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LIBERATION AS SALVATION: A JOHANNINE INTERPRETATION

A man like St. John with profound divine experience has an interpretation of his own concerning human salvation. In each and every word of his writings one can detect the pulsation of a life lived in full conviction and a sense of fulfilment supported by a strong faith in a divine person who confronted him in the prime of his life and followed him until he breathed his last as an old sage at Ephesus. He felt really proud of calling himself "the beloved disciple" of that person whose ineffable love had transformed and elevated him to great heights of spiritual bliss. When his inherited Hebrew beliefs and his acquired knowledge of the then current philosophical thoughts melted and fused in the fire of his Christ-experience, there emerged a new world-vision, which has become a beacon of light to all generations on the way towards human salvation.

John was a realist in his appraisal of man and the universe. He sensed man's basic misery and bondage, and was convinced of the need of a saving hand from above to liberate and lift him up so that he may enjoy the perfect happiness. According to John, salvation is the merciful activity of a loving God towards the straying man who is in the grip of sin, darkness and death (John 3: 16). That merciful God comes down to him as his light and life (1: 4). He removes his blindness and gives him a new sight (9: 37). He liberates him from the slavery of sin and untruth, and enables him to follow the truth and thus to attain eternal life (8: 32,36; 14: 6). In this process of salvation, man cannot remain just a passive receiver, but as an intelligent, free being he should accept his salvation actively with his free and full co-operation. This demands on the part of man a realization of his own unauthentic self and of his world, which have undergone a process of estrangement from the original state of God-centredness, and simultaneous, sincere effort to re-discover the authentic exist-

ence by a process of re-focussing one's own being and having on the Word of God. Man should know that he and his world were created by the Word (Logos), through the Word and for the Word of God, who was eternally present in the Mind of God (1: 1-3). This Word is, therefore, the source, meaning, plan and purpose of the universe as well as of men. He is the true focal point of every being as he is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and end of every thing (Rev. 21: 6). According to John's realization, this eternal Word became flesh in Jesus Christ, who is also called "the only begotten Son of God" (1: 18), through whom alone can man attain divine light and life (1: 1-18). A brief analysis of the Johannine thought would help us to discover the true nature of human salvation.

(i) *Man's Self-Discovery*

One of the basic requisites for salvation, according to John, is man's realization of his unauthentic existence. In the Old Testament, "to be saved" means to be rescued from a dangerous situation in which one risked perishing.¹ John seems to follow the same line of thought. In the doctrine of salvation, his starting point is similar to that of the existentialist philosophers. He begins with a true appraisal of man's present state of existence. Man here on earth finds himself in a state of darkness, uncertainty, distress, anguish and anxiety. He is faced with a threatening existence. Left to himself, he can find nothing to hold on to a permanent existence. John finds a great distance between God who is pure existence and man who is only a participated existence. Man is "from below" (8: 23). He is "of the earth and speaks of earthly matters" (3: 31). He is "flesh", namely, a person with all the limitations and weakness of human nature. He does not enjoy true freedom, but is a slave of sin (8: 34, 36). He is in a state of death (5: 24; I Jn. 3: 14). He is in the grip of an evil power which would make him do always what is evil and lead him astray in dense darkness (8: 44; I Jn. 2:11).

The Need of a Saviour

Man cannot liberate himself from his slavery unless he gets powerful help from outside. Only if the Son of God makes him

1. Cf. X. Leon-Dufour, *Dictionary of Bible Theology* (London: 1967) p. 457, col. 2.

free, he will be really free (8: 34-36). He alone can give him eternal life and keep him from perdition (10: 28). Hence, "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (3: 16). This Son can show man in his predicament the right path to life, setting him free from his bondage and uniting him with God who is "spirit" (4: 24). So he could proclaim: "I am the light of the world; he who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (8: 12); "I am the door; if any one enters by me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture" (10: 9); "I am the way, and the truth and the life" (14: 6). In contrast to man's predicament this Saviour is "from above" (8: 23); He is "not from here" (18: 36) but "from heaven" (1: 51; 3: 13, 27, 31; 6: 31-58). Hence He can surely save man.

