

Salvation as a Socio-Historical Reality*

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1. INTRODUCTION

According to the witness of the New Testament writings, the followers of Jesus experienced his death and resurrection as the source of atonement, a historical reality that was life-giving, redemptive and therefore a community creating event. The word atonement literally means "at-one-moment" by which is signified the process of making God and humanity one after they had been separated by sin and had become enemies (Is 59:2, Col. 1:21). In Christianity everything thus depends on the claim that the vicarious suffering and death of Jesus Christ on the cross has effected the restoration of broken relationships between God and human beings and between human beings themselves. Thus by bringing the reconciliation between God and humanity, the death of Jesus was experienced by the early church as the event that saves humanity from the slavery to sin, from the evil powers of Satan, and death. It was the gospel par excellence because, according to St. Paul, "it is the power for salvation to everyone who has faith" (Rom. 1:16).

However, the concept of salvation and how it should be understood is not as simple as we might often suppose. Therefore, throughout the history of the Church, theologians in different situations have proposed a variety of understandings of what salvation means. I shall sketch here briefly two major types of the understanding of salvation. At the risk of oversimplification I shall refer to the first as the traditional view, and the second, as the liberationist view of salvation.

2. THE TRADITIONAL VIEW OF SALVATION

Gustaf Aulen, in his classic book *Christus Victor*, outlines for us at least three main types of atonement theories that have been developed in the history of Christian thought by which salvation wrought by Christ is understood. The first type is called the classic dramatic view. It employs a conflict model and presents the death of Christ in dramatic terms signifying God's conflict with and victory over the powers of the devil on behalf of humanity. Jesus himself understood his messianic mission in terms of that conflict. In consequence, his ministry began with the temptation, and conflict with the enemy of humanity in the wilderness: Satan. The cross is seen as the climax of the struggle between Jesus and Satan under whose evil powers humanity is held in bondage and suffers. According to this view, sin in its individual and corporate nature is viewed primarily as human submission to the evil powers which sinful human beings. That is, humans, as sinners, are regarded as justly belonging

to Satan because of sin. Because they cannot save themselves God, in Christ, took the initiative and confronted Satan and dies on the cross as a price (ransom) that had to be paid before Satan would release humans from their bondage. Satan accepted Jesus' death on behalf of enslaved humanity. However, in permitting himself to become a victim or ransom, Jesus destroyed the power of the devil not only by paying the price that was demanded for the release of sinful humans but also by proving his supremacy over Satan because his demonic powers failed to hold Jesus in bondage. The resurrection of Jesus was thus a demonstration of the decisive victory over the powers of evil which he won on the cross, the powers that constituted an unbridgeable barrier between humanity and God.

It is important to note that in this classical view, Jesus's struggle was not merely against personal or individual temptations and sins — although he fought and conquered personal temptations and sins successfully — but his combat was waged in the larger context of the divine struggle against all the evil powers that enslave humanity. In his victory Christ thus broke their dominion and claim over human lives. It is for this reason that his life, death and resurrection constitutes at-one-ment, a reconciliation between God and humans. For after Christ's victory over these powers that constituted a barrier between God and the sinful humanity, a new situation of complete change obtains: a change of attitude of God towards sinful humans on account of Christ's work which reconciles God to the world. Salvation in this view is understood therefore as a bestowal of a life of fellowship with God, because Jesus death overcomes the state of alienation between God and human beings. However, as the church's status changed from being a persecuted minority missionary movement to a state church, when Christianity became an official religion the church gradually adapted its doctrines to the new situation. In consequence, this conflict model that interprets salvation as the cosmic drama of conflict between God and all the evil powers that enslave humanity lost its appeal. The medieval theologian Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109), reflecting the Roman juridical system of just punishments and rewards offered to traditional theology, a second theory of atonement in his book entitled *Cur Deus Homo*. As Anselm set out to explain why God became human being within Western legal structures, he propounded his theory of salvation with such persuasive logic that his views were destined to receive general acceptance among both Catholic and Protestant theologians. Not only did his views triumph over the preceding views of salvation but also proved influential in the subsequent history of the church to the present.

