

Biblical Discourse on Redemption: An Epistemic Evolution of the Concept from Early Hebraic Period to the Present Biblical Understanding of “Redemption”

Binoj Mathew

I. Introduction

The Scripture, the Old Testament as well as the New Testament, present God as a liberator and Redeemer. The people of Old Testament experienced Yahweh as go'el in their exodus from Egypt, the land of slavery, to a land promised by Yahweh Himself, a land flowing with honey and milk, a land of freedom and joy. In the New Testament Jesus Christ through the message, ministry and mission revealed Himself to be the Redeemer. His preferential option for the poor and oppressed of the society manifested itself in the way of his praxis and culminated in his death and resurrection. In this chapter we shall analyse the epistemic evolution of the concept from early Hebraic period to the present Biblical understanding of “Redemption”.

II. The Concept Redemption

Everyone is in need of redemption. Redemption is a Biblical term which means “a purchase” or “a ransom”. Historically, redemption was used in reference to the purchase of a slave's freedom. A slave was "redeemed" when the price was paid for his freedom. In the Old Testament God spoke of the journey of the people of Israel this way: "I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from slavery to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment" (Ex 6:6). The use of redemption in the New Testament includes this same idea. Every person is a slave to sin; only through the price Jesus paid on the cross is a sinful person redeemed from sin and death.¹

“Redemption” means to deliver by paying a price. The work of Christ fulfilling the O.T. types and prophecies of redemption is set forth in three principal Greek words: (1) AgorazO, to buy in the market (from agora, market). Man is viewed as a slave 'sold...to sin' (Rom 7:14) and under sentence of death (Ezek 18:4; Jn 3:18-19; Rom 6:23) but subject to redemption by the purchase price of the blood of the Redeemer (1 Cor 6:20; 7:23; 2 Pet 2:1; Rev 5:9; 14:3-4). (2) ExagorazO, to buy out of the market, i.e., to purchase and remove from further sale (Gal 3:13; 4:5; Eph 5:16; Col 4:5), speaking of the finality of the work of redemption. (3) lutroO, to loose or set free (Lk 24:21; Ti 2:14; 1 Pet 1:18), noun form, lutroOsis (Lk 2:38; Heb 9:12). Compare also 'redeemed' (lit. to make redemption, Gk epoiEsen lutroOsin, Lk 1:68), and 'deliverance' (intensive form, apolutroOsis) used commonly to indicate release of a slave (Lk 21:28; Rom 3:24; 8:23; 1 Cor 1:30; Eph 1:7, 14; 4:30; Col 1:14; Heb 9:15; 11:35). Redemption is by sacrifice and by power (Ex 14:30); Christ paid the price, the Holy Spirit makes deliverance actual in experience (Rom 8:2).²

III. Redemption In The Old Testament

In the Old Testament, the liberating action of Yahweh serves as a model and reference for all others in the Exodus from Egypt, “the house of bondage. “ When God rescues his people from hard economic, political and cultural slavery, he does so in order to make them..., “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Ex. 19:6).”³ Thus the book of Exodus depicts Israel’s basic historical experience, her experience of deliverance from Egyptian oppression, of covenant and communion with God.

III. 1. The Liberator God: The Experience of Exodus

The first chapter of Exodus describe the state of bondage endured by the Israelites in Egypt, in “that place of slavery” (Ex. 13: 2; 20: 2); in their oppression (Ex. 1: 10-11), their hard labours (Ex. 5: 6-14) and their humiliations (Ex. 1: 13-14). In Exodus a God is revealed as the one who hears the outcry of the oppressed: “I have witnessed the affliction of my people in Egypt and have heard their cry... I know well what they are suffering” (Ex. 3: 7-8), a God living and taking part in historical moments of liberation. Here “the true essence of God is revealed in the sense that God clearly shows us who he will be in the history of humankind: that is, the one who hears the cries of those living in oppression and who is determined to do something about it.”⁴ “ Again, “I have seen the miserable state of my people in Egypt. I have heard their cry to be free of their slave drivers. Yes, I am well aware of their suffering. I mean to deliver them out of the land of their oppressors” (Ex. 3: 7-9). Thus God is He who comes out of Himself, who ransoms and redeems Israel.

