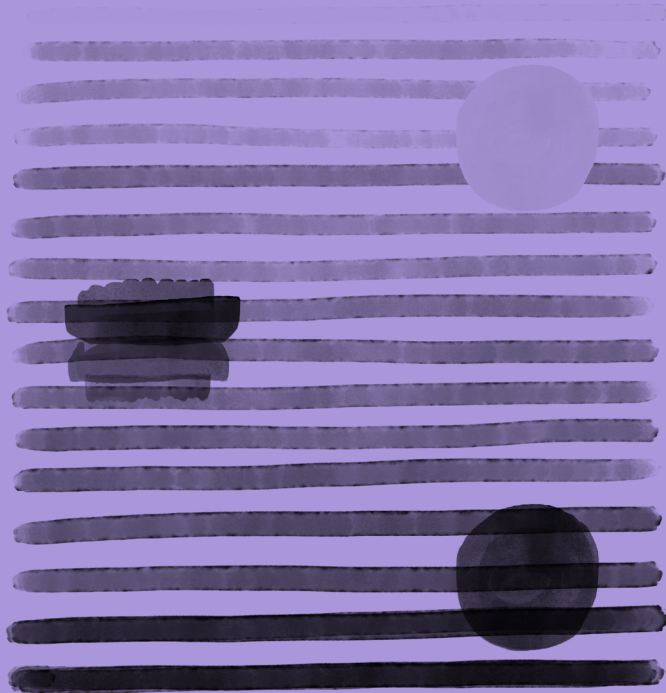




God in Liquid Times

Theology Seminar
of Cristianisme i Justícia



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GOD IN LIQUID TIMES

PROPOSALS FOR A SPIRITUALITY OF FRATERNITY

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“No one must say
that they cannot be close to the poor
because their style of life demands
more attention to other areas.”

Pope Francis [EG 201]

During the 2017-18 course, the theology seminar of Cristianisme i Justícia considered various new currents of spirituality that are being accepted uncritically by many people and that merited a warning from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in a recent document. We felt a need to reflect on the new currents and to evaluate their contributions. At the same time, we wanted to clarify certain basic elements of Christian theology that is done from the perspective of “the least and the last” of this world. We therefore offer this reflection that involves elements that are part of the theological mainstay of our center of studies.

This is a booklet with high theological voltage, so reading it may prove difficult. We ask that you be patient and persevere. Often the language is not easy, but it is worth the effort. Just let yourself be carried by the music! At the end of the booklet you will find a helpful glossary that includes many concepts and words that may be unfamiliar or difficult to understand. They are marked with an asterisk (*) in the text. Don’t hesitate to consult the glossary while you are reading. Upon reaching the end of the booklet, you will have been given an excellent introduction to one of the most important theological debates today in the West.

A STARTING POINT: FAITH IS BORN OF A CRY

—What happened to your hand?

I had already known Nasser a long time. I had always noticed his hand, but until now I had never dared to ask him anything about it. A deep scar ran from the base of his thumb to his wrist. A piece of flesh seemed to be missing.

—“This?” he responded. “A piece of my hand remained on the wall.”

Silence. We looked one another in the eye. We walked along, and little by little he told me his story, which made me ask more questions.

He left his native country in sub-Saharan Africa because there he had no future. He crossed the desert as best he could. He finally reached the wall that separated Africa from Spain. There he spent a long while—waiting, sleeping rough, and staying warm with the other companions he had gotten to know in his travels or in the camp. Finally notice was given one night. This was the moment. They set out in silence, running toward the wall. They did their best to get over it.

—Many didn’t make it—he said—. I did, but I left there a piece of my hand and a lot of blood.

Nasser was thirteen years old when he climbed over the wall. After that, everything was supposed to be easier, but it wasn’t. He still had to cross the stretch of water that separates the African continent from Spain. His eyes took in the immensity of that sea that had swallowed so many lives and so many hopes.

—I looked into its depths, trying to find my dead family and the friends who had drowned there.

But he wasn’t looking only downward. He also raised his eyes toward heaven, seeking help from his God, trying to find answers in him.

We parted with an embrace, as we had done so many other times since first meeting. I returned home, my heart beating fiercely within me. Shortly before that, I had been at a talk about faith. Now my certainties were changed into questions. The answers could be found only in Nasser and in his life—and also in my own.

I remembered how faith was born as a response to a God who heard the cries of his people and wanted to free them. I remembered the cry of Jesus, helpless on the cross and raised up by God.¹ I remembered the deeds and the life-filled stories of the One who is the face of mercy, a mercy made comprehensible only through his proclamation of the kingdom that belongs first of all to the poor.

Then I looked at myself, and I looked around me. I looked at the religion we profess while forgetting at times our origins. Forgetting the important questions, we practice a bourgeois religion that I don't think has much to do with the God of Jesus of Nazareth. Perhaps it would be good to write something that speaks to the present situation, so as not to lose perspective and go astray.

What is salvation? I don't know if it is the same thing for Nasser and for me. At times I think of salvation as something to do with me and my fullness. Nasser thinks of it in terms of his community and his family. And I think he is closer to the truth. I cannot speak of salvation without speaking of Nasser's salvation.

In what Christ do I believe? I have so decontextualized him; I have so spiritualized his message that I forget who he is. And when I find myself with Nasser, Christ's representative, I find myself naked. In what Christ do I believe? We have to keep posing this question in order to recover the Christ of faith, the one who was so human that he could only be the son of God.

And so what church am I building? My church must give evidence of the God in whom I believe, of the Christ whom I follow, of the salvation that I hope for. Will my church be in touch with its reality or kept at odds with it? Will it be more concerned for its image and prestige than for its true essence?

(Narrative based on actual events)

INTRODUCTION: A SPIRITUALITY EMERGING FROM THE VICTIMS

Every form of thought—including the theological—emerges from a situation. The relevance of any answers always depends on the “place” from which the questions come. Reflecting on God, salvation, or spirituality in our post-modern culture requires us to consider first the subject who asks the question: what persons today are asking the transcendent questions that provide the title for this booklet? Acknowledging the undeniable revival of religion in our secularized society will not by itself bring about the theological renewal that is always necessary. In order not to resort to discourses that are as irrelevant as they are time-worn, it is vital that we recognize the origin of the demand for transcendence.

The questions about suffering are not the same as the questions about dissatisfaction. The same response cannot be given to both the victims and the dissatisfied, even though both groups seem to coincide, at least ostensibly, in their search for God, salvation, or spirituality. That is why we wanted to begin this booklet by recalling the testimony of Nasser. His story anchors our reflections in the cries of those who need an effective, unhesitating response of salvation and not in the un-

happy complaints of those who want only the comforting of therapy.

In recent times we have become aware of an ever more intense search for spirituality. The search may in large part result from the emptiness and meaninglessness that characterize our consumerist society; it may also result from disillusionment with the promises of past revolutions; or it may just be exhaustion. Whatever its cause, the search transcends the border between believers and non-believers, and it ex-

ists in a ambivalent relationship with religions. On the one hand, it does not bother itself much with religious dogmas and institutions; on the other, it gradually discovers that many religions share a common spirituality that extends far beyond doctrines and truths, as important as these may appear.