In his presentation of Jesus' miracles as "signs", John takes care to show that Jesus' interventions were that of a saviour in the typically human situations of helplessness, distress and need.² Jesus does the "first sign" at the wedding feast at Cana, when the unexpected shortage of wine put the young couple as well as their family in a humiliating and utterly helpless situation described by Mary in the words: "They have no wine" (2: 3). The second sign occurs when He intervened to cure the sick and dying son of a distressed official in Galilee (4: 47). At the pool of Bethzatha he intervenes to bring instantaneous cure to a paralytic who had been lying there for many years witnessing the selfishness of mankind, and expressed his distress uttering "I have no one to take me to the water" (5: 7). Jesus multiplied the loaves and fed five thousand men, when his disciples described the helpless situation saying: "Wherefrom will we buy bread that all these people may eat" (6: 5). Another scene that represented man's dreadful existential situation was that of Jesus' walking on the water. The disciples were in a boat in the midst of the sea and it was dark; and "the sea rose because a strong wind was blowing" (6: 18). Thus when they were on the verge of death, Jesus comes to them walking on the water with the encouraging words: "It is I; do not be afraid" (6: 20). A similar image of man's helpless situation can be seen in the scene of Jesus curing a man who was blind from birth (9: 1,32). Death is the most terrifying thing to

2. Cf. D. Mollat. "Jean l'évangéliste": *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, Vol. 8, 1972, p. 194.

man, in the presence of which he feels quite helpless. Such a situation was experienced by a family at Bethany when Lazarus died (11: 14). But four days after his death, when it was beyond any human power to bring him back to life, Jesus appears on the scene as the life-giver and saviour, and raises him to life (11: 43-44).

Thus, whenever man realizes his dreadful existential situation, God's salvation dawns on him. Only those who acknowledge their spiritual blindness will receive sight to see the right path to salvation (9: 39, 41). To the thirsty, Jesus is the source of "living water" (4: 10; 7: 37-39); to the hungry, he is "life-giving bread" (6: 35); to those who listen to his voice for protection, he is the "good Shepherd" (10: 11); to those who sincerely seek God, he is "the way, the truth and the life" (14: 6). Thus man's felt need for a saviour is the first step to salvation.

(ii) *Salvation as Knowledge of God and of Jesus Christ*

In his prayer Jesus says to God the Father: "And this is eternal life: for men to know you, the only true God, and to know Jesus Christ whom you sent" (17: 3). This is true definition of salvation. The knowledge mentioned here, however, is not quite the same as the one we find in Greek thought. According to the Greeks, to know God means to contemplate the ultimate reality in its changeless essence. There the knower contemplates (theōrei) God as the object in its static essence from a distance. But in John, knowledge is to be understood according to the Semetic thought, where knowledge of God is not a mere intellectual contemplation, but an experiential knowing; it involves an acknowledgement of God in His works and in His dealings with men in history and in one's personal life, and a positive response to Him by a life of obedience and love.³ In the prophecy of Isaiah, God laments over the lack of such knowledge on the part of Israel: "Sons have I reared and brought up, but they have rebelled against me. The ox knows its owner, and the ass its master's crib; but Israel does not know, my people do not understand" (Is 1: 2-3). It is in the same strain in the gospel of St. John that the world is often accused of not knowing God. In his prayer, Jesus says to God: "Righteous Father, the world does not know you" (17: 25).

3. Cf. C.H. Dodd. *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, (Cambridge: 1968) pp. 151-169.

Here the reference is not to an unknowable God, but to a God who is present in the world, and who is knowable to man through His Word. In the Prologue too it is said: "The Word (Logos) was in the world; God made the world through him, yet the world did not know him" (1: 10). Here the reference is to a culpable ignorance, which St. Paul would put more clearly as "they did not choose to know God" (Rom. 1: 28).

In John, knowledge of God means the knowledge of Christ. For, Christ is the knowability or the revelation of God the Father (14: 9). This is in line with the thought of the Alexandrian Jewish philosopher Philo who taught that God is known in His Word (Logos).⁴ John expressly states that Jesus Christ is this word become flesh, and that, therefore, he is the perfect revealer of God. "No man has ever seen God except the only Son who is of the bosom of the Father, and who had made Him known" (1: 18; cf. 3: 13). No prophet of the Old Testament has ever claimed to have had a full knowledge of God when he said to the Jews: "The one who honours me is my Father—the very one you say is your God. You have never known Him. If I were to say that I do not know Him, I would be a liar like you. But I do know Him, and I obey His word" (8: 54-55). Since he brings to the world the knowledge of God, he is the light of the world which gives eternal life to men (8: 12). This very presence of Jesus, the Word Incarnate in human history as the light of the world, is a challenge to each and every man. Man is left free to make a decision, either to look at that light of revelation and receive him with a sincere heart, or to close his eyes and thus reject him. If he acknowledges this light by believing in him, he is saved; but if he does not choose to know him by going over to the side of darkness, he is condemning himself to eternal perdition (3: 16-21).