The experience of the Exodus contains, above all, a bodily and material dimension of liberation: the step from slavery and alienation. But in Exodus we also see another dimension: the service of God. "Exodus recounts, definitively, the step from servitude to the service of the living God: 'when you bring my people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this very mountain.'"⁵ In other words, freedom from bondage flows into and becomes, in effect, the covenant of the people with God on Sinai (Ex. 24). In this way, the deliverance from Egypt and the covenant are two phases of the same event, which leads to the encounter with God, to serving and adoring Him. This dual aspect of the liberating God is best reflected in Exodus 6: 6 ff: "I am Yahweh; I will free you from the forced labour of the Egyptians and will deliver you from their slavery. I will rescue you by my outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgement. I will take you as my own people, and you shall have me as your God... I will bring you into the land, which I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. I will give it to you for your own possessions."

In short we can see that the Exodus was the birth of Israel as a nation. It established Israel's identity in its relationship with Yahweh. And so throughout the conquest and its subsequent life, Israel used the Exodus event as model and imagery to signify who Yahweh was and who Israel was. "Yahweh begets Israel as a father not in creation, but in the act of deliverance, which was Israel's creation: "when Israel was a child I loved him and out of Egypt I called my son" (Hos. 11: 1). Further, if Yahweh had become their father by delivering them, then he would deliver them from future oppression."⁶

III. 2. The Redeemer God (go'el) of Israel

After the Exodus, throughout the history of Israel, Yahweh is its go'el. Go'el is typical of Deutero-Isaiah, where it appears more than twelve times (Is. 41: 14; 43: 14; 44: 6, 24; 47: 4; etc.). "Originally, go'el was the closest relative of victims or dispossessed person, the one who have the obligation to avenge ransom or recover persons or possessions that had fallen into action and hostile hands."⁷ In other words go'el is "the near relative on whom falls the duty of defending the interests of an incapacitated or murdered member of the family."⁸ With this original sense of go'el as the official protector of one's kinsmen as a basis, God is called go'el of Israel: God is the near relative, the next of kin, he who rescues, the protector, defender and avenger of Israel, yet even more so, and above all else, God declares himself the go'el of the poor within the Jewish nation itself (Ps. 68: 6-7). That Yahweh is go'el of Israel, because he defends the poor, the oppressed, the outcasts, etc., among the people has already become the character, the indelible seal making the covenant. Thus the idea of God as go'el underlies the aspects of God's closeness to and solidarity with his people, and in a special way, with the poor. Therefore "the basic idea is that of promoting the interests, the welfare of the family,"⁹ namely, Israel.

If God's identity is defined as go'el of the poor, the oppressed, the outcasts, etc., so this obligation is also incumbent on every Israelite: the establishment of justice, the extension of God's liberating act. This is the only way possible to live in permanent fidelity to the covenant compacted between God and his people. "To know God is to do justice (Jer. 22: 13-14), that is to establish just or right relations between men and women, to recognize the rights of the poor. Therefore in the words of Gutierrez, "the defence of the poor is the meaning of the national affirmation of the Jewish people. Not to practice justice toward the poor is to turn one's back on the true national identity of the Israelite people."¹⁰

The prophets through their preaching established that the solidarity with the poor is the hallmark of an Israelite for belonging to the covenantal community. The main motif of the prophet's message was their concern for the weak and the poor. "The treatment of the poor and the weak became for them the true criterion for a just society."¹¹ Therefore we see the prophets hurling their accusation at individuals and groups in society who were responsible for the administration of justice, particularly kings, judges, priests and prophets. Thus, in Isaiah we find: "This, rather, is the fasting I wish: releasing those bound unjustly, untying the thongs of the yoke; setting free the oppressed, breaking every yoke; sharing your bread with the hungry, sheltering the oppressed and the homeless; clothing the naked when you see them, and not turning you back" (Is. 58: 6-7).

As a conclusion to this part we can say that the experience of God as their liberator helped Israel to become conscious of their obligation in the family, that is, the obligation for the next of kin to avenge, further developed in the obligations they had for each other as a covenantal community. "Thus the solidarity of an Israelite for the poor (orphans, widows, and strangers) was the touchstone for belonging to the people of the covenant and for true worship."¹²

IV. Redemption In The New Testament

The title of Redeemer for Jesus obliges us to speak soteriologically.¹³ And in the present-day theology, which has so strongly emphasised the basic aspects of the Jesus of history, soteriology is not confined to stressing the redemptive power only in Christ's death. All of Christ's life, his preaching, his miracles and his controversies have the value of redemptive-liberation. In this part we shall try to analyse some of the relevant themes from the Gospels to see their redemptive-liberation value.