That common spirituality seems to us to be summed up in a search for three things: *profundity*, *escape from self-interest* (the triad: pleasure-possession-power), and *communion* (with others and with nature).

From a human and Christian perspective, this intense spiritual quest is something positive, even when it disrupts some people's lives. It compels people to take a hard, critical look at themselves from a radically Christian viewpoint. Such is the complexity and infirmity of the human heart (cf. Jeremiah 17,9) that people can end up making spirituality itself the final recourse for evading God, who reveals himself as the God of the poor, the oppressed, and the crucified.

When human beings seek to escape from the aridity and sterility of our material, technological world, they may seek refuge in a narcissistic spirituality that protects them from the God who is constantly appealing to them to do something to help their suffering sisters and brothers.

It is for that reason that we published another Manifesto a generation

ago now, when some were urging the need to return to the sacred to counter the dominant paradigm of secularity. In that declaration we affirmed: "If secularity threatens us with losing sight of God, returning to the sacred can threaten us with falsifying the true God. ... Christianity is not compatible with spiritualistic evasion that seeks refuge in a transcendent 'sacred'."²

The same vision is communicated well, though in a less religious language, in the magnificent verses of Gabriel Celaya, which were long ago popularized by Paco Ibañez, who sang:

Poetry for the poor,
poetry as necessary
as the daily bread,
as the air we breathe
three times a minute.

But he quickly added: "I curse the poetry of those who don't take sides." And may similarly say now: "I curse the spirituality of those who don't take sides." That is why the new and quite understandable searches for "spirituality" need to be submitted to a "discernment of spirits." We must ask: what God and what salvation is sought by the spiritual men and women of the 21st century? What responses are being offered from secular and religious domains? Are all the offerings compatible with the construction of more just, more equal, more peaceful world?

POST-MODERNITY IN SEARCH OF NEW (?) SPIRITUALITIES

Without being aware of it, Christianity has quietly identified Christian existence with the natural existence of the bourgeoisie; Christian praxis has surreptitiously been transformed into bourgeois praxis (J. B. Metz, *Más allá de la religión burguesa* [Beyond bourgeois religion], pp. 14-15).

The Eternal Temptation of Bourgeois Religion

There is now a general consensus that we are experiencing a change of epochs. There has been a major shift in the mental paradigms or frameworks by which we open ourselves to reality. But how do we define that change? Is it as novel as it is made out to be? How does it affect our understanding of those realities that we consider sacred?

It is undeniable that mentalities and perspectives change over time. There is much talk these days, for example, of post-modernity, whereas just a few years ago all the talk was of modernity. There is enthusiastic talk also of the era of “post-truth.” Sometimes such changes come about as a reaction

against the inadequacies of an earlier paradigm. Other times they are aggressively pushed by the mass media in order to introduce as contraband something that would be considered unjustifiable if it were called by its true name. Remember that just a few years ago we heard repeated proclamations of the “end of history,” which was nothing but an attempt to absolutize the definitive victory of economic neoliberalism. And nowadays we are discovering that our astonishing acceptance of the “post-truth era” is carrying us toward an era of untruth, where the only absolute truth is one’s self-centered identity.

New data and fresh discoveries, especially in the area of science, require us to view the world in a differ-

ent manner. Creation continues to be a truth of faith after Darwin, but it cannot be understood in the same way as it was before. Often the new paradigm does nothing more than uncover an old truth, one that had been forgotten because of the fluctuating, non-linear paths along which history moves. In this regard, J. B. Metz spoke years ago of the need to advance “beyond bourgeois religion” because Christianity (if we agree to call it “religion”) is in reality a “messianic” religion. At other times the change happens imperceptibly, and the day comes when we find that almost nobody views things the way they were commonly viewed years before.

It is therefore necessary that all new paradigms be affirmed not by denying earlier truths but by finding a way to coexist with them. The new consciousness does not deny the advances achieved; it transcends them and at the same time *integrates them*.

Spirituality to Suit the Consumer

This post-modernity in which we now live is described in contradictory ways, raising the suspicion that it is unconsciously constructed to “suit the consumer.” Sometimes post-modernity is rejected as incompatible with spirituality; other times it is the doorway to a new spirituality. Sometimes the post-modern paradigm means the triumph of an absolute individualism that has congealed into the total relativism that is the fruit of the “post-truth era”; other times it is presented as a relative relativism that should lead us to overcome individualism. We should

not be surprised by this state of affairs because nothing new appears in history as definitive; whatever appears is always bound up with errors and inadequacies that constantly need to be corrected and improved.

In reality, paradigms are not static, nor are they transparent, like new eyeglasses. Rather, they are dynamic and blurred like a first intuition. That is why a presumably new paradigm will be considered suspect if it conceals data that contradict reality or if it prescind from such data. We do well, then, to recall that the worst sin today, according to many sociologists, is not wickedness but indifference.

We stated that what we call new truths are often only “forgotten truths” that once easily coexisted with features that are now thought to be surpassed in the new paradigm. For example, as we will later point out, what is today called “overcoming self” is not as new as it pretends to be: it was already present in Saint Paul’s *Sōma Pneumatikon* (1 Cor 15,44), and it was found also in Buddhism and in Sufi mystics like Ibn Arabi—that is, it existed also in the “pre-modern” paradigm. The bourgeois paradigm is what has obscured that ancient truth.

There is no doubt that in the past a “mythical mentality” prevailed, but even that age of myth gave birth to some surprising formulations, which find their place today in the best aspects of the post-modern paradigm. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Simone Weil, and Etty Hillesum were prophets who foresaw the present crisis and proposed other paths for overcoming it.

To us it seems undeniable that we are today glimpsing a new form

of consciousness that may be called transpersonal or trans-egoist; it is the best of the new spirituality. Teilhard de Chardin, on the one hand, and liberation theology, on the other, had intuitions of that new spirituality from other mental perspectives. We will try to move in that direction ourselves, while keeping in mind that the transpersonal vision is the task before us rather than a reality already achieved. The challenge is determining where that self-transcendence will take us, whether toward community or toward unconsciousness.

The Call to Solidarity: the Demand of All Spirituality

Since all paradigms are relative, we must consider to what extent the presumed novelty of any paradigm requires us either to abandon the intuitions of the previous paradigm or to complete them. This is a fundamental point for talking about God, Jesus, and salvation.

The Bible was, of course, written using pre-modern paradigms. This may cause difficulties when we read the Bible, but it is also clear that the Bible often surpasses those pre-modern paradigms when it speaks of things to come. That God wants all people to be saved and fulfilled is not a recent discovery, although it may have been a forgotten truth or a truth framed in categories different from ours. Also, Jesus' offer of a trusting closeness to God (calling him *Abba*) implies a trusting closeness to all human beings, but that is sadly a half-forgotten truth in Christianity, one that must be ur-

gently recovered in any new paradigm. Something similar could be said of the great spiritual intuitions of other world religions.

