persons to determine these concepts independently may be questioned, relative meaning of these concepts in and applicability to daily life in all likelihood have to be determined by each person. A person can choose of course to make such determination independently or to 'shop' for the determination most amenable to him. This argument has been made on behalf of both abortion and euthanasia.

Such rights language can reduce moral claims to claims of justice. Other areas of moral discourse are ignored. Persons no longer, for example, speak in terms of virtue, of doing God's will, of duty, of natural law, or of abiding by the Ten Commandments. What about the moral obligation of a person to care for his health? Health is something persons owe to other persons, but it is not considered a personal obligation or responsibility. A person can smoke tobacco for many years knowing full well the physical consequences, yet expect society to find and finance a heart transplant, and then either he or his estate will want to sue tobacco companies for destroying his health. Does a person have the right to kill himself?

The moral vision of the Roman Catholic Church can be expressed without reference to rights. Rights language focuses on a narrow range of ethical concerns – just interactions among human persons and between them and the state. Catholic moral vision, in addition, encompasses human dignity, natural law, virtue, grace, love, charity, commandments, prayer, sacraments, passions, conscience, and obligations to other persons and to God, sin, and eternal destiny of human persons. These are all themes of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Such concerns can easily be lost in a moral vision governed only by rights.

Perhaps the difference between moral vision governed by rights language and that of the institutional church can best be understood by contrasting what it means to be a creature bearing rights and a creature bearing duties. Society is slow to recognize duties and responsibilities. It finds negative connotations in them, which suggest curtailment of freedom. Rights, on the other hand, smack of freedom. A rights-bearing human person is full of needs and demands that often seem to conflict with those of other persons. A duties-bearing human person is interconnected with other persons as one who should actively seek the good of other persons, and who, in doing so, is also achieving good for himself, if only the important good of performing his duties.

The Catholic moral vision considers a human person as indebted from the moment of conception and throughout his lifetime. He owes God and his parents for his birth and life. He owes countless other persons for making possible his life and enjoyment of it. Every human person is indebted to God and to other persons. He is obliged to live a life of self-giving, if only to offer token repayment for what he has received. His focus should not be on himself, on his needs, demands, and rights, but on doing good for other persons. Those persons who perform their duties achieve true freedom, freedom from selfishness and evil. While rights language can serve the important function of protecting human dignity from assaults against it, the language of duty advances nobility of the human person and his true freedom.

Christians understand rights to be grounded in dignity of human nature, which encompasses more than a person's status as free creature. Such grounding is important because it prevents irresponsible proliferation of rights grounded only in human needs and desires. The following is a clear statement of the foundation of rights:

Human rights depend neither on single individuals nor on parents; nor do they represent a concession made by society and the state; they belong to human nature and are inherent in the person y virtue of the creative act from which the person took his origin.<sup>36</sup>

Here rights are linked to human nature and to the Creator who formed this nature. The *Catechism* links rights talk not only with human dignity but also to the commandments and natural law as well:

The natural law, present in the heart of each man and established by reason, is universal in its precepts and its authority extends to all men. It expresses the dignity of the person and determines the basis for his fundamental rights and duties.<sup>37</sup>

The Ten Commandments belong to God's revelation. At the same time, they teach us true humanity of man. They bring to light essential duties and, therefore, indirectly, the fundamental rights inherent in the nature of the human person. The Decalogue contains a privileged expression of the natural law:<sup>38</sup>

"From the beginning, God had implanted in the heart of man the precepts of the natural law. Then he was content to remind him of them."<sup>39</sup>

## **6. THEOLOGICAL NOTIONS FROM THE BOTTOM UP**

What can Christian theology generally and Catholic theology in particular contribute to salvation of human persons in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? Can coordinates of theological notions embedded in and drawn from daily experience of human persons, who are not all professed Christians, be organized in the form of an outline of a public theology that may have broad application to human life in most, if not all, religious contexts?