IV. 1. Christ the Redeemer

Redemptor Hominis (Redeemer of Man), is the first encyclical of John Paul II promulgated on the 4th March, 1979. The central theme of Redemptor Hominis is the centrality of Jesus Christ in human history and as the answer to the human search for meaning and identity. Vatican II's *Gaudium et Spes* was a reflection on the situation of humanity in the mid-twentieth century that constantly returned to Christ as the true meaning of humanity, the one who reveals us to ourselves. A foundation of Redemptor Hominis is the rejection of the Marxist idea of religious alienation. Whereas Marx had argued that 'Communism is the solution to the riddle of history, and knows itself to be the solution' (Communist Manifesto, 1848), Redemptor Hominis is inspired by the faith that Jesus Christ is at the centre of human history, and that faith in Jesus Christ is not alienating, but rather the true source of fulfilled and joyful human existence.¹⁴

Redemptor Hominis constantly affirms the Church's readiness to stand with human beings in their history, their particular social context, and aid and guide them in the search for that true humanity that has its source and fulfilment in Christ.¹⁵ Christ, the Redeemer of the world, is the one who penetrated in a unique unrepeatable way into the mystery of man and entered his "heart". For, by his Incarnation, he, the son of God, in a certain way united himself with each man. He worked with human hands, he thought with a human mind. He acted with a human will, and with a human heart he loved. Born of the Virgin Mary, he has truly been made one of us, like to us in all things except sin" he, the Redeemer of man.¹⁶

The dignity of the Church who continues the mission of Christ is expressed in its readiness to serve, in keeping with the example of Christ, who "came not to be served but to serve". Nowadays it is sometimes held, though wrongly, that freedom is an end in itself, that each human being is free when he makes use of freedom as he wishes, and that this must be our aim in the lives of individuals and societies. In reality, freedom is a great gift only when we know how to use it consciously for everything that is our true good. Christ teaches us that the best use of freedom is charity, which takes concrete form in self-giving and in service. For this "freedom Christ has set us free" and ever continues to set us free. The Church draws from this source the unceasing inspiration, the call and the drive for her mission and her service among all mankind. The full truth about human freedom is indelibly inscribed on the mystery of the Redemption.¹⁷

IV.2. Jesus' Announcement of the Kingdom of God

The kingdom which Jesus inaugurates is the kingdom of God. Jesus himself reveals who this God is, the One whom he addresses by the intimate term "Abba," Father (cf. Mk 14:36). God, as revealed above all in the parables (cf. Lk 15:3-32; Mt 20:1-16), is sensitive to the needs and sufferings of every human being: he is a Father filled with love and compassion, who grants forgiveness and freely bestows the favors asked of him. St. John tells us that "God is love" (1 Jn 4:8, 16). Every person therefore is invited to "repent" and to "believe" in God's merciful love. The kingdom will grow insofar as every person learns to turn to God in the intimacy of prayer as to a Father (cf. Lk 11:2; Mt 23:9) and strives to do his will (cf. Mt 7:21).¹⁸

"The Kingdom of God" is itself an eschatological concept which points out the utopian in the human heart: total liberation from all the elements that alienate and stigmatize this world such as suffering, sorrow, hunger, injustice, divisiveness and death, not only for man but for all of creation.¹⁹ But as such, the Kingdom is at the same time, the fulfilment of humankind's deepest longing for a new world completely freed from all evil and fully tamed by love. And this will be fully realised only at the end of time. Similarly, "The Kingdom of God is the background against which, on the one hand, the situation of oppression and domination is denounced as sinful and incompatible with its coming, and in the light of which on the other hand, every achievement of brotherhood and justice among human persons is announced as a step towards total communion with God."²⁰ Therefore, the kingdom of God is the definition of God's absolute dominion over this world oppressed by diabolical forces. God emerges from his silence to proclaim that He is the meaning and ultimate future of the world; that He is its liberation from all evil, the absolute liberation for good.