According to this Anselmian theory of salvation there is a barrier between humanity and God which has been created by sin. Sin is

understood as a transgression of God's law; it is a refusal to render to God what belongs to God, namely obedience. Therefore, God must punish sinners who transgress the law in order to preserve the divine honour. Therefore, unless the honour of God is satisfied through human obedience to God's law, there can be no atonement between God and humans. However, because humans on their own fail to pay ransom for their sins, Christ came to die on the cross not only to pay for the penalty which God's justice required for the human transgression of divine law, but also Christ as a sinless and obedient person unto death fulfilled the requirements of the law to the uttermost. This Anselmian theory of atonement has been dubbed the satisfaction theory because it understands atonement as a satisfaction or reparation made to the divine justice on account of sin (disobedience) that caused injury to God's honour.

Traditional theology was later given a third view of salvation, the so-called moral-influence (subjective) theory of atonement which was first profounded by Peter Abelard (1079-1142) about thirty or forty years after Anselm's death. Abelard's theory gained prominence among the 19th century liberal theologians who also argued that the saving work of Jesus takes place inside individuals who are changed from hatred and rebellion against God to love and obedience.

This theory of atonement essentially rejects the traditional view that Jesus came to pay a ransom (debt) to the devil or to satisfy God's justice, the justice which demands human obedience to God's law. According to the satisfaction theory view the problem of sin does not with God who needs to be appeased or bought off by the death of the innocent person. God is essentially a loving God whose forgiveness to those who respond to the work of Christ on the cross is based entirely on God's mercy and limitless love. Rather the problem or essence of sin is more in people's evil intentions. Sin thus is committed when people submit to the evil inclination of the mind or heart. In consequence they rebel against God's authority, and become self-centred, thereby turning in upon themselves and finally closing themselves off from God. Because they are self-centred they also become heartless, loveless, non-compassionate, merciless and unjust in their dealings with their fellow humans. The death of Jesus on the cross brings salvation because through his self-sacrificing death, humanity is touched by the limitless depth of God's love. As people contemplate on this sacrificial love they are moved to repentance, to love God and to amend their lives, thus undergoing a profound moral transformation. The dominant idea in this view is moralism, the uplifting of human beings toward God. Salvation thus effects primarily a change in the spiritual or moral life of individuals rather than a change in the social conditions in which people live.

3. CRITICAL EVALUATION OF TRADITIONAL THEOLOGY'S THEORIES OF SALVATION

These are the three theories of atonement (with variations within each of them) that have come down to us and which traditional theology has found adequate over the centuries. Taken together they present a fair biblical account of how God's saving activity in Christ has to be understood. Because they are based on solid biblical texts these views have enjoyed universal acceptance among both Protestant and Catholic Christians and their influence continue up to this day. However, on closer examination, one finds that there are serious flaws and inadequacies in these theories. Consequently, traditional theology has been incapable of expressing the comprehensive meaning of salvation as found in the Scriptures. The serious defect in these theories, except perhaps for the classical dramatic theory, is their tendency to trade on individualism which leaves the saving work of Christ unrelated to God's community-creating intention so prominently pronounced in both the Old and New Covenants.

For instance, the moral-influence view, while advocating a need for ethical and moral reformation of individual Christians, dismally fails to integrate conversion of such individuals to the creation of new modes of interpersonal relationships in the social sphere which the reconciling act of Christ clearly calls forth for. And by making the work of Christ on the cross a private matter between God and individual Christians this view not only fails to grasp the radical quality of concrete evil and human suffering in society but also undermines the objective reality of divine reconciliation that must be embodied and expressed among people in their relationship with one another. Indeed, one cannot avoid the feeling that Abelard's theory found acceptance among the 19th century theologians because it was compatible with the prevailing bourgeois social conditions which did not expose liberal theologians to the actual tyrannical and demonic power of social evil which promoted the colonial exploitation and oppression of the majority of the human family. Thus a bourgeois theologian who lives a sheltered life of security, he or she could discuss suffering in abstract terms, imagining what suffering of Jesus on the cross could have been like. Therefore the cross of Jesus was understood merely as a stimulator of this imaginative, complative suffering. Obviously such a theory of salvation which fails to focus attention on what is objectively and concretely wrong with our world cannot be relevant to the victims of evil social structures who do not yearn primarily for a private, individualistic mystical communion with God but rather look with tears and hope to God to do something in order to change their earthly spiritual and physical bondages to social sin, manifested through human oppression of their fellow humans. For the defenceless victims of social

injustice, any theory of God's saving transaction which "allows sinful and violent and fallen structures to remain substantially unchanged" (Driver 1986:30) is fatally defective because God appears powerless before sin and its social consequences.