From daily lives of people emerge, at least in part, key aspects of religion. Personal and collective experience play a role in development and practice of people's lives. Ritual expressions of worship, sacrifices, sacraments, and other acts of adoration and devotion are informed by their culture, which emanates from their daily lives. Daily interactions of people, at the root of which is an inborn sense of right and wrong, produce ethics, moral codes, and behavioural guides. Myths and other stories, which encapsulate fundamental beliefs of families, neighbourhoods, communities, and societies, were originally drawn from varied ways in which people and their ancestors lived. Often religion is the glue that binds people together in a particular society. Even their individual prayer life has a communitarian aspect. Everybody prays in one way or another and rarely, if ever, does a person pray only for himself.

Human persons, as they enter the 21<sup>st</sup> century, are not asked to discover truth that has never been discovered before. In Christian and other religious traditions, "truth has been expressed in religious terms, a language which has become well-nigh incomprehensible to the majority of modern men."<sup>40</sup>

## **7. ORGANIZATION OF THE CHAPTERS**

In chapter one, the study considers Scripture, recognized as the work of the Spirit, which has a quality transcending the particularities of religions. It is accepted as humanity's common experience, God's word to human persons expressed in their words. So it is in the Scriptures, especially in the Bible that people should look for a comprehensive idea of salvation, which involves the development of a person's potential. The Bible records the story of creation, particularly of the human person by God in His own image and likeness as well as of His will to impose a Divine-human, covenantal solidarity

In chapter two, the study understands that salvation applies to the common good of human persons individually and collectively. As human self-awareness developed, an inner orientation emerged that began to understand that the common good required more cohesiveness among human persons, individually and collectively. The change was from a religious to a more inclusive political attitude that naturally led to a more expansive social attitude. Human persons found that political cohesiveness led immediately to a network of social relationships called society.

Free play in politics and a multitude of personal and collective relationships led to freethinking in individual consciousness. This is what happened with the emergence of individual states in Europe freed from papal control. Until that time emphasis was on doctrine and content of human consciousness. In chapter three, the study is concerned with how psychology that dealt with contentless individual consciousness could build up human personality.

In chapter four, the study considers that human persons are more than objects. They are subjects who think and have free will. These characteristics of human essence exceed boundaries of scientific investigation. The uniqueness of the human person, of

simultaneously being both object and subject cannot be recognized by science. The human person can be considered, consequently, a philosopher as well. For him everything contains within itself the potential to become what it is finally meant to be, to fulfil its potential. This orientation towards fulfilment takes different forms in different traditions.

Contrary to popular belief, a person giving his life for sake of humankind, a friend, and even an enemy can be a means of salvation. It can become the culmination of a person's personal fulfilment. The attitudinal change in focus in chapter five is from the human mind to the whole human person. Internal and external solidarity may provide the answer to life.

Value of human life is supreme. The work of all human persons is to protect, honour, and respect the life of every person – from unborn children, to older, sickly persons as well as imprisoned persons. Integrity of life is a seamless garment. Each person is a child of God and thereby worthy of love, dignity, and respect. The change in attitude in chapter six is from recognition that a person's salvation is dependent upon salvation of all persons. Salvation is solidary not solitary.

The study turns in chapter seven to synthesizing various theologies of salvation. To gain a perspective on Christian theology of salvation, consider that it is one divine economy of human salvation requiring a religious solidarity among adherents of all religions. Various theologies of salvation are discussed, pointing out that church doctrine and theology do not always work hand-in-glove. The key to salvation as it commences in human life is liberation in its various forms. Persons seek liberation from sin, for communion with God and other persons, for solidarity and justice, from fear of death, for a free life, and from the need to justify themselves thereby developing a capacity for vulnerable love. The Eucharist is the most formidable means of solidarity among human persons and with God.

This study has indicated that there is not a single element of human life that does not bear in itself the stamp of the Creative Logos that leads the entire Creation forward to its final fulfilment, which appears quite similar to its origin. The Bible, politics, sociology, psychology, philosophy, and theology all contain certain dynamism that point to the final fulfilment and self-realization of humans. Salvation is not an escape from the world but a common pilgrimage within the whole creation to the unity of all things under the headship of Christ. The attitudinal change in chapter eight is from one of wonder to a profound contemplation of the ineffable, divine, Triune God.