Jesus' basic intent, then, is to proclaim and to be the instrument of the fulfilment of the ultimate meaning of the world: a deliverance from all that stigmatizes it: sorrow, divisiveness, sin and death, and emancipation for life, for the complete communication of love, grace and fullness of God. Since Jesus, the kingdom of God is not only future and utopian, but a present reality, which encounters historical contexts. Therefore, we must understand that the Kingdom of God begins in this world and is consummated in eternity. This dialectical tension is wholly balanced in Jesus.

IV.3. Jesus Christ as Kingdom's Personal Realization

Jesus orients all his preaching to the Kingdom of God. But Jesus did not just proclaim the Kingdom as coming only in the future but as here and now, breaking into the present. The Kingdom is a process that begins in this world and reaches its culmination in the eschatological future. Jesus proclaimed that humankind's deepest longing is no longer purely "utopia" (nowhere), but already "topia" (somewhere).²¹ The kingdom is therefore partially but concretely anticipated within history.

Jesus is the Kingdom in person. By its presence and action in His own person, the Kingdom has already arrived (Mk. 1: 15) and is in our midst (Lk. 17: 21). In his action and behaviour Jesus "historified" the Kingdom of God. His miracles demonstrate that the kingdom of God is a present reality; his solidarity with the marginalized of society is to be viewed as incarnating the Kingdom and giving concrete shape in history to the attitude of God towards the lowly and the sinful. By doing so Jesus demonstrates who God really is.²²

The liberation and salvation brought by the kingdom of God come to the human person both in his physical and spiritual dimensions. Two gestures are characteristic of Jesus' mission: healing and forgiving. Jesus' many healings clearly show his great compassion in the face of human distress, but they also signify that in the kingdom there will no longer be sickness or suffering, and that his mission, from the very beginning, is meant to free people from these evils. In Jesus' eyes, healings are also a sign of spiritual salvation, namely liberation from sin. By performing acts of healing, he invites people to faith, conversion and the desire for forgiveness (cf. Lk 5:24). Once there is faith, healing is an encouragement to go further: it leads to salvation (cf. Lk 18:42-43). The acts of liberation from demonic possession-the supreme evil and symbol of sin and rebellion against God-are signs that indeed "the kingdom of God has come upon you" (Mt 12:28).²³

IV.4. The Plan of Jesus: The Manifesto of Jesus

Luke using a text from Isaiah presents the content of the Messiah's programme, which will enable us to understand the mission of Jesus. "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me,. Because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring glad tidings to the lowly, to heal the broken hearted; to proclaim liberty to the captives and release to the prisoners, to announce a year of favour from the Lord" (Is. 61: 1-2; Lk 4: 18-19). Here we have what we may call the manifesto of Jesus, the clearest expression of what we understood to be his mission in life. His task was not only to announce the age of divine favour but also, and above all, 'to let the broken victims go free.' God's purpose in history had to be realized through human effort for the liberation of man.²⁴

According to G. Gutierrez "the various human situations enunciated in the text (poverty, captivity, blindness, oppression) are set forth as expressions of death. With Jesus' proclamation, death will beat a retreat; Jesus injects into history a principle of life, and a principle that will lead history to fulfilment."²⁵ The Good News proclaimed by the Messiah is made concrete in the action it proclaims: liberating captives, restoring sight to the blind, and bringing freedom to the oppressed. In all these actions freedom or redemption is the dominant notion.²⁶

IV.4.1 The Response of Jesus to John the Baptist

The reply of Jesus to the messengers of John the Baptist is very closely related to the definition he gave to his mission at the very outset of his ministry. The messengers of John the Baptist asked Jesus: "Are you 'he who is to come' or do we look for another?" (Mt. 11:3; Lk. 7: 20). Jesus answered: "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: the blind recover their sight, cripples walk, lepers are cured, the deaf hear, dead men are raised to life, and the poor have the good news preached to them." (Mt. 11: 4-5; Lk 7:22).