It has wisely been said that we should not confuse the truth with our interpretation of the truth. What we understand by truth and the way we understand truth depend on the level of consciousness at which we find ourselves. Since this is the case, we should notice that changing the ways of expressing a truth is not the same as changing the truth itself. It would be an error to uncritically identify that new level of collective consciousness with the way an *individual* sees. With good reason the Gospel reminds us that, while we all have good eyesight when it comes to perceiving other people's ignorance of their own presuppositions, we are perhaps blind when it comes to perceiving our own ("the speck in the other's eye, the beam in one's own").

No paradigm can be exclusive, especially when it comes to God, because the truth exists only in that totality to which we never have access. The truth is not to be found in our fragmented insights or in our false visions of totality, which often provoke a reaction of relativism.

While it is undeniable that our framework for understanding is changing, it is also true that many of the contents will also change, thus affecting our vision of God, humanity, salvation, and the significance of Christ. Those globalizing themes are where history evolves most dialectically because all of reality is dialectical: each epoch discovers a forgotten feature of reality while trying to preserve the fea-

ture that was previously most evident. In the long run, however, the feature that formerly was taken for granted gets forgotten, overshadowed by all the attention given to the newly discovered feature.

In our view, that describes our present time. We human beings are constituted by “interiority and transcendence” (if not toward God, then at least toward what is outside ourselves). Having lived through an epoch of revolutionary pretensions that have not been achieved (though they have made a contribution), we now become aware that perhaps we are interiorly empty. Another epoch thus arises that desperately seeks to fill that interior void. At first we try not to deny our experience of transcendence, but over time the strong affirmation of the new dimension we had forgotten makes us forget the earlier experience, which now seems to contradict the simple (or simplistic) affirmation of what we just discovered. The history of Christology provides a good model for illustrating this dialectical movement since the full humanity of Jesus must be affirmed at the same time as his full divinity. In this regard, Pascal taught that the heresies were wrong, not because of what they affirmed but because their affirmations left no room for other truths.

Trans-Egoist Consciousness: Beyond the Ego

We believe that the word that best defines the best aspects of the new level of consciousness is “trans-personal,” which is related to the already cited proposal of Metz to go “beyond bour-

geois religion.” Perhaps more nuanced language would speak of a “trans-individual” consciousness because the person, as E. Mounier taught, is not simply the lone individual but the individual with others (thus, the “trans” is already contained in the personal).

More than a complete novelty, however, the truth we are treating here is always new because it is always forgotten. Almost all the teachings of the Buddha can be summed up in his affirmation of the falsity of our consciousness of “self.” That paradigm does not appear to be so “new,” nor does it demand that we totally abandon other paradigms considered mythical and mental. We still need myths because “they give us something to think about” (as P. Ricoeur said about symbols). And even though mental reality might not represent the ultimate dimension of our existence, it cannot be abandoned if we want to prevent the trans-rational from becoming simply the irrational.

We should not conceive the new paradigms as historical epochs that pass on and are replaced by others; rather, they should be conceived according to the Hegelian dialectic inscribed in our reality: from its very beginning, human consciousness appears to move in a pattern of “thesis, antithesis, synthesis.” The old should not be abandoned; it should be integrated (or subsumed) in the new.

In our own times, when so many people are denied the dignity of being persons, the trans-egoist proposal will be authentic only if it is addressed to those who have been depersonalized. The affirmation of the transpersonal would tend to result in something

non-personal if it spoke simply in abstract and global terms, and it would thus be collaborating indirectly but materially with the extreme affirmation of ego present in our culture, which causes so many people to be condemned and excluded from our history. Being free of the ego does not mean closing one's eyes; rather, it means opening them wider and seeing better.

The Lie of the Ego and the Truth of the "I"

This trans-egoist consciousness and the corresponding lie of the ego serve well as a modern formulation of "original sin," which consists in clinging to the lie of our ego and not wanting to let go of it.

There is no need, then, to use the current "new consciousness" to negate original sin as presented in its disastrous Augustinian version, which is easy to discredit. If we move from the realm of mental speculation to that of experience, we see that believers and non-believers alike have understood original sin in other ways, as representing our inability to be good by our own forces. For example, the agnostic M. Horkheimer asserted that "original sin is evident," and a Spanish bishop at Trent said that if you want to know what original sin is, "Just take a look in the mirror."³

However, truth tends to be dialectical, and that is the case also for our new consciousness of the life of the ego.

Let us imagine a cartoon that shows a man being trampled, crushed, and beaten. A passing monk approaches the man

and tells him: "Don't worry, Your ego is a lie, so the pain you feel is an illusion." This example shows that the reality of human suffering in some sense refutes the supposed lie of the ego. It might be objected that if the lie did not exist, then neither would suffering. Perhaps, but the fact is that suffering does exist, and plenty of it! Consequently, the "sin of the world" was active already, even before our ego began to act.

What is more, as deceitful as our ego (or better, our self) may be, it is not *totally* false: as a creature made in the image of God, it has permanent validity. Holding on to just one of the two poles of that dialectic (the lie of the ego—the truth of the self) leads us to view the affirmation of a personal God as an outmoded paradigm. God is thus replaced by a hazy abstraction such as the "totality of being."

We will speak of God in the following chapter. What is important now is making it clear that suffering, maltreated persons—and all human beings—have a dignity that proceeds from their being creatures and children of God and that that makes them subjects of rights. This must not be denied, no matter how much we affirm the lie of our ego.

We correctly recognize the value of our own being, but we must recognize it as a value that is "received." The lie of our ego is rooted in the negation of that gratuity and in our attempt to absolutize ourselves ("you will be as God"). The Indian Upanishads, which affirm the lie of the self, claim that we should "consider the self as the kindling that serves to feed the sacred fire."⁴

That is what we humans are: un-

truth and kindle for the divine fire. That can also be reformulated on the basis of our experience of being subjects since that is the experience that most contributes to the deception of the ego. It is true that I am a subject (or have some subjectivity), but I am not a unique subject. Therein lie the contradiction and the falsity of humanity: we think we are unique.

Why? Well, because subjectivity tends to turn everything into objects and so makes itself something special. Since we cannot experience the sensations of others in the same way we experience our own, we can only—and we must!—believe and accept that they are like ours.

Thus, we can affirm the following: I am a subject but not unique. The radical lie of my ego is rooted in my feeling unique and behaving accordingly. In this sense, the need for salvation is required by the multiplicity of (supposedly unique) subjects.

This contradiction that defines us⁵ allows us to understand both what we call original sin (believing myself unique, wanting to “be like God” [Gen 3,28]) and the false resignation of conservatives, which forgets that we have a dignity that rebels against resignation. Vatican II defined salvation very precisely: it is not merely recognition of the lie of the ego; it is communion (LG 1). The first eleven chapters of Genesis describe how evil entered into human history, causing a rupture of communion in its diverse forms, beginning with the rupture of brotherhood (Cain and Abel) and ending with the rupture of human society (Tower of Babel). Here we meet up again with transpersonal consciousness, but more

as a forgotten truth than as a new discovery.

We Are Divided Beings

That contradiction we just described is what makes us “divided beings,” even before we experience all the deceptions worked by our ego. Today there is much talk about “non-duality,”* but if that non-duality cannot tolerate our condition of being “divided,” it becomes as mythical as dualism, no matter how much it seeks to be the expression of a new paradigm.