Similarly, the Anselmian theory of salvation is guilty of individualism because of its overemphasis on sin and grace and its tendency to separate the spiritual life of individuals from their daily concrete conditions. It emphasizes the sinfulness of the human heart, the rottenness of human life in this world because nothing good dwells in the flesh which is perceived to offer unconquerable temptations to sin. It emphasizes human weakness and helplessness in the face of sin and evil powers to which they are held in bondage (Maimela 1987:50). Salvation thus becomes a sort of divine rescue or translation of individuals out of this unredeemed and oppressive situation of spiritual torments and helplessness. Salvation becomes a transaction that lifts individuals out of this miserable worldly existence by providing relief to the soul.

In itself, the emphasis by traditional theology on sin of disobedience against God's holy will which makes human beings stand guilt before the righteous God, is correct and even biblical, but the problem lies in its anthropological limitation: this theory of atonement sees the human problem largely in spiritual terms. Hence it offers us a theory of salvation which hardly affects the sinful situation of social oppression and dehumanization which the majority of people find themselves. The consequence is that it interprets the work of Christ as an abstract "saving transaction which allows sinful and violent people and their unjust structures to remain substantially unchanged" (Driver 1986:30). In so doing, it overlooks the broader biblical view in which salvation is portrayed as aiming at the transformation of human beings not only in their spiritual aspects but also in their total physical context, namely, in their interpersonal relationships with their human fellows. It overlooks the liberating and transforming power of Christ's work in the lives of individual believers as well as in their interpersonal relationships in the sociopolitical sphere, a power which continues to free men and women from the tyranny of oppressive ideologies of racial, class and sexist prejudice. Indeed, the saving work of Jesus Christ does far more than the satisfaction theory suggests: it aims both to overcome sin and recreate the totality of human interrelationships, thereby making human beings more human and the world more just and liveable (Maimela 1987:96-97,106-108, 117-120)

By offering us an individualistic view of salvation the theories of Abelard and Anselm have tended to create the impression that the saving life, death and resurrection of Christ are exhausted by merely

changing a few hearts of individuals here and there. In consequence, traditional theology has unashamedly taught that it is possible for the “saved” individual Christians to shut themselves “in the closet door, pray, and make everything right with God, and then in their daily life continue to hate, exploit, tear apart” their fellow humans (Mays 1964:35). Here we have a classic example of traditional theology mistakenly defining un-christlike people as Christians who, in the church, “could be assured of the benefits of the saving death of Christ, bereft of its power to transform” them (Driver 1986:31).

While the classical dramatic theory of atonement does not suffer from excessive individualism, it suffers from another defect which it shares with the other two traditional theories: the failure to be historically realistic. For instance, while the classical dramatic theory correctly teaches that Christ’s work is primarily one of God’s combat against and victory over objective evil powers of sin, death and Satan that hold God’s people in bondage, it fails to historicize this divine struggle against earthly oppression and injustice. In so doing, it fails to spell out that the principalities and powers of evil that are mythically expressed in the figure of Satan represent not merely heavenly realities, but also earthly powers or realities, powers that cause human exploitation, poverty, injustice and oppression. In modern times these powers manifest themselves through the state, politics, class, race, sex, social struggle, nationalism, accepted morality, democracy or human traditions—some of which often oppress and enslave people. By failing to historicize this divine conflict with evil powers, traditional theology tends to ignore the fact that God’s saving activity is the drama that is not acted out somewhere in the skies, but on earth where God is actively involved on the side of oppressed people in order to destroy all the evil powers that deny them freedom and dignity. For it was in history and on this earth that God, in Jesus of Nazareth, became a human being, and lived among human beings. In so doing God entered history, identified the Godself with the conditions of the oppressed and suffering people, and made those conditions God’s own conditions by being born a poor and powerless man of Nazareth so as to make it clear that all forms of domination, oppression and dehumanization of humans by their fellows contradict the divine intentions, aimed at overcoming sin and recreating humna community through the power of the gospel (Maimela 1987: 90-91). The failure to historicize God’s conflict with sin and evil powers has prevented traditional theology from comprehending the extent of divine involvement in human suffering on behalf of humanity. It also fails to recognize that in conflict with sin and its social consequences God did not reveal the divine self as the enemy of humanity who, like the pagan gods, needs to be appeased but is God the Creator

and Redeemer who is totally for human creatures despite their sinfulness. Hence God took upon the divine self the suffering, the agony and the pain of humanity on the cross in order to vanquish these enemies of God and humanity.