This reply of Jesus draws John's attention to a series of oracles of the prophet Isaiah (Is 35: 5-8; 26: 19; 61: 1-2), wherein the messianic times are described for the sake of benefits, God wills to bestow upon the poor, the sick and the marginal. Likewise, the mission of Jesus consists of proclaiming salvation through works that reveal God's tender solicitude for the disinherited of this world. The mention of the poor at the end, after the resurrection of the dead, makes it clear that he is singling out the most crucial and decisive of the messianic signs.²⁷

IV.4.2 The Beatitudes

The proclamation of the imminent coming of the kingdom of God is a piece of good news, especially for the poor, sick and suffering. For they, in fact, are the main beneficiaries of this kingdom. Therefore this proclamation takes the form of sorrowing; they shall be consoled;... Blest are they who hunger and thirst for holiness' sake; they shall have their fill" (Mt. 5: 3-6; Lk. 6: 29-31). Pope John Paul II, during his pastoral visit to Brazil said: "The Church all over the world wishes to be the Church of the poor...she wishes to draw out all the truth contained in the Beatitudes of Christ, and especially in the first one: 'Blessed are the poor in spirit.' ...She wishes to teach this truth and she wishes to put it into practice, just as Jesus came to do and to teach."²⁸

As S. Kappen explains it: "in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus was proclaiming that God will come to root out whatever is opposed to the fullness of man – sorrow, injustice, and estrangement from himself. He will come to affirm and fulfil whatever is truly human – gentleness of spirit, concern for right, purity of heart, commitment or peace, mercy to one's fellowmen."²⁹ This plan of Jesus is concretely manifested in the way of the praxis of Jesus.

V. The Way Of The Praxis Of Jesus

The way of the praxis Jesus shed light on what the reign of God is. The praxis of Jesus is what Jesus did, his ministry and activity, which was the concrete expression of the presence of God's Kingdom. One aspect that needs greater emphasis today, in theology and in the practice of liberation, is Jesus' opting for the poor and the marginal. Jesus the liberator must be the supreme model in our specific apostolate of liberation.

The supreme test is the giving of one's life, to the point of accepting death in order to bear witness to one's faith in Jesus Christ. Throughout Christian history, martyrs, that is, "witnesses," have always been numerous and indispensable to the spread of the Gospel. In our own age, there are many: bishops, priests, men and women religious, lay people—often unknown heroes who give their lives to bear witness to the faith. They are par excellence the heralds and witnesses of the faith.³⁰

A priest is a representative of Jesus and as it is stated in the Second Vatican Council: "The spiritual gift that priests have received in ordination prepares them, not for any narrow and limited mission, but for the most universal and all embracing mission of salvation 'to the end of the earth.' For every priestly ministry shares in the universal scope of the mission that Christ entrusted to his apostles."³¹

All priests must have the mind and the heart of missionaries - open to the needs of the Church and the world, with concern for those farthest away, and especially for the non-Christian groups in their own area. They should have at heart, in their prayers and particularly at the Eucharistic Sacrifice, the concern of the whole Church for all of humanity.³²

V.1. Jesus, the Brother of the Marginal People

The life, mission and message of the historical Jesus clearly shows his conviction that the kingdom of God belongs to no one so much as poor, the marginal and the rejected of society. They are the prime beneficiaries of the Kingdom of God. The vast majority of his contemporaries were men and women under the yoke of oppression. They were those who could not defend themselves, the desperate, the hopeless, the hungry, the unclothed and the strangers.³³ "In a society which gave enormous importance to social status, Jesus stands on the wrong side, with those no one wants to be with; he realizes that prestige is also a divisive principle, opposed to equality. He declares that God is on the side of the little people, those who have no value for society."³⁴

As a prophet and a teacher Jesus was expected to associate himself exclusively with the respectable classes. In reality, it was, above all, the despised and the disreputable he chose to mingle with. Only they, in his view, were open to all the possibilities of man and disposed to welcome the initiatives of God. That is the reason he said to the respectable classes who prided themselves upon being the favoured friends of God: "I tell you this: tax-collectors and prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you" (Mt. 21: 31).³⁵

Though not despised, the womenfolk occupied an inferior position in Jewish society. Their condition finds an accurate description in the saying of Josephus: "A woman is in every respect of less worth than a man."³⁶ In such a context, nothing, perhaps, was more shocking for his contemporaries than the freedom with which he associated himself with women. We find a retinue of women accompanying him wherever he went and supporting him out of their own means (Mk. 15: 40-41; Lk 8: 1-3). Contrary to the accepted social norms he freely engaged in conversation with a woman he met casually by a well side, something that amazed even his disciples (Jn. 4: 27). Friendship with Martha and Mary (Lk. 10: 38-42), allowing a 'sinful' woman to wash his feet (Lk. 7: 37 - 38), etc., are other examples of his association with the inferior sections of society.