Earthly contemplation means to the Christian, that behind all that human persons directly encounter the face of the incarnate logos becomes visible. It is something simultaneously super-historical and historical. The historical element is that face of divine man that bears marks of a shameful execution. Happiness of contemplation is a true happiness founded upon sorrow. Earthly contemplation is imperfect contemplation. Unrest stems from the human person's experiencing at one and same moment overwhelming infinitude of the object, and his own limitations.

Scripture, recognized as the work of the Spirit, has a quality transcending the particularities of religions. It is accepted as humanity's common experience, God's word to human persons expressed in their words. So it is in the Scriptures, especially in the Bible that people should look for a comprehensive idea of salvation, which involves the development of a person's potential. The Bible records the story of creation, particularly of the human person by God in His own image and likeness as well as of His will to impose a Divine-human, covenantal solidarity. When that failed through human sin, God proposed a New Covenant

and a new *modus operandi* to restore and elevate the human relationship to God, who is his origin and final goal.

To be continued

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<sup>1</sup> Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, "Relativism: The Central Problem for Faith Today," *Origins*, 26: no. 20 (October 31, 1996), pp. 310-317.

<sup>2</sup> Gen 1: 28.

<sup>3</sup> Peter L. Berger, *The Social Reality of Religion* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), p. 121.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 124.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 125.

<sup>6</sup> Gal 4: 1-4, 8-10, 21-31.

<sup>7</sup> Lk 20: 25.

<sup>8</sup> Lk 22: 38.

<sup>9</sup> Jn 18: 36; Mt 26: 64; cf. Jn 8: 47: "Whoever belongs to God hears the words of God; for this reason you do not listen, because you do not belong to God." Cf. Jn 10: 27: "My sheep hear my voice. I know them and they follow me."

<sup>10</sup> Deut 6: 5.

<sup>11</sup> Mt 22: 37; Mk 12: 29-30.

<sup>12</sup> St. Augustine, *The City of God*, ed. David Knowles. (New York: Pelican, 1972), p. xiv.

<sup>13</sup> Brian Tierney, *The Crisis of Church and State* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1980), p. 13.

<sup>14</sup> R. W. Southern, *Western Society and the Church in the Middle Ages* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), pp. 36-37.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 45-49.

<sup>16</sup> LG 1, 9, 48, 59; see SC 5, 26; AG 1, 5; GS 42, 45.

<sup>17</sup> DS 1604-1608; 2536; LH 11.

<sup>18</sup> DS 1529, 1604, 1618.

<sup>19</sup> DS 1672, 1706, 1579.

<sup>20</sup> DS 225-230, 373-397, 1520-1583.

<sup>21</sup> DS 2429.

<sup>22</sup> LG 16; GS 22.

<sup>23</sup> DS 125.

<sup>24</sup> GS 36.

<sup>25</sup> This might involve e. g., service, charity, support for particular legislation, political involvement to bring about a democratic and constitutional government, and other social activism.

<sup>26</sup> Gnosticism.

<sup>27</sup> Judaism.

<sup>28</sup> Hellenistic mysticism.

<sup>29</sup> Isa 40: 9; 52: 7; 61: 1-2.

<sup>30</sup> This thought is being developed as a result of conversations with Dr. John B. Chethimattam.

<sup>31</sup> And because governments are intended to protect their people and work toward their welfare.

<sup>32</sup> *Op. Cit.*, Ratzinger, p. 311.

<sup>33</sup> It is difficult, if not impossible, to know how many people or what percentage of people agree or disagree with the moral and other teachings of the institutional church. The communications media worldwide are controlled by people who oppose teachings and strictures of the institutional church, especially concerning morals.

<sup>34</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *The Levinas Reader*. Ed. Sean Hand. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), pp. 82-84.

<sup>35</sup> 112 S. Ct. 2807 (1992). Is there a better definition of individualism?

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<sup>36</sup> *Donum Vitae*, Sec. III; CCC § 2273.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, CCC § 1956.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 2070.

<sup>39</sup> St. Irenaeus, *Adv. haeres.* 4, 15, 1: PG 7/1, 1012.

<sup>40</sup> E. F. Schumacher, *Small Is Beautiful: Economics As If People Mattered* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), p. 296.