

alternatives to warfare. Nuclear deterrence is not the alternative. It is only the fearful recoil from the terrible vision at the end of centuries of war-making and weapons development. We have to find the real alternative while there is still time. It could be the frightened Europeans' historical task to find it now.

Roger Ruston

Some Books by Prophets:

Walter Stein and others, *Nuclear Weapons and Christian Conscience*, 1961, now reissued by Merlin Press, 1981.

Robert Neild, *How to Make up Your Mind about the Bomb*, André Deutsch, 1981

Alva Myrdal and others, *Dynamics of European Nuclear Disarmament*, Spokesman, 1981.

Lord Mountbatten, Lord Noel-Baker and Lord Zuckerman, *Apocalypse Now?* Spokesman, 1981.

Ken Coates, E. P. Thompson and others, *Eleventh Hour for Europe*, Spokesman, 1981

Sir Martin Ryle, *Towards the Nuclear Holocaust*, The Menard Press, 1981.

God, the Living One

Edward C Schillebeeckx O P

When a Western European landed his plane among African natives who gazed unbelievably at this enormous bird, he proudly remarked, "In one day I have covered a distance which used to take me thirty". Thereupon the wise black chieftain came forward and asked, "Sir, what do you do with the other twenty-nine?"

Here we have the twofold possibility of man's fundamental decision: on the one hand *technological rationality*, and on the other the question of the *meaning* of human action.

The question also of the relationship between human hopes and expectations by self-liberation, and the God-given salvation: *the question of God* as connected with the context of mankind's striving for liberation. The question of God-talk is intrinsically connected with the question of human integrity and wholeness in such a way that this question of identity cannot be solved in purely *theoretical* terms: it includes the question of a particular life-style — contemplative *and* political as well. Talk about God

stands under the quest of our way of life; it is governed by the question of our real concerns in life.

Ideas and expectations of salvation and human happiness are invariably projected from within concrete experience and the pondered fact of calamity and pain, misery and alienation, with here and there the fleeting promise of a happier lot, fragmentary experiences of well-being in a story, stretching from generation to generation, of hopes unfulfilled, of guilt and evil – the Job's problem of our human history. Hence, there eventually emerges an anthropological project, a vision of what is held to be a true, good and happy mode of life. This is why man's craving for happiness and well-being, always being submitted to critical judgment, yet again and again surviving every critique, inevitably acquires – in diverse forms – the pregnant nuance of 'release from' or 'deliverance out' and, at the same time, of entering into a 'completely new world'.

The striking thing about this process of calamitous and also partly benign experience is that the distinctive ideas a people have about 'salvation' and human wholeness attempt to probe and interpret, not only the depth and unbounded extent of calamity, suffering, evil and death, endured and enduring, but also their causes, origin and effects. In the ancient world there is invariably assigned to such experiences of disaster, suffering and meaninglessness, thanks to the human, theoretically bottomless and *practically irremovable* depths of meaninglessness involved, a *religious* dimension. It is felt instinctively that, whether in theory or in practice, the ill is not to be contained within a merely human reference. And so where human beings have looked for salvation their hope has received a *religious* name. Reaching above and beyond themselves, humankind learned to expect that this good must come from a transcendent One: *from God*. They look for mercy and compassion at the very heart of reality, despite every contrary experience.

But, what earlier seemed to be only the interest of religious people, is nowadays the concern of a variety of humane sciences, technologies and activities: all strive for healing, making whole, for the salvation of men and women and their society. It cannot be denied that the desire for a whole and livable humanity is more alive in human kind, *as a quest*, than at any other time, and that in our time the answer to it becomes all the more pressing the more we note on the one hand that people fail, fall short and are above all displaced persons, and on the other hand that we are already able to experience fragments of human healing and liberation. The quest of salvation, the theme of all religions, is more than ever the great stimulus throughout the whole of present-day existence,

even *explicitly outside religion*. It is not just the religions that are an explicit thematisation of general human salvation. The question of salvation and liberation is the great driving force in our present history, not only in a religious and theological context, but also thematically *outside religion*, in the so-called profane world.