Therefore by failing to acknowledge that the divine conflict against evil that was begun in Christ was aimed at the historical liberation of God's people from all forms of enslaving relationships, be they personal or institutional, traditional theology has given the wrong impression that salvation is possible without the re-creation of a new human community and a new world in which animosities between God and humanity, and between human beings themselves, are overcome. Reacting sharply against this mistaken view of salvation James Cone (1975:234), has rightly argues that:

There can be no reconciliation with God unless the hungry are fed, the sick are healed, and justice is given to the poor. The justified sinner is at once the sanctified person, who knows that his freedom is inseparable from the liberation of the weak and the helpless.

4. THE LIBERATIONIST VIEW OF SALVATION

The liberationist view of salvation does not find traditional theories of salvation persuasive and adequate as ways of expressing the full significance of Christ's work on the cross, the work which need not be understood in a narrow individualistic fashion or in abstract non-historical terms. Rather salvation should be understood as a comprehensive and ongoing divine activity whose goal is to free men and women from all spiritual (psychological) and sociopolitical and cultural powers that enslave them.

The attempt by liberation theologians to interpret Christ's saving act comprehensively as a demonstration of God's victory over and an ongoing conflict with evil powers under which humanity suffers oppression, and the attempt to correlate God's victory with human struggles for freedom, dignity and self-fulfilment is a fairly recent one. For in most of Western Christianity a static view of history and social institutions developed in which the class structures were seen to have been ordained by God, and therefore were fixed and unchangeable (Maimela 1984: 129-149). Reflecting this static view, traditionally theology taught that while Christians may be equal in spirit before the Lord, there can be no equality on earth. Therefore the poor and the underdogs should be resigned to their divinely assigned lot, bearing their suffering with Christian patience and humility because they would be rewarded in heaven after death. Remarking on this misuse of religion, Napoleon points out that the value of religion lies in its ability to link the idea of social inequalities to heaven thereby preventing the "rich person from being murdered

by the poor.” Religion does this by teaching the poor that God wills social inequalities on earth and therefore “it is necessary that there be rich and poor in the world; but afterwards in eternity there will be a different distribution” (Cited by Lindberg 1981:37) Agreeing with Napoleon’s observations Kingsley, expressing his dismay at the use of Christianity as an antidote to social unrest which the British Industrial Revolution, painfully admits that:

We have used the Bible as if it were a mere special constable’s handbook, an opium for keeping the beasts of burden patient while they are being overloaded (Cited by Dillenberger and Welch 1954:242)

This misuse of religion has had a long history in the Church and was made possible by a legacy of a defective theological view point which, beginning in the Medieval period and continuing during the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century, laid a greater emphasis was on the salvation of the soul than on the body. According to this view, life on earth was seen primarily as a preparation for the life hereafter. Not surprisingly even the Reformers like Luther and Calvin taught that the main purpose of social institutions was to further the religious (spiritual) life of Christians, and not the satisfaction of people’s bodily needs. It was therefore logical that Luther would flatly reject the demands of the Peasants for equality, freedom and self-fulfilment as illegitimate misuse of the gospel for worldly, socio-political and economic gains. Luther thus viewed the Peasant Revolt as an activity of political revolutionaries who were dressing their worldly demands with religious garb, thereby mixing religion with politics (Luther’s Works 46: 63-91)

Two important developments took place to change this view. The first was the humanist stream that surfaced during the Renaissance which focused on human achievements, and valued human freedom and happiness as ideals to be striven after. The human race was understood to be responsible for its own history and destiny. Secondly, this growing optimism about the possibility of achieving human freedom and happiness on this side of the grave was given further impetus by the thinkers of Enlightenment in the eighteenth century and the liberalism of the nineteenth century—both of which expressed a profound Christian concern for the welfare of the oppressed peoples. This concern first appeared among the Quakers and expressed itself in the call for social reforms. Another expression of it is found in the campaign of Wilberforce and others for abolition of slavery and slave trade in the British Empire. A further example of this was the contribution of Lord Shaftesbury and others toward the improvement of factory conditions during the Industrial Revolution and their fight against the extensive use of child labour — long

before the emergence of the labour trade Unions (Maimela 1990: 79-81)

These two trends, among others, gave birth to what is commonly known as the modern historical consciousness, that is, that awareness by humans that the social conditions in which the majority of the human family lives were not directly created by God who wills that one class or a group of people should enjoy all the benefits while the rest should be contented with their lot, however oppressing and dehumanizing. Rather modern historical consciousness has come to see history and human conditions as creations by human beings themselves, and therefore as alterable for the better. Therefore, it concludes that people suffer under unjust social conditions not because this is willed by God but because the political power and resources to fashion society are vested in the hands of a sinful elite who deny the majority of the human family the right to participate in the political decisions which shape their future (Maimela 1990: 172-177; Gutierrez 1973: 24-33)