Much more than a sense of non-duality, what human beings need to recover today is a sense of gratuity, because the negation of gratuity perverts human progress. Fear of progress may be a form of resistance to a change of paradigm, but that would be valid only in an ideal, fairy-tale world; it would not apply to the progress that has created nuclear weapons and caused climate change.⁶

Conclusion

There is no denying that overcoming the ego is the path of spirituality, but that is not the whole story. The question remains: whither tends that escape from self?—to what place or thing or person? The human heart is so subtle that it can remain firmly fixed in its own ego, proudly affirming its lie.⁷ That is why we believe that the important thing is forgetting the ego, and that forgetting becomes possible only by paying attention to others—especially the victims and the suffering.

THE NON-BOURGEOIS GOD: THE ONLY ONE IN WHOM I CAN BELIEVE

“When he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is”
(1 John 3,2).

“You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the
poor” (Mark 10,21).

Non-Duality: a Half-Truth

All language about God is tremendously imperfect and inevitably projective. The Fourth Lateran Council taught that we cannot talk about God without speaking more falsehood than truth (“more dissimilarity than similarity”). This warning should help us preserve that small dose of truth, but we should not absolutize it. The classic saying, “Tell me the how you imagine God, and I’ll tell you the image you have of man,” is valid also in reverse: “Tell me the image you have of man, and I’ll tell you how you imagine God.” Thomas Aquinas, who is neither modern nor post-modern, long ago stated that the final word we can say about God is that we said before is worth nothing.

Some thinkers hold that the trans-egoist paradigm we mentioned above implies a change in our idea of God. We believe, rather, that the transpersonal paradigm is best expressed in the *Abba*-Kingdom dyad that Jesus proposes because it involves the relational element of confidence, which is the attitude that best actualizes our personhood, even though it involves risk.

We are told, though, that the “transpersonal” paradigm fails to avoid the problem of “dualism” that typifies the modern paradigm, so that the concept of *advaita* (non-duality*), taken from Hinduism, is proposed as the most suitable way of speaking about God. God thus becomes that “nameless Totality” in which we are irretrievably immersed. Only the appearance of mind,

and with it the idea of God, generates the conception of a “separate” God.

Saint Augustine had something to say about that already in the fifth century: he claimed that God is “closer to me than I am to myself (*intimior intimo meo*),” but he also commented, surprisingly, that God is also “higher than my highest reaches” (*superior summo meo*.)” Augustine thus speaks of non-duality and duality simultaneously.

The best theological traditions has also spoken about pantheism (meaning “all-in-God”: “in him we live and move and have our being”) as opposed to pantheism (meaning “all-is-God”). Pantheism is different from the diffuse pantheism of our own day, which seems to emerge from non-duality. The fact is that non-duality can have a least three meanings:

- a) Metaphysically, it was affirmed by the most traditional scholastic doctrine: God is in all things, giving his being, energy, etc. That was the sense of the classical doctrine of “concourse” or the prayer that spoke of *Rerum Deus tenax vigor* (“God the fierce force of things”). However, a metaphysical statement cannot be converted into an immediate psychological experience, as some supposedly new spiritualities seem to propose.
- b) As mentioned earlier, Hinduism gives the name non-duality (*advaita*) to the experience of God in the depths of oneself (*atman-Brahman*). Christianity knows that experience and defines it as experience of the Holy Spirit. Etty Hillesum described such an experience in her

famous diary; that was what led her to discover God.⁸ Let us add that in Hinduism there are various schools that interpret this non-duality differently: some are more pantheistic while others are more dualistic. Non-duality is also described as non-unity, which restores a certain type of dualism.

- c) Finally, the deepest and truest realization of non-duality is what we call the “hypostatic union”* in Christ: the full realization of the *advaita*. In this regard, Rahner said that “human beings aspire to hypostatic union”; that is, *they aspire to non-duality*. Viewing that aspiration as real and accessible for all is a clear eschatological anticipation of what the New Testament says: “God will be all in all” (1 Cor 15). If we take that aspiration as something already realized, then the *advaita* could paradoxically become not only the greatest myth but also the most tacit and occult affirmation of the ego.

To avoid this danger, it would be better to project non-duality into the relationship between myself and others, that is, understand it as equality among all. But that is a task to be accomplished, not a treasure already possessed. Consequently, there does not exist—nor should there exist—any superior, omnipotent, supposedly divine agent like the ancient emperors in China, Egypt, or Rome or like the modern dictators. We can only aspire to *advaita*: affirming anything more is just another form of affirming our ego.

It would be wrong, therefore, to conceive this kind of language as ne-

gating dualism or moving beyond it. It is not the case that “dualism is a myth, and non-duality is not.” Both are equally true, and both are equally myth. They are both valid at the same time, as contradictory as that may sound. Already in the second century Irenaeus of Lyon was using bipolar language about God: what we cannot say about God because of his greatness we can say about him because of his love. Later Nicholas of Cusa defined God as *coincidentia oppositorum*, “the harmony of opposites.”

In this regard, we believe that the word “Mystery” is preferable to “Silence” for indicating God because it is less ambiguous: Mystery always includes plenitude, whereas Silence can be vacuous and can lead to an ill-defined spirituality, which would be spirituality without faith.

The Trans-Personal, Relational God

The new spiritualities produce important results that we cannot deny, but we tend to think that what they discover are “forgotten truths,” not new ones. Moreover, in addition to their one-sidedness, which we have already criticized, the new spiritualities bring with them other negative consequences or omissions of importance:

- Understanding that God is “unspeakable” turns God into a critic of religion. That is true, but it is nothing new: Jesus and Paul were severe critics of religion, long before Nietzsche or Freud. Religion is not an element of our relation

with God (and can end blurring authentic faith), but it is necessary for expressing the communal nature of our faith in God. Consequently, after religion is negated, it still needs to be recovered.

- It is also said that viewing God as the enemy of human sin leads to viewing God as the enemy of human beings. There is much truth here as well, but we should add that God, as the friend of human beings, is radically opposed to the sin that dwells in us and destroys our humanity, dividing us into executioners and victims. God is the greatest friend of humanity precisely because he is the enemy of sin.
- Affirming God’s transcendence (dwelling “in heaven”) suggests a dialogical (dualistic) relation with God, based on our weakness. All our contact with him is viewed as relational and petitionary; we may even feel that we are “superior” to others because we think we are related to God. This danger is real, but only if we experience our relationship to God as that of an “interlocutor” while denying the other type of relationship that some call “oceanic” (“in him we live and move and have our being” [Acts 17,28]). On the other hand, if we have only this latter type of experience and deny the relational contact, then all possibility of true “faith (or confidence) in God” disappears.

In other words, the insufficiency of affirming a “personal” God should lead not to the affirmation of an “a-personal” God but to the affirmation of a “transpersonal” God. The doctrine of

the Trinity therefore makes a crucial contribution insofar as it diversifies and “complicates” our relation with God: inaccessible as Father, crucified and unrecognizable as Son, but present in us as Spirit who makes us call God our Father and recognize Jesus as Lord.

Believing, then, is something more than “becoming aware”; it is a form of confident surrender that accepts the possibility that the “Silence” has in some way revealed itself and that that revelation allows us to recognize the God of the dispossessed of history.