The contemporary context for talking meaningfully about God, therefore, is the context of humankind's striving for liberation, meaning and happiness. On a physical, psycho-somatic and social level, factors which condition human personal identity and culture, much can be done by men and women towards the healing of our humanity, but we are still constantly confronted with suffering people: suffering from love, suffering as a result of guilt, because of our finitude and mortality, suffering through failure and inadequacy, and finally even suffering over the invisibility and hiddenness of God. No human techniques of healing and emancipating practices can ever remove or diminish this suffering. However, such victories over suffering, often blotting out the guilt of our human history, are essentially *partial* and *limited*. Furthermore, for millions of human persons who in the past and the present have already been excluded because they have died or have been martyred, have been snatched away by illness and killed in accidents or earthquakes, and so on, any form of liberation, however successful, will come too late. And if salvation, making whole, means perfect and universal wholeness, do we then no longer include these in our modern conception of salvation? Are they the chaff in our history that we throw away? Therefore, there is no *true* liberation, unless these forms of suffering which are not accessible to human liberation are also overcome. The salvation of one can no longer be the damnation of others. In other words, one can ask whether a project, which 'reconciles' itself with our history as a mixture of meaning and meaninglessness, of sorrow and happiness, adequately takes into account the suffering *of others*. Does it not remove an essential part of our real problem of suffering? At all events, the human experience of the mixture of meaning and meaninglessness which makes up our life raises the question whether in the last resort *we can trust life*. Is there any kind of total meaning?

So in present circumstances the religious problem stands very urgently in the centre of the emancipatory process of self-liberation, as a human liberating impulse which can only lead to partial, non-universal and provisional results, and in the last result finds itself confronted not only with the failure of any liberation which seeks to be total and universal, but also with the alienating character of any claim to total self-liberation. Such a project unleashes enslaving and irrational forces.

Therefore, the history of emancipation *cannot be identified* with the history of redemption from God, nor can the latter be detached from human self-liberation. For it seems to me to be a disastrous false conclusion to argue from this that God's salvation in Jesus is limited to a restricted, spiritual sphere and that the rest is to be left to an emancipatory process of human liberation. Moreover, that would also go against the New Testament itself, which sees the two primary saving actions of Jesus, apart from the preaching of the good news, in the healing of the sick and the liberation of men and women from the alien domination of demonic powers!

In the Jewish-Christian tradition, God is experienced as a God who is concerned with mankind, as the promoter of good and the enemy of evil, as pure Positivity. This speaking about God is in fact talk about God's will to universal salvation – talk about God as the definite foundation of universal hope. The Christian affirmation of God's existence is not at all separated from the affirmation that he wills universal salvation. Therefore, wherever for the sake of man goodness and justice is being realised – in an interpersonal, in a political, in a social manner – the believer sees God-given salvation at work *through* men, women and their society. For it is precisely the experience of our absolute limit, our finitude, in all we are and do, which is for the believer the *mediation* of God's absolute merciful presence. But that absolutely present divine freedom, bearer and source of our freedom, is not exhausted *by* our history of freedom. That absolute limit between God and us, is not God's limit but is only ours!

In our times, the acknowledgement of our radical finitude and contingency or our experience of an absolute limit does not any longer necessarily express a religious attitude, and our experience of an absolute limit not any longer a religious act or concept: it is an experiential reality generally acknowledged by believers, agnostics and atheists alike. We *are* that absolute limit. It is not the product of the human mind, as e.g. images of God are images made by men of their God. Our finite existence in the world is not the product or projection of our human mind. Because of the absolute character of that limit, our interpretation of it – whatever it may be – presents at the same time a view on man and world. Or to put it differently: here, at the limit religions as well as agnostic views on man and history-as-a-whole originate. Everyone has to make up his mind about that limit and no one can do without an interpretation of that absolute limit.

What then is the structure of the interpreting experience of that absolute limit? According to my opinion, the structure of a religious interpretation is the same as the structure of a non-religious one. In the anglo-saxon philosophy of religion there is a

discussion about the question; is the experience of contingency a basic-experience shared by believers and non-believers? An important argument runs as follows: there is no neutral, basic experience, that can be interpreted either theistically or atheistically, since the interpretation is an integral part of the experience itself and can not be separated from it. This argument is correct, but not complete. It is clear that the believer's experience of contingency differs radically from the non-believer's experience of contingency. On the one hand, for the believer this experience is the experience of being enclosed within the absolute limit and of hanging as it were above an absolute vacuum, and, precisely via this limit-experience, of knowing and realising God's immediate absolute and liberating presence. On the other hand, for the non-believer, the limit is experienced as the final word: he remains enclosed, he remains lonely hanging above the absolute vacuum. These are clearly two completely different experiences.