(iii) *Salvation is Perfect Freedom.*

Salvation, according to the Johannine theology, is liberation of the total man from the slavery of sin, darkness, world, death and Satan. To the Jews who boasted of their freedom by definition, namely, that they were free since they were the descendants of Abraham, Jesus said: "I tell you the truth: everyone who sins is a slave of sin. A slave does not belong to the

family always, but a son belongs there for ever. If the Son makes you free, then you will be really free" (8: 34-36). This implies that mankind as a whole is in the grip of sin, which separates them from God (8: 42, 45, 47). Only the Incarnate Word, the only Son who always remains in the bosom of the Father (1: 18), can truly liberate man from his slavery of sin. It was precisely for this purpose that Christ came into this world. For he is the sacrificial "Lamb of God" who takes away the whole burden of the sin of humanity (1: 29). As the Servant of Yahweh he suffered and died for our sins (Is. 53); as the Paschal lamb he immolated himself on the cross for the remission of our sins (19: 33, 36, 37). After his resurrection, he commissions his disciples to perpetuate his work of redemption by absolving man of his sins (20: 23). Hence, salvation is a liberation from sin.

Man is also in the grip of darkness, which is the wilful ignorance of man, the evil tendency that makes him stand against the light which is the word Incarnate, the true revelation of God who is pure light (I Jn. 1: 5). This darkness is something intrinsic to man.⁵ John says that when the Word Incarnate came to this world as its light, this darkness in man tried its best to put it out, but it could not (1: 15). This light shone on men with all its brightness, so that whoever follows him cannot walk in darkness (8: 12). The whole life of Jesus, according to John, was a constant fight against darkness in order that he might liberate man from its grip. It is, however, a sad fact that many still remained slaves of darkness, because they preferred darkness to light (3: 19) and the salvific activity of Christ became ineffective in them. Although in his death, darkness celebrated its false victory, it was utterly defeated when Jesus rose up from the dead on the third day as the victorious light which can no more be put out. St. Paul also takes the same view of salvation namely, that Christ has saved us from the power of darkness (Col. 1: 13).

Salvation is also a Victory over the World

Here by world John means the world of men who stand in opposition to the revelation in Jesus Christ. It hates Christ (7: 7); it hates also his disciples (15: 19). It does so because they try to convict it of its evil ways (15: 18-24). It refuses to acknow-

4. Cf. C.H. Dodd, *op. cit.*, p. 277.

5. Cf. R.H. Lightfoot, *St. John's Gospel* (Oxford: rep. 1969) p. 80.

ledge its Word-bound origin and existence (1: 10). Being aloof from God, it develops in it an attitude of hostility to God.⁶ It is closely related to darkness, towards which man marches on (13: 30), and walks in it without knowing where he is going (1 Jn. 2: 11). It is this world that Jesus has conquered by his suffering and death (16: 33). Now, salvation is nothing but the participation of man in this victory of Christ by silent suffering and faithfully following him. It means sharing the throne of Jesus' glory.⁷

Salvation is a Liberation from Satan, the Evil Power

Man is not only in the grip of sin, world and darkness, but also of the devil, the evil force which tries its best to make men unauthentic making them his sons filled with his own evil nature (8: 44). The world is under his control, as he is the "prince of this world" (12: 31; 14: 30; 16: 11). That is why Jesus prayed to His Father for his disciples: "that thou shouldest keep them from the evil one" (17: 15). Being allied with the world, Satan always stands in opposition to Jesus, the light and truth. But Jesus, by his cross and glorification has judged the world, and has overthrown Satan, the prince of this world (12: 31). Hence salvation is a radical exorcism.⁸ In the case of each man it is a participation in the complete victory of Jesus, the Lamb of God who valiantly fought against Satan and his powers with the Lamb's war technique of self-emptying and suffering (16: 33; Rev. 21: 6-7).