Against Bourgeois Religion

For all these reasons, any language about God in which there not a single mention of suffering or the oppression of humans by humans will never produce more than bourgeois (or perhaps

pharisaical) religion. Such a religion rejects the Christian affirmation that God has revealed himself not as an answer for intellectuals but as good news for the oppressed. The well-known verses of Atahualpa Yupanki adroitly unmask that God: “There are things in this world more important than God: that no one have to spit blood so that others may live better.”

But what if God has revealed himself in Jesus Christ precisely in the way those verses affirm? God would then be primarily an appeal, a challenge, a voice that calls out to you (“Go forth from your country...” [cf. Gen 12,1]). Paradoxically, it is when a person obeys that difficult call that God “by addition” becomes consolation and therapy: “Seek first the Kingdom of Heaven and the justice of God, and everything else will be added to you” (Matt 6,33).

CHRISTIAN SALVATION: SAVING ONESELF OR BEING SAVED?

“Although you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy, for you are receiving the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.” (1Pet 1,8).

“You did it to me” (Matt 25).

The Illusion of the Individual’s Absolute Autonomy

It has become extraordinarily difficult in our time to speak of the Gospel of Salvation (Acts 4, 12; 1 Tim 2,5) in a credible and convincing manner. Since we cannot go deeply into this problem here, we will limit ourselves to sketching in broad outline some aspects of this difficulty.

Some of the reasons for the difficulty are internal: two thousand years of church history have produced many deviations and deformations of the Gospel of Salvation. Some of these derive from the fact that our traditional catechetical, liturgical, and theological vocabulary is quite obscure for

our contemporaries. Concepts such as “divinization,” “redemption,” “justification,” “sacrifice,” “expiation,” and “satisfaction” are opaque categories for the immense majority of those who hear them and use them since they cannot be related to any normal human experience. When they first were used, however, they referred to real human experiences, such as freedom from slavery or from debt.

Some of these theological categories have been rejected as perverted or as conveying dangerous ideas about God. The theory of “satisfaction” has especially stirred up much criticism. J. Ratzinger rejected the theology of satisfaction because it implied that God’s “inexorable justice demanded a human

sacrifice, the sacrifice of his own Son.” He lamented that “this image is as widespread as it is false. ... It distorts the meaning of divine justice by associating it with unrelenting wrath that totally negates the message of love.”⁹

However, the most important reasons for this problem of incomprehension are external and are related to cultural changes. The Christian message of Salvation in Jesus Christ has received three successive blows, and each blow displaced the one before it, piling up further difficulties for believing the Gospel of Salvation. The blows were these:

- a) First, theology had to explain how Christian salvation related to the modern age’s notion of emancipation. The tension between the autonomy of emancipation and the heteronomy of salvation has still not been totally resolved. For that reason, the Vatican has said, “a type of neo-Pelagianism* has proliferated in our times, whereby radically autonomous individuals seek to save themselves and refuse to recognize that at the core of their being they depend on God and on others. Salvation is thus sought by personal efforts or by purely human structures that are impervious to the newness of the Spirit of God.”¹⁰
- b) Soon after the first attempt was made to respond to the challenge of emancipation, Christian discourse was confronted with the even greater challenge posed by the victims of modern emancipation and the unjust suffering it has caused. How can we speak of God and his salvation after Auschwitz (J.B. Metz)?

How can we speak of God and his salvation in the face of unjust suffering (G. Gutiérrez)? And how can we speak of God in the global concentration camp that our modern world has become? This is the great challenge that must be met today by any discourse about salvation that pretends to be Christian.

- c) Post-modernity, for its part, brings with it the negation of all discourse that is capable of endowing history with meaning: the only thing we can do is to try to seek the meaning of history in the loss of meaning. This new tendency makes culturally precarious any “grand narrative” of salvation (like Christianity) that would bestow an absolute meaning on history.

In conclusion, during the last sixty years we have often had the impression that whenever we begin to develop answers to the new questions about Christian salvation, the questions change and we have to start all over again. This situation makes quite contemporary the question E. Schillebeeckx formulated fifty years ago: “In view of the new models of experience and thought, what must we do here and now to preserve a living faith in the salvation offered by Jesus Christ, which even today, thanks to his truth, is significant for human beings and for society?”¹¹

Another Half-Truth: the Lie of the Ego

They say that we can’t be saved by any creed but only by recognizing our own truth, and our own truth is the lie

of our ego. Here we have another half of another “great truth”: acknowledgment of that inflation of the self is indispensable for our salvation, but that alone is not enough; it leads us to cry out like Paul, “Who will free me from the lethal lie?” (cf. Rom 7,24). What is more, the faith experience of having been saved is what helps us most to acknowledge the lie of our ego and all the subtleties by which that lie takes possession of us.

That lie, which constitutes us, impedes all authentic communication, and it remains in effect as long as our idea of salvation excludes communion. The One who makes possible communion, which is the true name of salvation, is the God who will be “all in all” at the end of time (1 Cor 15).

The Constitution on the Church proclaimed by Vatican II defines human salvation as communion with God and with one another (*LG* 1). To be sure, subjectivity does not disappear in communion, but it is transformed. The subject continues to be a subject, but it surrenders its self-centered subjectivity in love; it becomes a subjectivity that receives from the love of the other.¹² God is one and triune because the subject exists only by surrendering subjectivity.

That is precisely why Jesus’ announcement of God is inseparably united with the notion of “God’s reign,” which is an expression of communion. Jesus does not preach about getting lost in the vagueness of “what is.” In fact, from a Christian viewpoint, “what is” is not merely “Subsistent Being”: it is “Subsistent Love.”

It is now clear that our conception of salvation is closely united to our notion of God.

Negating the Self or Forgetting the Self?

The rectification we have made keeps us from closing our eyes before the agonizing pain and the immense injustice of this world; it prevents us from keeping our distance from those excruciating realities, like the priest and the Levite in the parable. We must not only keep from closing our eyes before them; we must make them lodestars for our own spiritual life because they are the realities that most help us to perceive the lie of our ego; they are what will give us strength to combat that lie. To pretend that human beings are capable of escaping from the lie by their own effort is just another subtle reaffirmation of ego.

The fact is that our unconscious is so subtle that, if we lack the love and compassion that G. Gutiérrez calls the “reverse side of history,” even the negation of our ego can become a subtle form of narcissism. Trying to save ourselves simply by acknowledging the life of our own ego degenerates into a form of gnosis.*

The Divine Value of the Human

We agree totally that salvation means waking up to our true integrity and experiencing who we are when all the dimensions of our being are integrated. The problem is knowing what that integrity consists of and what the dimensions of our being are.

When a future “eternal life” disappears from the horizon of our expectations, we are inevitably forced to reevaluate the fragility of our lives.

Such a reevaluation can be done safely either by devaluing our subjectivity (in a diffuse, stoical spirituality) or by anticipating the eternal dimension within our present fragility:¹³ “If you have risen with Christ, seek now the things that are above,” that is, the full dimensions of the resurrection (cf. Col 3,1ff.).