It does not follow, however, that one could speak in no way about *one* basic experience and two possible interpretations. To be clear: I am not arguing for a neutral common experience, that is only afterwards interpreted in different ways. Experience is always interpreted experience and each interpretation is part and parcel of that experience and determines or colours the whole of that experience. But, the experiential element of contingency or of the absolute limit, is not simply identical with the interpretative component. Without being able to speak about a neutral common experience, we can speak about the experience of contingency, that is accessible to both believers and non-believers, as a shared experience, be it that both parties feel this experience in quite contradictory ways. The non-believer sees and experiences the contingency as the final word about our facticity; the believer sees and experiences that absolute limit as the way, the mediation by which God presents himself to us. This last view does not imply a dualistic scheme of *two* worlds, but it enables us to see *how* the believer, while respecting the profane and scientific language about everything that happens within the absolute limit, can use *religious* language in talking about the same things.

This means that for the believer what happens inside the experience of the limit, is objectively an event of salvation. So e.g. social and political liberation, that is, the overthrow of a real oppressive force and of a certain repressive economical and political order. This 'profane event' is for the believer an event of salvation, since *it is* the realisation of universal hope in terms of a socio-historical praxis. Some latin-american liberation theologians present this whole in the following – and I think incorrect – way: that liberation becomes a moment of christian salvation only when it is

included or integrated in a higher spiritual liberation or redemption from sin. But it is much more profound than that. Between the socio-political liberation as analysed by a historian or a social scientist and the same liberation as analysed by a theologian, there is an essential difference, marked by an epistemological rupture. From the theological point of view, this socio-political liberation, this self-realised liberation from oppression appears as a religious event, as an event of faith. It is not necessary at all to add a spiritual dimension, even when christian redemption and salvation imply more than the political liberation. Liberation in its historical density has a meaning full of grace and full of salvation. Faith does not create this political event's objective meaning of salvation: it perceives it.

The theologian raises the issue of the absolute and ultimate meaning, the issue of God in the events of emancipation and self-liberation. If this move would be inconceivable, there would be no theology of self-liberation, no liberation-theology at all. If the theologian would investigate only the causes, the laws, the internal structure of that liberation, he would not be doing theology. To avoid any misconception: I must add immediately that this type of investigation is essential to theology, for it prevents a theologian from talking in the abstract and probably in a dangerous manner. So, the theologian inquires after the absolute and ultimate meaning of this specific historical event. Or in other words: he brings this event into the light of faith in God, who is the foundation of universal hope.

In so far as this event possesses an internal relation to God, the object of theology, this profane event can and must become the *theme* of theology itself. At stake is the absolute meaning of a historical fact.

The interpretation of the meaning of a certain phenomenon can, of course, only take place *on the basis* of the prior explication of the autonomous internal structure of that phenomenon. Only in the structure itself meaning is revealed. Objectively oriented hermeneutics is only possible on the basis of structural analysis.

For the theologian every event of liberation is as it were a reading *text* that has to be decoded according to the grammar of hope, religiously used. The grammar of 'class-struggle' and of 'society' is, let us say, a sociological one; the grammar of 'righteousness' and of 'kingdom of God' belong to the language of faith and theology; and the grammar of 'freedom' belongs again to sociology and anthropology and the grammar of 'grace' to theology.