In response to this modern historical consciousness, liberation theologians agree that humans must be understood as creators of history through their actions and decisions. Consequently, liberation theology encourages Christians to become involved in the transformation of their oppressive world into a humane and just world. Liberation theology is thus not merely calling for an improvement or amelioration of the living conditions of the poor as the past and present traditional theologies have done. Rather it calls for the end of poverty and oppression themselves. It does this because of its fundamental conviction that every person has the right to freedom, dignity and personal fulfilment, and that men and women have the inalienable right to participate in the creation of the society in which they belong. In consequence, liberation theology invites all the people to become creators of their own history, and, in practice, this amounts to struggling against all the social forces that promote, perpetuate and tolerate human oppression in society. This struggle towards the transformation of social structures so as to abolish human oppression by their fellows is believed, by theologians of liberation, to have been initiated by Jesus victory over sin and evil powers that hold humanity in bondage. It is a struggle that has to be continued until God's kingdom arrives, as Christians work alongside and together with God to create new possibilities for fellowship with God and among human beings themselves.

5. SALVATION AS A SOCIO-HISTORICAL REALITY

As has already been pointed out, liberation theology is born out of a historical awareness and experience of the suffering of the weak and of defencelessness at the hands of their fellow humans. It is

born out of an awareness by the oppressed groups that they are not poor by accident or by God's design or because the poor are lazy, cannot think or be responsible for their lives. Rather they are made poor and underdogs by another class of people who deny them the right to shape their future. In response to this denial of their fundamental rights, these oppressed groups have decided to liberate themselves historically from their bondage. They do this in the belief that human oppression, be it physical or spiritual need not be accepted because the death of Jesus on the cross and his victorious resurrection offer effective remedy for sin and its social consequences. For by abolishing the sin of alienation between God and humans, it has created new community in which hatred and divisions between people can be overcome, thus offering humanity the gift of a fundamental fellowship of brotherhood and sisterhood to which the gospel calls and invites all people. This offer of a new possibility of genuine fellowship beyond present divisions in the church and society, where one class or race or sex confronts and wants to dominate another, is a demonstration of God's victory over sin which makes conversion of antagonists towards one another possible, thus opening up the possibility of a new community in Christ the Saviour.

Behind the claims made by liberation theology that Christ's saving act offers a real and effective remedy for sin and its social consequences lies the conviction that the gospel, to be a really good news in a situation of conflicts and alienation, must have a social meaning. That is, the restoration of broken fellowship between God and humanity which the Christ-event brought about should be interpreted and correlated with the renewal of political, economic and social institutions. It is out of this conviction that liberation theologians have had to reject traditional theology's over-emphasis on the spiritualization of the gospel—as if the gift of salvation which Christ offers has no interest in the material, historical conditions of the poor and the oppressed majority of humankind. Accordingly, liberation theologians accuse traditional theology of a false, deliberate reductionism for limiting the understanding of the gospel to the so-called spiritual sphere, implying thereby that the saving work of Christ touches social structures tangentially and not at their basic roots where social, racial and sexual classes struggle to break out of bondage to which they have been subjected to by dominant groups (Gutierrez 1973: 157-178). In succumbing to this reductionist temptation of portraying salvation as it were a "pie in the sky" unrelated to human struggle for freedom and dignity, traditional theology unwittingly or by default became a tranquilizing instrument, an opium which the ruling classes were ready to use to cover up social injustices so that the poor, the downtrodden and the oppressed groups

would not rise up to challenge the prevailing unjust material relationships (Maimela 1990: 76-80, 172-177).

Obviously, it would be incorrect to exaggerate the claim that traditional theology was not altogether aware of the social implications of the gospel, because the church as an institution located in society does exert cultural and political influence. But this awareness was overshadowed by the overriding concern to save individuals from the pangs of hell, thereby preparing the saved souls for a "true" life in heaven. This spiritualistic trend is even more pronounced in the pietism of both the Protestant and Catholic churches, the pietism that has a marked influence on traditional theology's tendency to focus more on the individual than on the social reality of salvation on this side of the grave. To be sure, the removal of guilt and the salvation of individuals are important biblical concerns—but these do not seem to be the center of focus in the Bible as traditional theology would have us believe. Rather biblical evidence points to the fact that God's purpose for humanity is to establish a community creating fellowship with God and among humans themselves. Therefore individuals are saved only and in so far as God saves the world which God has given Christ to die for. Indeed without minimizing the personal or spiritual reality of salvation, liberation theology has done the Church a great service through its recovery of and emphasis on the social reality of salvation, thus offering a necessary corrective to the traditional theology's overemphasis on the spiritual nature of human life at the expense of its physical dimension.