That “anticipation” of the eternal is what is truly typical of the Christian paradigm, but that does not mean that Christianity has always been faithful to it or that it has realized that anticipation in every historical context. Paul, for example, living at a time when Christianity was a tiny movement and sudden structural change was impossible,¹⁴ could not fight against slavery, but he did struggle against the divinization of the emperors, proclaiming Christ as the “only Lord.” Also, he told Philemon to consider his slave Onesimus as a “brother in the flesh and in the Lord,” thus encouraging a new mentality that would eventually do away with slavery.

Of course, the Christian paradigm has often been poorly formulated or poorly understood, but in those cases what is needed is to replace the mistaken understanding with a correct understanding, and this requires study and patience. Rejecting a false concept of Christianity should not result in rejecting Christianity as such. This is a problem that affects not only Christianity but all language and intelligence.

Jesus, Savior or Spiritual Teacher?

The classical Christian acronyms especially designated Jesus as Savior. We see this in the Latin acronym IHS

(*Iesus hominum Salvator*, “Jesus, Savior of humankind”) and in the Greek acronym ICHTHUS (“fish”), whose letters are the Greek initials for “Jesus, Christ, Son of God, Savior”.

In some of the new spiritualities Jesus is no longer properly a “savior”; he becomes one more spiritual teacher (the wisest one, if you will) among the many who have existed in history. They teach that individuals save themselves by becoming aware of the lie of their ego.¹⁵

Contemporary historical research confirms that Jesus, though he was quite steeped in the culture of wisdom, was above all a Prophet and “more than a prophet”; he was the Definitive Prophet or, as E. Schillebeeckx says, the “Eschatological Prophet.” The strong conflict and controversy he provoked is what most differentiates him from other great spiritual teachers.

If we eliminate that conflict and his call for us to “share in divine life” (2 Peter 1,4), then it hardly seems necessary for Jesus to be the “Only Son” of God. He could be simply another spiritual teacher. To be sure, he would be the first one who realized that we are all God’s children, but we would not be “children in the Son” (according to the classical theological formula); we would simply be children in the same way he was. In such an understanding, we are all fully divine and fully human, just as Jesus was, so that our sin would be not daring to believe what Jesus has already told us.

Such a position involves a certain manipulation of Jesus because what he actually said was not that we are exactly the same as he is but that we can call on God in the same way he called on

God (*Abba*) and that whoever see him sees the Father. In the gospels Jesus constantly distinguishes between “my Father” and “your Father.” Of course, we can argue about which of the two

visions of Jesus is more true (in the end, our faith will be definitively confirmed only in the hereafter), but it seems to us that only one of those two ways of viewing Jesus is Christian.

THE SPIRITUALITY THAT MAKES US “ECCENTRIC,” JUST, AND COMPASSIONATE

“Our spirituality is often little more than a therapeutic recourse. ... Our relationship with God is a way to make us feel better, but we don't expect to be challenged” (R. WUTHNOW, *God and Mammon in America*).

“God is love” (1 John 4,20).

What is Spirituality?

All human beings, says Jon Sobrino, have a “spiritual life” because, whether they want to or not, whether they know it or not, they are constantly confronted with reality, and they are endowed with the ability to react to it with finality. Consequently, the phrase “spiritual life” may be a tautology: all human beings live their lives with spirit. The kind of spirit with which people live is another question, of course, but there can be no doubt that they live with spirit. To be more precise: spirituality is the spirit with which we confront the reality and the history in which we live, in all their complexity. We can argue about what type of spirit

is adequate and what type is not, but whatever type it is, it gets confronted with reality and must decide what to make of it.¹⁶

The different spiritualities are identified by their ultimate horizons. It is very important to clarify this so as not to get lost in sterile discussions about the value of practices that may appear to be spiritual but are in fact only “inconsequential” exercises, in the literal, non-pejorative sense of the term. Not all meditative praxis is spiritual praxis, though it may appear to be to an external observer. In order for praxis to be truly spiritual, it must reach toward a transcendent horizon that is not self-referential. Such a requirement naturally disqualifies the hygien-

ic-therapeutic practices whose ultimate aim is personal well-being. Truly spiritual praxis must relate to reality and not to the analgesic evasions by which people take flight from the world.

The Temptation of a Spirituality Divorced from History

The “new” currents of spirituality—even if they are less new than they appear—seem to draw heavily on the religions of the East: the human richness of Hinduism, the human mendacity of Buddhism, and the path that Taoism traces between both. In no way do we want to reject any of these spiritual treasures; indeed, we need them. But as Christians we believe that they find their fullness in the revelation of God as Love that took place in Jesus of Nazareth.

J. B. Metz argued that Catholicism was tempted to practice a type of religion that sought a God divorced from history, from flesh, and from the poor. Pope Francis has many times lamented the proliferation of a certain neo-Gnosticism that proposes a purely interior, totally subjective salvation, which consists in ascending intellectually to the mysteries of the unknown divinity. “An effort is thus made to free the person from the body and the material cosmos, which no longer reveal the traces of the Creator’s provident hand; instead, the body and the cosmos become pointless reality, irrelevant to the person’s ultimate identity and deployable in accord with the person’s interests.”¹⁷

We spoke already about the interiority and the transcendence that

are constitutive of every person. In the days when human beings had little awareness of historical progress, it was normal for spiritualities to consider history irrelevant and to pay special attention to interiority. But the Judeo-Christian tradition, in speaking of the God who reveals himself “in history,” declares that all that wealth of interiority exists in order to be poured forth lovingly in that progressive liberation from all slavery that Jesus called the “reign of God.” If historical development derives from something other than that interior wealth poured forth lovingly, then it doomed to failure, as experience shows. On the other hand, if the cultivation of our infinite depths does not lead to that pouring forth in love, then we can say of such spirituality, parodying a saying of Marx: “Man makes spirituality; spirituality does not make man.”

Jesus Does not Seek to Reduce Stress

Jesus was a spiritual man whose life was oriented and formed against the horizon of the Kingdom of God. His deeply held conviction about God’s sovereign intervention in history influenced his ways of acting, speaking, relating, and praying.

The gospels show Jesus adopting attitudes and practices that we spontaneously associate with the spiritual realm: he withdraws to solitary places to meditate and pray; he prays to God and calls him *Abba*; he takes part in the Jewish rites; he recognizes and gives thanks for God’s presence in all reality... In reconstructing his spiritual bi-

ography, however, we would be guilty of an obscene caricature if we were to reduce his spiritual practices to the search for “mindfulness,”* to give just one example.

The spiritual practice of Jesus was not aimed at reducing stress, preserving his gray matter, or connecting with his interior self. The burning passion that consumed his existence was the announcement that God’s reign had already begun and would soon be fully established. When his disciples asked him to teach them to pray, they did not receive yoga lessons about bodily posture, breathing techniques, or ways to empty the mind. Rather, they received training in a mystagogy* that sought to situate them on the same path as Jesus himself: the horizon of the Kingdom (“your Kingdom come”), the will of God for their lives and for history (“thy will be done”), attention to daily physical needs (“our daily bread”), the need for forgiveness as a vital way of relating (“forgive us our transgressions as we forgive those who transgress against us”), and a lucid awareness of the dynamics of death that are lodged in the heart of every human being (“let us not fall in times of temptation”).