These terms belong to two different language games. One should not mix these different language-games, but one should not reconcile them dialectically either, as if there were two auto-

mous realities: on the one hand, freedom and man, self-liberation, on the other hand, grace and God, justification by faith alone. There is only one and the same reality, but it is seen from two different formal points of view, or understood on two different levels. If one would talk here about dialectics, or about a fruitful tension, or about continuity and discontinuity, one would produce a dangerous confusion. One would namely use a formula that solves everything and nothing, that compares two incomparable things. One confuses then two different formal points of view with two different realities, which one, moreover, introduces on the same level of understanding: a downright confusion. On the one hand self-liberation, on the other hand, salvation and redemption, and one places these two face to face within the same horizon of meaning. This seems to be the definite form of being squint or of a bilingual language game. (In Concilium 1973 – I have called this ‘linguistic dualism’). One uses two different grammars at the same time and produces an incomprehensible language (one speaks then truly double dutch!). Two heterogeneous terms are being articulated on the same homogeneous level. In this way, one solves the problem in a purely formal manner, but at the cost of the concrete historical substance. The fundamental error in this solution is: the confusing identification between the order of reality and the order of knowledge. Idealism! These terms – freedom and grace, self-liberation and salvation – are related antinomically only for the mind, that looks at them from two different formal points of view; there are then two different codes to read. Or to use terms used in semiotics: it is about two dissymmetrical isotopes (A. J. Greimas, *Sémantique structurale*. Paris 1966; P. Ricoeur, *Le conflict des interprétations* p. 77 and 94). On the level of concepts and their linguistic expressions these terms (i.e. finitude and belief in creation; freedom and grace; self-liberation and God-given salvation) are *thought* next to each other. They are conceptual or linguistic entities with the same formal and symbolic structure, but with a completely different theoretical and semantical content. So, it is possible to think God and God-given salvation next to man, and it is possible to write these on one line or to use them in one proposition, as e.g. in the Chalcedonian formula: one and the same is man *and* God. But precisely here is a dangerous trap: “Deus non facit numerum cum creaturis”, God and man, self-liberation and salvation can in reality not be put on one and the same line. To do this is to fall victim to the confusion of the dualistic language game.

The language of faith *and* the empirical, descriptive or scientific-analytical language refer to one and the same reality and do not need to be reconciled dialectically, as if there were a real class-

struggle. We must only distinguish the formal point of view from which the same material object is seen and 'elaborated' and then appears differently. Therefore, we should not say 'God *and* man', *but*: on the one hand man, e.g. described historically, and on the other hand, man seen differently in the light of faith, namely in his own specific and unique relation to God' (in the language of faith: 'son of God').

If 'absolute limit' and 'immediate presence of God', mediated by the experience of absolute limit, like self-liberation and God-given salvation, are distinguished (*faciunt numerum*) only in their conceptual and linguistic formality (in semiotic terms, in their pertinency), they can coincide within the homogeneity of the theoretical field of theology, which speaks of God as the absolute and ultimate meaning of the world and the human history. They can coincide in their theological isotopy. Precisely this, theology must show in its discourse. This is why the theologian can speak about the God-given salvation where the sociologist speaks about self-liberation, or about creation, where the physicist speaks about evolution, or about the coming kingdom of God, where the marxist speaks about the class-less society, or about grace, where the philosopher and the scientist speak about man's autonomy and freedom. God-given redemption and salvation do not lie next to or beyond and on the other side of self-liberation, but lie inside liberation (in the same way as what is called in christian faith the *divinity of Jesus* is located inside Jesus' humanity and not next to it or on the other side of it).

What this amounts to is this: a sentence has to be read within a certain text (e.g. self-liberation, or, God-given redemption). But one should not place them as two realities next to each other in order to reconcile them. *Transcoding* is the *conditio sine qua non* for a fruitful dialogue between believer and non-believer, between theology and human sciences. So, the mistake leading to pseudo-problems and immense confusion is this: to loosen pure concepts and terms from their discursive and syntactical context or structure, or to employ them outside their isotopy. Used inside their isotopy, 'absolute limit' and 'presence of God', 'liberation' and 'God-given salvation' can not produce a conflict. Ambiguity starts only when two isotopes are mixed.

To talk about God-given salvation is a second discourse, namely a discourse on the basis of a first discourse that e.g. talks about self-liberation. The theologian 'elaborates' from his formal object, that is God as ultimate and absolute meaning of man and his society, the given reality of 'self-liberation' and sees precisely therein *God-given* salvation. He, then, produces the theological affirmation: 'that liberation *is* salvation'. Of course this must be justified

(on the level of concept, of proposition and of theory).