Salvation is Liberation from Death:

The scope of Incarnation is to save man from death and to give him eternal life. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (3: 16). As St. Paul says, by his death Jesus has overcome death, the last adversary (I Cor. 15: 25f.). He rendered death as well as the devil, the lord of death, powerless (II Tim. 1: 10). In the Gospel of St. John, Jesus emphatically

6. Cf. J.H. Bernard. *Gospel According to St. John* (Edinburg: 1969) Vol. 1, p. 13.

7. Cf. J. Massyngberde Ford. *Revelation* (New York: 1975) p. 422.

8. Cf. D. Mollat, *art. cit.*, p. 200.

says that he would liberate all who would believe in him, from the grip of death. (5: 24-29). Lazarus brought back to life from death by Jesus, symbolized man's true liberation from the grip of death through the intervention of the Saviour (11: 1-44). Death has no power over a believer. For, he who believes in Jesus Christ, even if he dies will live (11: 25). He will not be hurt by the "second death" by which one is deprived of eternal life (Rev. 2: 11). Thus salvation is a state of perfect freedom of the true sons of God which Jesus Christ has secured for us by his suffering and death on the cross.

(iv) Salvation is the Attainment of the New Life of Grace

According to St. John, those who receive the Word Incarnate by believing in him are given the right to become God's children (1: 12); they become God's children not by natural means but by a supernatural birth from God (1: 13). It is a birth from above by the Spirit of God (3: 5-8). Such a birth enables them to enter the kingdom of God, which represents a new life of grace brought down by Jesus, the perfect revealer and Saviour (1: 16-17).

This new life is the very life by which God Himself lives, and which the Son of God possesses, as it is received from the Father (5: 26). The Son possesses this life with a special orientation of sharing it with men: "In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent His only Son into the world, so that we might live through him" (I Jn. 4: 9). In the parable of the Good Shepherd Jesus says: "I came that they may have life, life in abundance" (10: 10). He is the way, the truth and the life of men (14: 6). This life is an eschatological good which is already communicated to the believer in Jesus Christ as an actual good. For, Jesus says: "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears my word and believes Him who sent me, has eternal life; he does not come into judgement, but has passed from death to life" (5: 24). Hence this life in which consists man's salvation, is a present reality (3: 36). The believer possesses it here and now, although its fulness will be experienced only in the life beyond the grave.

The source of this life is the Spirit of God. For, "it is the Spirit that gives life" (6: 63). He is like breath for natural life (20: 22). The Holy Spirit was given to the disciples by the risen Lord, while he symbolically breathed into them. As did man from the dust in creation become a living being when God breathed

into his nostrils the breath of life (Gn. 2: 7), so did he receive eternal life in the second creation which is salvation, when the Spirit of life was breathed into him by the risen Lord.⁹ This Spirit is the gift of the "living water" promised by Christ to his believers (4:10; 7: 37-39). As water to the thirsty man so does this "living water" give eternal life to man. This "living water" according to St. John, is the Holy Spirit: "Now this he said about the Spirit, which those who believed in him were to receive; for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified" (7: 39). This Spirit is, therefore, the fruit of Christ's vicarious suffering and death (16: 7). Hence, the salvation we receive through this Spirit of life is nothing but the fruit of Christ's Passion and death.

(v) *Salvation Consists in a 'Kenotic' Transformation*

According to the Johannine theology, man should die to self and rise again with a new life with its special characteristic of true altruism. Referring to his own suffering, death and resurrection, Jesus said: "Truly, truly I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life" (12: 24-25). Here salvation is viewed as a radical transformation of one's self, in which one dies to self as a grain of wheat, and comes out of his self-made prison of egoism and becomes a man for others. On the one hand he loses himself by self-emptying, and on the other by true altruism he grows up to the stature of Christ who was totally a man for others. Only he who hates his life, namely, he who acts quite contrary to self-seeking, will keep his life for eternal life (12: 25). Just as Christ's glorification took place on the cross, so must also the disciples be glorified by sharing in his Kenosis.¹⁰ The state of salvation is compared to the new life manifested in a wheat plant which sprouts out from a grain of wheat that falls down on the earth and decays (3: 3, 5). That plant bears much fruit, not for itself but for others. So is the state of a man who possesses salvation. By an interior transformation

9. Cf. H. Van den Bussche. *Jean, Desclée de Brouwer* (1967). p. 551.

10. Cf. R. Bultmann. *Dass Evangelium des Johannes* (Göttingen: 1968) p. 326.

he dies to himself and becomes a new person fully oriented to others and to God. This is a painful process indeed, but surely is the process of man's sanctification.