A Horizon Inhabited by a God Who is in Solidarity with the Victims

The spirituality of Jesus is never an evasive practice; it always connects with the vital, historical reality of particular persons. Hunger, sickness, death, desolation, guilt, oppression, and injustice—as well as joy, festivity, and thanksgiving—are not irrele-

vant matters that you leave at the door beside your shoes in order to become submerged in a transpersonal experience of fusion with an unnamable mystery. Within the transcendent horizon of Christian spirituality dwells a Father who, crazy with joy, embraces a prodigal son; a Shepherd who desperately seeks out the lost sheep; a King who promises happiness for those who weep now, suffer hunger, and struggle for justice; a Judge who visits prisoners, clothes the naked, and feeds the starving.

There are many spiritualities and many ways to relate to the ultimate reaches of reality. There are transcendent horizons that pursue Beauty, Goodness, Justice, and Peace. As Christians, we welcome all of them, but we do so from a horizon inhabited by a God who is profoundly moved by the suffering of victims. All of us can—and should—take part in ecumenical* encounters that celebrate the beauty of the world, demand care and protection for the gift of Creation, promote relations free of domination, recognized historically denied identities, urge us to adopt an austere style of life, stress the importance of nourishing our interior world, etc. All these spiritual horizons contribute to making the world a better place, one in which believers can recognize clear signs of God’s Kingdom.

Inevitably, though, as Christians become immersed in that shared spiritual ocean, they must raise a prophetic voice to remind people, as Josep Cobo has said, that the bottom of that seemingly calm ocean is covered with the corpses of migrants who were seeking nothing more than justice and

redemption. Christian spirituality—that is, spirituality driven by the Spirit of Jesus—is tremendously lucid; far from being alienated from reality, it submerges itself in it and call things by their real names.

Ethics and Mysticism Have a Mutual Need for one Another

All spiritual proposals (prophetic, mystical, sapiential) worthy of the name recognize the importance of mercy. Spiritual persons of all traditions develop a special sensibility to the suffering of others. If authentic spirituality confronts us with reality, it also places us, inevitably and inescapably, in the presence of individual and social evil. Compassion forms part of the ethical minimum¹⁸ shared by all spiritualities, Christian or not.

While all spiritualities will make us more compassionate, the Christian vision is exceptional in that it puts concern for the suffering of others at the very core of our spiritual experience. Other spiritualities take account of situations of injustice and, in a later ethical moment, resolve to work for their eradication or mitigation. Christian spirituality faces suffering as part of its ultimate horizon. Christians do not find distress only in the world, nor do they find peace only in prayer. Their prayer, their communing with the transcendent God, is at the same time an encounter with the world's suffering. That is the meaning of the text of the final judgment in Matthew 25: "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when

was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you? And the king will answer them, Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of my sisters and brothers, you did it to me" (Matt 25,37-40). In Christian spirituality, ethics and mysticism are fused. Christian spirituality carries to its ultimate consequences what the prophet Jeremiah expressed categorically: knowledge of God—the aim of all true spirituality—comes through the practice of justice (Jer 22,16).

Christian Spirituality: Far from Being an Opiate

There is simply no way that Christian salvation can be understood as a private matter that is of concern only to the religious individual. Such a perspective makes it extremely difficult, if not impossible, for a human being to encounter the Love who descends to pitch his tent among the poor of the world in order to save humankind and recapitulate the cosmos.

In Christian spirituality, the encounter with God is an encounter with "God's world," with his project for saving suffering humanity. In the interior reflection that is proper to spirituality, Christians encounter not only the "face of the Other" but also, and inseparably, the suffering faces of others and lives that appeal to us and make demands on us. There is no true spiritual experience that can abstract from suffering, and there is no Christian experience that can fail to make the cross part of its constitutive moment.¹⁹ How-

ever, the cross is not the “mainstay” of Christianity—the resurrection is that—but it is a constant corrective to all our falsifications of the Transcendent.

We repeat once more our readiness to accept all “spiritual” proposals that pursue interior tranquility as the result of meditative practice, introspective silence, emptying of self, and the search for peace. They provide obvious proof that the civilization (and pseudo-religion) of the god Money (with its minions, consumption and ostentation) cannot make us happy, no matter how much it forces us to declare that we *are* happy. Taking time out and quieting our inner world has therapeutic benefits that are far from negligible.

Despite all this, the biographies of the spiritual teachers of all religious traditions make reference to an interior world that is agitated by “struggling spirits.” Ignatius Loyola distrusts the quality of the spiritual practice of persons who remain impassive when making his Exercises.²⁰ The reason is that entering into the spiritual world involves confronting personal and historical “demons” that conspire together to prevent the construction of a society of solidarity. Confronting the deepest reaches of reality means recognizing that our interior struggle takes the form of a “duel,” an ongoing battle between the kingdom and the anti-kingdom.²¹ The spiritual experience of Jesus also involved struggle, and the evangelists capture it well in the story

of the temptations in the desert, which seems to draw on other moments in the life of Jesus (using God to benefit oneself or one’s personal mission, being proclaimed king, or having legions of angels standing ready to ward off threats.)

Today, in a changing world that appears threatening and opaque to many people, the pseudo-spiritualities flourish, offering personal peace and integration and avoiding conflict of any sort. A critical examination should ask about the ultimate horizon of that tranquility: is it the manna that satisfies hunger on the journey through the desert? Or is it the irresponsible obliviousness of infantile ignorance? In Christian spiritual praxis, there is a need to decide which spirits we will call on to build the Kingdom: will it be the spirits of power or the spirits of service?

There are many spiritualities, and some converge on the horizon of the Kingdom. They are the spiritualities that make us more other-centered, compassionate, lucid, and just. If they also reduce our stress and preserve our gray matter, so much the better, but if they do only that, then we would fare just as well riding a stationary bike or consuming certain opiates. Let us close, then, with something written years ago: “This contrast between enjoying God and doing the will of God is one of the most basic elements for any reflection on the meaning, the value, and the limits of mystical experience.”²²

APPENDIX: CHURCH OF JESUS, CHURCH OF THE POOR

Given the situation we have described, the Christian churches (at least in the West, considered the homeland of Christianity) are experiencing an understandable temptation: they want to present themselves as an oasis of the peace and tranquility that is so longed for in most of the Western world. In doing so, they seek to recover something of the status they held in the old days of "Christendom." Many people are unconsciously nostalgic for those days, even if it is only because the churches are still striving to recover their former prestige. This seems to us a false path because the adult world of today has already understood that it is possible to seek at least something resembling that peace and tranquility without any need for the Church.

The other option is to abandon the dream of Christendom once and for all and to strive to be what the Gospel calls "leaven," tiny amounts of which can make a mass of dough rise; or to be a "mustard seed," which though tiny can produce a giant tree; or to be the "grain of wheat" that must die in order to bear fruit. This second option will yield the Church that Bossuet called a "world in reverse" since in it the poor have an "eminent dignity," those excluded from society are lords, and the rich and the powerful, though also called to be part of it, can enter it only through the door of the poor.²³ As utopian and inaccessible as that goal may sound, it points in the right direction for a Church whose God "brings down the powerful from their thrones, and lifts up the lowly; who fills the hungry with good things, and sends the rich away empty."