This increasing appreciation in theology that human beings exist in the totality of their body, mind, and spirit in their social relationships has broadened our understanding of the biblical emphasis that salvation refers both to a restored relationship with God and to the concrete, observable, historical reality in the life of God's people whose will, mind and interpersonal relationships are being transformed in and through the saving power of Christ's work. Seen from that perspective salvation can no longer be understood as an escape from this miserable world but as a divine power and the possibility of transforming individuals and their social structures—thus liberating them from both spiritual and physical oppression. That is, salvation has everything to do with the institutions and structures that bind men and women of flesh and blood and can therefore become good news for the oppressed, the hungry, the alienated and divided humanity. Put somewhat differently, what is at stake in the debate between the theology of liberation and traditional theology over the meaning of salvation is the central claim, advanced by liberation theologians, that the Christian confession of faith in the saving God must necessarily be linked to and integrated with

our confession of justice in society. For on that correlation depends the future and the integrity of the christian message and its promise of salvation for the world (Maimela 1990: 90-91)

In an attempt to offer a much more comprehensive understanding of salvation, liberation theology felt it necessary to redefine the concept of sin. Over-against traditional theology which views sin largely as a personal matter between the sinner and God, liberation theology points out that sin is not merely a private matter but rather it is an eminently social, community concept manifesting itself through a human refusal to be in fellowship both with God and with one's fellow humans. Refusing to separate the stories of Genesis 3 and Genesis 4, liberation theology argues that sin is a theological concept that refers to a state or condition of alienation, alienation which resulted from broken relationships between God and humanity and between human beings themselves. It thus refers to a structural condition which characterizes human existence, and describes a reality which includes personal sin and the sins of one's people, class, race and sex. Because it describes a structural, social reality, sin is something we never encounter in itself. It is encountered and manifests itself in concrete, particular instances of alienation between God and humans and between human beings. It is for this reason that this fundamental sin of alienation is the basic cause of situations of injustice, oppression and the will to dominate — all of which individually and collectively breed conflicts and polarization between people (See Gutierrez 1973:175f). Sin is therefore a deeply rooted reality in human existence transcending individuals because the collective will of refusal to love is embodied in social structures. Therefore the elimination of sin requires greater effort than the conversion of few pious individuals. Its elimination demands a radical liberation and transformation of humanity itself as well as the transformation of society. This happens when men and women together with God struggle to build up a just society, thus jointly contributing to the building up and growth of God's kingdom in history.

Our hope for this radical transformation of individuals and community relations is grounded in the gift of fellowship which God in and through Christ offers to the world. For the gospel message is that in and through the saving act of Christ God intends to deal with what is deepest and most fundamental in human life: the healing of the most stubborn disease of the human heart, namely, hatred, distrust and lovelessness that manifest themselves in sinful unjust relationships (Niebuhr 1965:191, 209, 213). It is as God heals the hearts, wills, and attitudes of alienated humanity that transforma-

Tion of society and reconciliation become a possible historical reality (Maimela 1987: 57-58).

In view of this cosmic salvation involving the transformation not only of pious individuals but also of the entire human existence, liberation theology is justified in insisting that salvation is a social, historical fact which aims at restoring broken fellowships, and that it can become real only when it includes the social relationships in which men and women live (Is 11:6-9; Rev. 7:13-17; 21:1-5).

Obviously, in order to achieve this total victory over sin and its consequences both in the personal and the social sphere so that liberation, reconciliation and freedom can become the common property of every person, a long struggle involving God and humans will be called for. But it is a struggle that will have to be engaged in if the salvation that the oppressed people long for is not to remain a "pie in the sky," a pie that is incapable of touching ground where God's people are in society so as to recreate, restore and save humanity which has been infected and soiled by sin. Indeed, the preaching of the gospel is premised on the believe that humanity and our world are transformable for the better in and through the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ, because God in the Christ-event has won victory over sin and its social consequences. This liberationist perspective, which offers hope for God's people in this world, is the one which Christians ought to embrace in order for them to embody this hope, which will empower and place them on the cutting-edge of human struggle for the transformation of our unjust social world into a more just and humane world.

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