(vi) *Salvation is the Intimate Union with the Triune God*

It is a mutual indwelling. Of that state of redemption, Jesus said to his disciples: "Then you will know that I am in the Father, and you in me and I in you" (14: 20). Hence in the state of salvation, in a triangular relationship, God the Father, the Son and the believer, dwell in one another by virtue of a love which is the very life and activity of God. In the Father it is the love that gave the only Son for the salvation of the world (3: 16). In the Son it is the love which was manifested in his obedience to the Father and in his readiness to lay down his own life for the salvation of men (10: 15, 17). In the believer it is the love that makes them observe Jesus' command to love one another and thus glorify the Father in the Son (13: 34-35). Thus salvation is a most intimate and dynamic union for which Christ prayed: "...that they also may be in us; ...that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and Thou in me, that they may become perfectly one..." (17: 21-23).

This union is not, however, an impersonal absorption into the divine, nor an ecstatic possession by a divine inspiration, but a community of being by a dynamic sharing of the very life of God in love.¹¹ Here man is introduced into the intimacy of the inner life of the Triune God, in which each of the Three Persons gives Himself totally to the other two. In the case of human salvation we find nothing but an extension of this divine intimacy so as to include also men in that ebb and flow of love. Since this love implies a total self-giving, man's possession of divine life consists not merely in a feeling of love, but in the living of love by observing His commandments, which involve a love carried to the point of self-sacrifice (15: 10).

(vii) *Salvation means an Integration with Christ*

According to the Johannine concept, salvation is a bringing together of all men into one body in Jesus Christ. In the Old Testament too salvation is basically a bringing together of men to

11. Cf. C.H. Dodd. *op. cit.*, p. 197.

God. It is God's merciful activity of bringing together all the dispersed children of God into one body (Is. 11:12). Precisely in this way Jesus had understood of his own death when he said: "When I am lifted up from the earth I will draw all men to me" (12: 32). According to John Jesus dies not only for the Jewish nation but also to gather together into one body all the scattered children of God (11: 52).

Jesus liked to call himself "Son of Man" in the sense that he is the inclusive representative of the ideal humanity the redeemed mankind. Each man becomes a part of that humanity in so far as he is united with the ideal man Jesus Christ. Sacraments like Baptism and Eucharist indicate nothing but this integration with Christ (6: 56-57). Jesus Christ the ideal Son of Man is the one who "descended from heaven" (3: 13), and died to draw all men to himself (12: 13) and again, returns to heaven (13: 1), that where he is they may be also (14: 3). Hence man is saved only if he is united with this Son of Man, Jesus Christ, who had descended from heaven and ascends again to the same place of his origin.

This idea of salvation is well explained in the allegory of the vine and the branches (15: 1-10). Jesus says that he is the real vine in comparison with the unauthentic wild vine which symbolized Israel of the Old Testament. He reminds us of the necessity that we as branches should always remain united to this new vine which represents the ideal authentic man in order that we may bear much fruit. So he insists: "Remain united with me, and I will remain united with you" (15: 4). This integration with Christ is essential to bear fruit: "A branch cannot bear fruit by itself; it can do so only if it remains in the vine. In the same way you cannot bear fruit unless you remain in me" (15: 4b). Here "bearing fruit" primarily consists in possessing the eternal life which is manifested through a life of virtue with an orientation to spread that life of love to others.¹² The urgency of being united to Christ is well explained in the words: "Whoever does not remain in me is thrown out like a branch, and dries up; such branches are gathered up and thrown into the fire, where they are burned" (15: 6). Hence either one has to be integrated with Christ and live, or to die the eternal death. As St. Augustine puts it: *Aut vitis, aut ignis, i.e. either vine*

12. Cf. R.E. Brown. *The Gospel According to St. John* (XIII-XXI) (London: 1971) p. 675.

or fire.¹³ There is no third possibility. Hence, in order to be an authentic man and thus to attain salvation, one has to get integrated with Jesus Christ, the authentic man.