That second option is the path along which God leads the Church today. Jesus of Nazareth, who constantly offered "peace" as his gift, declared that his path would not bring peace right away, but rather war and division. But he also announced that in the end, if we seek only the reign of God and his justice, then all the other spiritual goods (peace, interior fullness, meaning, and a strange joy) will be added onto them.

GLOSSARY

Transpersonal / transegoist consciousness: It is the consciousness that makes us realize that the human person is much more than an isolated individual who relates to others without going beyond self. The term “transpersonal” comes from a branch of psychology, developed during the 20th century, that integrates the function of the ego with the spiritual dimension of the human being. It invites human beings to transcend themselves in order to identify with a greater Consciousness that is collective and all-encompassing.

Advaita / non-duality: This is the Hindu doctrine explaining that the atman (or soul) and the Brahman (or Divinity) are not two distinct entities. God and the world are not two, just as two creatures of this world are not properly two either. Salvation from the cycle of reincarnations requires having a unitive vision of everything.

Hypostatic union: This is the Christian doctrine that tries to explain the incarnation: how in Christ the divine nature is united to the human nature. The doctrine tells us that in Christ the divine and the human are not two, but neither are they simply identical. Both dualism and fusion are rejected. Thus, Christian believers do not aspire to fu-

sion with the divine, nor do they want to be separated from the divine; rather, they desire full communion.

Pelagianism: This is the teaching of a Pelagius (d. 420), a monk who taught that human beings could lead a holy life if only they desired and decided to do so. Salvation ultimately depended on a person’s will and not on God’s gift of grace. He ended up being condemned by the Church. Today we call Pelagians persons who understand literally the saying, “If you want to, you can!” and who affirm also the reverse: “What I have achieved is the fruit of my own effort alone.” Such arguments are used to defend both capitalist meritocracy (“what I earn is the fruit of my effort”) and religious meritocracy (“my salvation or my spiritual level is the fruit of my own effort or my spiritual path”).

Gnosis / Gnosticism: “Gnosis” literally means “knowledge,” and Gnosticism was an important tendency in the first centuries of Christianity. It held that salvation was attained by means of knowledge of oneself and knowledge of God and the world. The Gnostics formed elitist communities whose teachers revealed exclusively to members the occult secrets that only they knew. In contrast to the orthodox

teaching that stressed faith and the moral life, Gnosticism put the emphasis on knowledge, as if knowing God and the good would automatically lead to moral behavior. Gnosticism considered contradictory the affirmation of Paul: "I do the evil that I do not want to do, and I don't do the good (that I know and) that I want to do."

Mindfulness: This is a type of "full consciousness" that is sought through meditation techniques that aim at reducing stress by treasuring the present

moment and by paying attention to all that one perceives.

Mystagogy: Literally meaning "the path toward mysticism," mystagogy refers to discourse or practices that are capable of leading an individual to union with God or the Absolute.

Ecumenical / Ecumenism: It is the effort to achieve union among all Christians and denominations. The aim is to be united together in the same shared house (*oikos*).

1. “The divine verification that that life is the true life is the resurrection, but the historical verification that the life of Jesus is liberating and good news is, paradoxically, the cross. Therefore, the life of Jesus is today liberation and good news, not in spite of the cross but because of the cross.” (SOBRINO, Jon (1993). *Jesucristo liberador. Lectura histórico-teológica de Jesús de Nazaret*. Madrid: Trotta, p. 343).
2. CRISTIANISME I JUSTÍCIA (1987). *Manifesto contra un cristianismo espiritualista*. Barcelona: Cristianisme i Justícia. Cuadernos, no. 21, pp. 6 and 16.
3. For examples of this experience and other ways that believers express it, see GONZÁLEZ FAUS, José I. (2000³), *Proyecto de hermano: visión creyente del hombre*, Bilbao: Sal Terrae, pp. 299-380.
4. *Kaivalya Upanishad*, 11.
5. The Bible describes that contradiction by distinguishing between the creation of human beings and the creation of the rest of the natural world: “The human being is not just a creature, not just another creature, but ‘more than a creature,’ the image of God.” See GONZÁLEZ FAUS, *op. cit.*, chapters 2 and 3.
6. One formulation from the East is this: “The mind can be pure and impure. The impure mind is determined by desires; the pure mind lacks desires” (*Amrita bindu Upanishad*, 1).
7. G. Thibon, the person who best knew the great Simone Weil, wrote that she despised herself so much that she forgot to forget about herself: “She sculpts her ego in counter-relief whereas the proud sculpt theirs in high relief.” THIBON, PERRIN (1967): *Simone Weil telle que nous l’avons connue*, Paris: La Colombe, p. 160.
8. Cf. HILLESUM, Ety (2007). *Una vida conmocionada: diario, 1941-1943*, Barcelona: Anthropos, p. 41.
9. RATZINGER, J. (1977). *Foi chrétienne hier et aujourd’hui*, Paris: Le Cerf, p. 197
10. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Placuit Deo*, no. 3.
11. SCHILLEBEECKX, Edward (1981). *Jesús. Historia de un Viviente*. Madrid: Cristiandad, p. 547
12. The Misa Nicaragüense intuitively intones “A single immense cry of fraternity,” stating that there is nothing more beautiful than the experience of that single immense cry “in the hymn sung by all.”
13. “Let us speak of the task of our coming to an end, which means transforming all of time into eternity,” says a well-known poem of Pedro Casaldáliga.
14. It is striking that Aristotle, for all his serenity and intelligence, considered slavery to be in conformity with nature.
15. Thus the warnings about Pelagianism and Gnosticism found in the document *Placuit Deo* (March 2018).
16. SOBRINO, Jon, “Espiritualidad y seguimiento de Jesús,” in ELLACURÍA, Ignacio and SOBRINO, Jon (1994). *Mysterium Liberationis. Conceptos fundamentales de la Teología de la Liberación*. Madrid: Trotta, pp. 452-453.
17. *Placuit Deo*, no. 3.
18. Cf. HANS KÜNG (2002). *Reivindicación de una ética mundial*, Madrid: Trotta.
19. The crosses of all the victims in the course of history, which Jesus “carries” in his personal cross.
20. SpEx 6: “When the one giving the Exercises notices that the exercitant is not experiencing any spiritual motion in his or her soul, such as consolations or desolations, or is not being moved one way or another by different spirits, the director should question the exercitant much about the Exercises: whether he or she is making them at the appointed time.”
21. SOBRINO, Jon (2000). *Jesucristo Liberador: lectura histórico teológica de Jesús de Nazaret*. San Salvador: UCA editores, p. 218: “The coming kingdom is engaged in a duel with the

anti-kingdom. Not only do the two exclude one another, but they fight against one another.”

22. Cf. GONZÁLEZ FAUS, José I. (2000). *Migajas cristianas*. Madrid: PPC Editorial, p. 33. The whole of the chapter titled “God in Sight or

Religion à la Carte?” can serve as a summary of this booklet.

23. “On the Eminent Dignity of the Poor in the Church,” sermon preached on Septuagesima Sunday 1659.

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