The same fundamental option that moved him to seek the company of the marginalized also determined his choice of disciples. These too belonged to the despised classes. He spoke of them as "the little ones" (Mk. 9: 42), 'the humble' (Mt. 25: 40), 'the simple' as opposed to the wise. According to the prevailing conception salvation was difficult, if not impossible for such people.³⁷ Jesus' fundamental option for the poor and the marginal was not based on their moral superiority: not because they were more just or devout than others. Rather, it was based on his "absolute conviction that the Father's goodness and justice can't prevail among men without defending the abandoned, the oppressed and the disenfranchised, without taking up the struggle for those who have no other defender."³⁸

V.2. Jesus Welcoming Sinners

Jesus announces the Kingdom of God to sinners, that is, to those who are looked down upon, persons of low moral and social reputation, those whose religious ignorance and moral behaviour bar them, by the standards of the times, from the gateway of salvation. Jesus extends the Kingdom of God to those men and women condemned by the Jewish society, and do so by a revolutionary gesture of sitting down to eat with them. Now eating for the Jews was a form of social intimacy. When Jesus invited social outcasts, publicans and sinners to sit at the table with him he was in fact offering them intimate human fellowship. Common meals also had a religious significance among the Jews. "Food and drink shared was a symbol of fellowship with God."³⁹ Through his table fellowship with the socially despised, Jesus showed in deed that God was with them as one

who accepted them as they were and came to meet their need.⁴⁰ Therefore to the inquiry of the Pharisees and Sadducees: 'He eats with tax-collectors and sinners!' Jesus answered 'It is not the healthy that need a doctor, but the sick; i did not come to invite virtuous people, but sinners (Mk. 2: 15-17). Hence they mocked Jesus as a 'glutton and a drunkard, a friend of publicans and sinners' (Mt. 11: 19).

V.3. Jesus Ministering to the Sick

In the Jewish Society of Jesus' time, "illnesses of all kinds were attributed to demons."⁴¹ In ancient Palestine, sickness, especially leprosy, blindness, etc., presumed a situation of almost total alienation and was considered a chastisement from God. They were considered unclean and were excluded from the community.⁴² In spite of these, Jesus drew close to the afflicted as if by sheer necessity. It was his preoccupation to reclaim and restore human beings steeped in suffering, in moral condemnation, helplessness, loneliness, and social displacement. Jesus wanted to rehabilitate destroyed human beings, free them from their marginal status and reintegrate them into society. Jesus saw to it that the social stigma was moved also legally. That is why he told the healed leper: "Go and show yourself to the priest, and make the offering laid down by Moses for your cleansing; that will certify the cure" (Mk. 1: 43-44). Jesus not only brought them physical healing but restored the whole human being. He helped them believe in life again, in health, forgiveness and reconciliation with God. Jesus did not merely cure a sickness: he healed a person. Cure refers to the "removal of a physical or mental ailment"; healing, on the other hand refers to "a satisfactory response that a person gives to physical or mental ailment, both as an individual and as a member of a family and community."⁴³

Again Jesus through his exorcisms brought about a de-mythification of the devil, liberation from the taboos of humans and their world. The diabolic is everything that defies the world and destroys humans, everything that prevents him from being God's good creation. Humans, in being freed from demonic seduction are restored to the true humanity intended by God.

The praxis of Jesus did not make all evil and sham disappear from the world. But he pointed out clearly the right way for faith in salvation. The followers of Christ, henceforth, have a challenge to rise to the mitigation and more than that the suppression of all human misery, sickness, hunger, ignorance, slavery and every kind of inhumanity. This must be human being's most enduring and important responsibility toward man and woman.⁴⁴

VI. The Death Of Jesus: The Price Of Liberation

The death of Jesus is intimately tied up with his life, his proclamation and his public ministry. His call for conversion, his new image of God, his freedom toward sacred traditions, and his prophetic criticism of the political, economic and religious leaders provoked the conflict that ended in his violent death.⁴⁵

The free acceptance of the death of Jesus is clear expression of his fidelity to the cause of God and human beings: to free humans from oppression. Both, the life and death of Jesus present two complementary aspects of a single reality: the redemptive or liberative mission of Jesus. As Clark puts it, in an extended sense the redemption or liberation brought about by Jesus meant "freeing people from oppressive or problematic circumstances which kept them from living a normal life and from which they could not free themselves."⁴⁶ This is materialised both through his public ministry and his death. The death of Jesus liberated us from something very bad, something that had an oppressive hold on us, namely, our sinful way of life and the bad consequences of our sinful actions. It also indicates the cost of our redemption as the life of the Redeemer, Jesus Christ.⁴⁷