Here in the allegory of the vine and the branches the "remaining" in the vine signifies not a passive resting in a place, but an active dynamic relationship with Christ the true vine, which involves observance of his commandments. For, Jesus says: "If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love" (15: 10). Ultimately it consists, therefore, in the practice of love to its highest degree of even sacrificing one's own self. For, Jesus says: "My commandment is this: love one another as I have loved you" (15: 12).

Integration with Christ for man's salvation is also the logic of the mystery of Incarnation. In Incarnation, God's Word (Logos) became flesh (man) and dwelt (pitched his tent) among us (1: 14). The pre-existent divine Word has now come down to us and united our weak nature with himself. It was through him, in him, and for him that the whole universe was created (1: 3). He is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and end of all creation (Rev. 21: 6). Hence, he is the meaning, plan, and purpose of the universe.¹⁴ Now, when the Word became flesh, through that flesh the universe is closely bound to the Word. In the redemptive work of Christ, the flesh which the divine Word united with himself has undergone a transformation. It passes through suffering and death and reached its final stage of glorification. The whole universe, which is related to the Word through the flesh, he assumed, is now tending to reach that permanent stage of union with the Word and thus be redeemed (Rom. 8: 20). The salvation of the universe is achieved when everything is recapitulated in Christ, the Incarnate Word who is its meaning, plan and purpose. This can be conceived of as the final stage of an on-going process of an evolution, which definitely will terminate in the Omega point, Christ. The whole universe automatically moves on to that stage.¹⁵

13. Cf. In Jo. LXXXI 3; PL. 35: 1842.

14. Cf. Philo. *De Opif.* 17, 24, 33; *Quod Deus.* 31; De Cher. 127.

15. Cf. Teilhard de Chardin. *The Phenomenon of Man* (New York: 1959) p. 272.

In the case of man's salvation, however, this integration with Christ, the Omega point, is not a passive or an automatic one, but a conscious and dynamic action involving man's free and positive response to divine revelation by believing in Jesus and acknowledging him through a personal self-commitment to him. If man is thus integrated with Christ, his salvation is already at hand, and he possesses eternal life here and now. Its final stage, however, will be manifested in the transformed "new heaven and new earth", where there will be no more pain and sorrow, and man will no more be a slave of sin and death (Rev. 21: 1).

According to the Johannine theology, this eschatological salvation has already begun here and now in the interior of man as far as he is integrated with Christ consciously or even unconsciously and participates in his divine life of grace. In this life of grace, God will see such a man in His only Son, and with the same love with which He loves His Son He will speak to him through the Word, His Son, making him a "you" in front of Him. This would give man a new confidence in the centre of his being, because he is now "someone" before God. He will be perfectly happy by the very fact that he is allowed to listen to God's loving speech, Jesus Christ, the Word and revelation of the Father. Along with this listening to His Word, he will enjoy His love, which is grace, the very life of God.

Conclusion

Thus, salvation has not only a negative aspect of liberation from sin, death, world and Satan, and even from self, but also a positive aspect of possessing the very life of God by means of an integration with Christ the Incarnate Word of God, who is the beginning and end of every created being. As far as God is concerned, salvation is a gratuitous and merciful act of God to fully liberate man from the grip of sin, and the evil powers. It is a supernatural re-birth by the activity of the Holy Spirit. It is a state of intimate communion between God and man, where man shares in the very life of the triune God by virtue of his intimate integration with Christ. As far as man is consciously or even unconsciously integrated with Christ, he already possesses that eternal divine life here and now, and its full flowering will be the Heavenly Bliss. From man's point of view, salvation can be

defined as true knowledge, a twofold knowledge involving a twofold activity. On the one hand man should realize and acknowledge his unauthentic existence and his helplessness to save himself by his own power, so with an open mind should seek a saviour who can liberate him from the bondage of sin, darkness, world, Satan, death and miseries; on the other, he should acknowledge God and His Word (17: 3), his only Son whom God has sent into the world for its salvation (3: 16) and be integrated with this Saviour Jesus Christ by means of a personal commitment to him. Salvation is an interior transformation in which one dies to self and rises up with a new life of true altruism, the source and model of which is Jesus Christ. Hence, the Johannine idea of liberation is a personal call from God and an existential challenge to man to which he is called upon to respond with a decisive "Yes" or "No"; and the choice is as important as his own existence.