If God, as the belief in God implies, is the absolute meaning of history, there is nothing in history that can not and must not be related to God.¹ So, everything in reality can become material object of theology, or one can theologise about everything.

It is the task of theology to search for that relation between everything and God. In order to be able to do that, the theologian has to accept beforehand that, that relation is present in the objective consistency of every event, independent of whatever *awareness* that would project that relation into that event. So, what happens *in* reality makes theology possible. The relation of salvation is located in reality itself and does not coincide with *religion*, for the religion is the *awareness* that *thematizes* God's universal saving activity. Religion is the 'symbolic order' of the salvation that is realised in history, in the world, but is not itself the universal salvation. Theology is not in the first place the voice of institutional religion or church, but it is the voice of the universal salvation, that God is realising in the world-history. Theology can only be theology if it, first, listens to the non-religious voice of daily experiences, of the sciences and philosophy; if it, secondly, breaks off these ties, that is to say if it transcends these in the right moment and if it, thirdly, plays a different language game. On the level of theological language itself, inter-disciplinarity is not necessary: it is even impossible. Interdisciplinarity is necessary, though to understand the material object, about which theology has to say something that can not be determined accurately and that is where the interdisciplinarity comes in: it belongs to the terrain of that one can theologise about, it does not belong to the terrain of theology. To accept it there would result in squinting or talking double dutch. Whatever happens inside the absolute limit, that is: inside the world and history is the material object of theology. This means that there is an essential difference between the theological theory of self-liberation seen as God-given salvation and the sociological theory of the same self-liberation.

Important here is the distinction between: (1) the reality and the whole of history as place where is fought for salvation over and against disaster and evil; (2) the awareness of salvation, thematised in religion: the faith or belief in God; the history of the awareness of the salvation; (3) the theory or theoretical awareness of the order of salvation: namely theology.

It should be clear that one is not permitted to identify the reality of salvation simply with the *awareness* or knowledge of it in the religions. Otherwise one would be the victim of a theological idealism. Liberation is God-as-salvation. For the believer in God there is no 'natura pura' in reality, but only nature and his

tory in the light of the God of salvation (the concept of 'natura pura' is of course thinkable, as a limit-concept, but that does not say anything about its possible existence). In everything there is a reference to salvation and on this reference the specific theological objectivity is founded. It is a reference which constitutes reality either by acceptance or refusal. That relation with God is concretely *grace*. God's absolute presence full of promise, or *sin*. God's initiative to salvation is thus a reality to a certain extent independent of our *awareness* of it; that is so to say, that reality of salvation is not constituted by our awareness of it, and is thus independent of our activities and deeds, in which none the less it is realised. This does not result in the acceptance of the distinction between salvation *and* revelation, for salvation can only be 'God-given salvation', and in that sense 'revealed salvation'. For, without revelation there is for us no God and thus no salvation. But there is a difference between salvation *and* faith, although faith is conceptually closely related to revelation, since faith is essentially 'revelation-faith'. Faith is the explicit awareness of the God-given salvation, but this awareness does not coincide with God's factual saving activity and the already realised salvation in history. In this respect, one can limit the concept 'revelation' to 'the religious awareness of the reference, the relation of salvation in all things and all events (not without mankind's practice of *charity*). Considered in this way, there is a real distinction between the history of salvation in the world *and* the history of *faith in salvation*. There is salvation outside religion and Church: one even has to say that salvation — which is not identified with the *awareness of* salvation — is properly realised *outside religion and Church*, that is, in the so-called profane world-history; everywhere where people are set free and live the praxis of love or *agapè*. Paradoxically, I might say: "Extra *mundum* nulla salus". Because it is the world of God, as far as people in this world are the promoter of good and the enemy of injustice and evil.

Nevertheless, on the other hand *salvation* is an *experiential* concept, and therefore it must reflect at least partially what man *experiences* as 'saving'. The experience or some knowledge of salvation as saving and liberating is part of the concept of salvation. That does not mean that salvation is everywhere and fully and completely a reality of experience, but it must *at least partially* and *at least sometimes* be experienced specifically by those affected *as saving*. No salvation-reality without at least *some revelation!*

However, not everything that men pass off as their own salvation is *in fact saving and liberating*; thus salvation is in fact announced to us *in the name of God*. God and salvation are not exhausted by our *particular* experience.