The reasons for Jesus' death are two-fold, and both are on the structural level. First of all, Jesus was condemned as a blasphemer, for presenting a God who is different from the God of the status quo: "Jesus exposed man's subjugation in the name of religion; he unmasked the religious hypocrisy that consisted of treating the mystery of God as a pretext for turning a deaf ear to the demands of justice. Thus the religious power-that-be rightly understood that Jesus was preaching a God opposed to theirs."⁴⁸

Secondly, his whole attitude and approach was eminently liberative, and the political authorities accused him of being a subversive element. His preaching and his activities were interpreted as the plotting of a revolutionary Zealot, because of his hope for the imminent arrival of the Kingdom, his radicalism, his inflammatory remark about the violent bearing away the Kingdom (Mt. 11: 12), his hold on the people, who would make him king (Jn. 6: 15). On the other hand Jesus clearly moved away from the approach of the Zealots by his renunciation of political religious messianism. He recognized it as grounded on the use of force and power, yet powerless to bring about the kingdom, which demands radical liberation, based on the total transformation or conversion of the heart of man (Mk. 7: 17-23).⁴⁹

VII. The Resurrection: The Bursting- Forth Of Definitive Liberation

God did not, by Jesus' death, consign his liberating praxis to failure. In raising up Jesus, God accepted and confirmed his mission of emancipation. The resurrection of Jesus reveals to us that definitive freedom is not confined to his or that historical precedent but solely to that praxis revealed to us in the life and message of

Jesus. The ultimate liberation of man is indissolubly bound to a determined course of action: that of Jesus the Christ.⁵⁰

According to L. Boff, resurrection “is the liberation of life from all its obstacles and conflicts in history. It is already an eschatological reality; as such it reveals God’s ultimate intention for human beings and the world.”⁵¹ The sacred congregation for the Doctrine of faith teaches that, “Through his perfect obedience on the cross and through the glory of his Resurrection, the Lamb of God has taken away the sin of the world and opened for us the way to definitive liberation.”⁵²

Jon Sobrino recognizes in Jesus’ resurrection certain liberative elements introduced or generated into history. In the first place, Jesus’ resurrection generates a specific ‘hope’, especially for this world’s victims, and it is a liberative hope because it occurs in the presence of the despairing fear that, in history, the executioners may triumph over their victims. A further liberative aspect is that, the resurrection of Jesus indicates the present sovereignty of Christ over history by generating human beings who are not history’s slaves but its sovereigns.⁵³

The fulfilling element in Jesus’ resurrection takes place here and now, in history, in the ‘freedom’ with which the following of Jesus is lived. “It is a freedom to become ‘more’ incarnate in historical reality, to dedicate oneself ‘more’ to the liberation of others, to practice the love that can become the ‘greatest’ love.”⁵⁴ It is a freedom to lay down one’s life without anyone taking it from him; a freedom to voluntarily enslave to all to save all. Thus Jesus’ resurrection is liberative because it enables and inspires people to live in history itself as risen ones, as persons raised. Because it enables and inspires people to live in history the following of Jesus, with indestructible hope, freedom and joy.

VIII. Conclusion

The theme of redemption and liberation is very central to the Scripture. As we have tried to see, God is very much concerned about the well being of his people throughout the history of humankind. He always made a preferential option by taking the side of the poor, the oppressed, the outcast and the marginalized of the society. Thus in the Old Testament He became the go’el in redeeming the people from the ‘house of bondage’. In the New Testament we see a God who incarnates to share the human condition. St. John brings out this idea very well in his gospel: “God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son so that anyone who believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. God did not send his Son into the world to condemn it, but to save it” (Jn. 3: 16-17). Therefore all of Christ’s life, his preaching, his miracles, his controversies, his death and resurrection have the value of redemption – liberation.

The message, ministry and mission of Jesus were oriented towards the liberation or redemption of his people, especially those neglected and despised by the community of his time. This redemptive mission of Christ has challenged and inspired many men and women and it still continues to challenge and inspire many more in the world, and it is they who continue the redemptive work of Christ in the world today, in various forms and ways. In fact the call of each Christian is to recognise this challenge and to respond to it positively.

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