What is more, religion and churches – they too – are historical phenomena in our world, and moreover, they thematise, celebrate and consciously put to practice the salvation that is realised in history. In this sense religion and church are the proper manifestation and revelation of this salvation. Religion, Church, is the place where God-given salvation is confessed, witnessed and celebrated liturgically; the place where salvation in history becomes as it were transparent in a ministerial testimony for others; the place where salvation is densified by being symbolised in liturgical and kerygmatic activities; the place, finally, where precisely the process of becoming explicitly aware of salvation in and by the ministerial revelation, refers per se to the salvation realised in the world and in the liberating movements in our history. The Christian faith in God is thus the acceptance of the explicit message of salvation in the name of God, but the real salvation can not be reduced to this.

The fact that also non-christian religions consciously thematise and confess salvation, and in one way or another celebrate it and praise and thank God for it, moreover, the fact that – as I said – the question of salvation is the great driving force in our present history *also* outside all religions and churches, shows that there too there is a specific conscious manifestation or *revelation* of salvation.

According to the Christian conviction, faith in Christ's revelation is the disclosure of the authentic and definite meaning of salvation that God realises in history and especially in that segment of our world which is the story of Jesus of Nazareth.

This does not imply, though, the annexation of all salvation within the boundaries of the Jewish-Christian tradition or within our churches. This tradition is the place of becoming aware, of confessing and of celebrating the salvation that all over the world in various ways is being realised by the living God, through men and women, and, finally – and this we hear only within Christianity – through Jesus the man of Nazareth. *Revelation* in the strict sense is only the specific revelation to those *whom* it is given to get to know the salvation that *God* is realising in history.

Therefore, I do not want at all, to see only a distinction between on the one hand the *real* history of salvation being realised in the history of the world, *and* on the other hand *the mere awareness* of this salvation, that in its fulness is given to the Jewish-Christian churches. Confessing, witnessing and celebrating God-given salvation *is* on its own an irreplaceable, densified realisation of that salvation – Church as '*Sacramentum mundi*', Sacrament of the world.

I know, one *could* argue in the following way: right! It is true that in the past the concepts of salvation and liberation have been

introduced *via* the religions, but now we can, grateful e.g. to the christian churches for their rendered service, do without the faith in God and now we can realise salvation and liberation by ourselves. This argument does not, I think, take full account of the inexhaustible potential of expectations and inspirations, which is the belief in God the creator. The reality of finitude is experienced by everyone. Faith *in creation* does not increase the burden of our finitude, is not kicking us deeper into finitude: such a view would amount to dualism and emanatism. On the contrary, faith in creation means that the despair and the emptiness, which can be provoked by the finitude of our existence, is being met by God, absolutely mercifully present *to* his finite world. Precisely this presence stimulates over and over again a new and renewing hope, a hope that renews the world. The finitude, which is the proper definition of all that is secular, can itself not be secularised: it is a mediating sign of God's absolute presence and nobody will be able to find the magic formula to free us from our essential finitude and absolute limitations.

Precisely God's presence, mediated in and by our finitude, remains an inexhaustible source of expectations, a source that never can be secularised; a reality, not a Utopia.

Faith in God is *affirmation* and *criticism* at the same time. Because faith in God is liberating, productive, it possesses also critical power, revealing our lack of freedom and lack of peace in the world. But every attempt to give a positive concretisation of final salvation or wholeness risks either to result in human megalomania or to belittle God's possibilities. Faith in God the creator, though, that is, faith in God who is pure positivity, who is not the Lord of life and death, but only the living Lord of Life, who wants salvation for all men and women and not their damnation; the faith in this God does put our acting into a very determined perspective, even politically. But we are not able to fill in, in a positive manner, the final term of that perspective, to indicate in a positive manner what the complete wholeness would be like. What we can do is to use those great metaphors: '*Kingdom of God*' for the final salvation of the community of all human beings; the '*resurrection of the body*' for the final salvation of the individual within this Kingdom; and, finally, '*the new earth and the new heaven*' as the ecological environment of a truly liberated freedom and of human and humane happiness. And all this *we have to start with in* our temporary world and society, here and now. But, divine freedom, the source of human freedom, is not exhausted in our emancipatory history of freedom. On the one hand, finite freedom must leave God in his freedom, so that our concept of 'salvation' cannot be fixed on what we ourselves dream and desire; it must re-

main open for the freedom of God which is surprising because it is absolute, and which in turn is familiar and 'a matter of course' to *religious* people. On the other hand, for Christians this particular mode of divine freedom has become visible in Jesus Christ. As God's interpreter and one who practised a way of life commensurate with the Kingdom of God, Jesus did not act from a well-defined concept of eschatological or final salvation. Rather, he saw a distant vision of final, perfect and universal salvation – the kingdom of God – *in and through* his own fragmentary actions, which were historical and thus limited or finite, 'going round doing good' through healing, liberating people from demonic powers, and reconciliation. Understood in this way, Jesus did not live by a utopian, distant vision or by a consummation of all things in God which had already been brought about 'ideally', but he recognized in and through his specific actions of doing good, a practical anticipation of universal salvation to come. *This* confirms the *permanent validity* of any practice of doing good, which nevertheless is incomplete and fragmentary because it is historically limited; it confirms also that failure, and suffering in doing good can be a means of salvation; in that case it is an *experience* of the real presence of God, not in the mediation of positive support but in the mediation of extreme negativity – a dark night.

Finally, the salvation asked for includes thus a salutary renewal of economical and socio-political structures as well as an inner conversion. Those two are related dialectically. An inner conversion of the heart does not automatically change the social and economical structures and an optimal political structure does not cause automatically the inner conversion. Dialectically also: because bad structures make an authentic conversion impossible. There can therefore be no inner peace 'detached from a social and political context'. On the contrary, 'the peace of God which passes all understanding (Phil. 4:7)' in the circumstances at present obtaining consists of *inner disquiet*. Therefore the Christian concept of salvation loses its rational significance, if there is no *positive* relationship between 'justification through faith alone' and the *liberation-movements* in the world, or if there is no positive relationship between eschatological salvation and social, political and economic peace which needs to be built up by human efforts. Theology which remains true to its task can only speak about the *mystery of God as man's salvation* (albeit with the help of other disciplines). What it then has to say is that *love of God and love of men and women* are a single, inviolable 'divine virtue'; 'He who *abides in love*, abides in God, and God with *him* (1 John 4:16).

That transcends any of our own attempts at universal and total liberation, which at the same time can no longer be the dam-

nation of others, nor just a matter of saving souls!

- 1 Theology is 'principaliter de Dec' but also it concerns everything 'secundum quod referentur ad Deum' (I, q. 1 a. 3 ad 1). The isotopy of the 'unitas scientiae' is not destroyed by this. See also I. q. 1 a.7: 'secundum ordinem ad Deum'. The identity of the pertinency, of the objectum formale quo.

Rahner Retrospective

III Transcendence or Finitude

Fergus Kerr O P

Karl Rahner's *Foundations of Christian Faith*, published in 1978, which is no doubt a masterpiece, nevertheless relies fundamentally on a very controversial picture of man as the being who transcends his finitude just by recognizing it – and this transcendence is something pretty substantial even if difficult to put a finger on. It enables Rahner to make the idea of God intelligible and even quite obvious and natural. The speed with which Rahner draws the reader into his "system", and the immense rewards in theological assurance and in spiritual stimulus if one goes with the tide, dissipate the difficulties about the initial move. The text is in any case very hard to understand in detail, or else the Anglo-Saxon reader, putting it all down to the foreign idiom, gives it the benefit of the doubt. This paper is a preliminary exploration of the basic epistemological problems in Rahner's philosophy of man, with the tentative proposal that a quite different starting-point needs to be accepted.

1 When he gets to them Rahner is already positioned to say that he need not go into the so-called proofs for the existence of God in any detail (*Foundations*, p 68). That is not the cop-out it might seem. He has been insisting all along that we have to see ourselves as the product of "transcendence towards the holy mystery". We exist, as he says, no doubt in the pregnant existentialist sense of *existieren* (roughly: the way in which we are always *outside* the world in which we are also always *inside*, of which more anon), "through our grounding in the holy mystery which keeps withdrawing from us insofar as it keeps constituting us by its surpas-