

# Looking for the sign of Jonah

## God's revealing light today

William Reiser

### *Revelation as experience of God*

**D**OES GOD DEAL WITH US DIRECTLY, in ways which we can experience both personally and communally? The answer to this question, of course, should be a confident 'Yes'. Over centuries the answer has been repeatedly confirmed in the lives of devout men and women both inside and outside the Christian tradition. That 'Yes' forms the presupposition of the process of spiritual direction and of every Ignatian retreat; that certainty is also what rendered St Ignatius suspect in the wary eyes of the Spanish Inquisition:

... during these Spiritual Exercises it is more opportune and much better *that the Creator and Lord communicate Himself* to the faithful soul in search for the will of God, as He inflames her in His love and praise, disposing her towards the way in which she will be better able to serve Him in the future. Hence the giver of the Exercises ... *should leave the Creator to work directly with the creature*, and the creature with the Creator and Lord.<sup>1</sup>

Leaving aside exactly how those experiences are mediated and which metaphors best describe them, the conviction that the mystery of God can actually be experienced underlies the classical doctrine of the spiritual senses which we find, for instance, in the writing of Origen.<sup>2</sup> And that conviction appears clearly and reassuringly in Scripture itself. 'O taste and see,' urges the psalmist (Ps 34:8). Throughout the two Testaments, not only is the mystery of God disclosed; above all it is known intimately and experienced in the everyday circumstances and events of people's lives.

The Christian doctrine of revelation is essentially an affirmation about the possibility of really experiencing God. Indeed, the experiential dimension of revelation must be kept firmly in mind when reading the opening paragraphs of Vatican II's *Dogmatic constitution on divine revelation*; otherwise the very scriptural texts cited by the document lose their meaning and power. Revelation consists of an *experience* of God and salvation before that experience ever finds its

way into formal religious language about the nature of God and God's extraordinary deeds. No matter how we eventually articulate or describe the content of 'the mystery that has been hidden throughout the ages and generations' (Col 1:26), that content is inseparable from our experience of salvation and the workings of grace. The entire second volume of Edward Schillebeeckx's monumental christological study turns on this important point.<sup>3</sup>

***Revelation: not closed but ongoing***

But if revelation supposes the ongoing self-communication of God both within the broad framework of human history as well as within the smaller horizon of individual lives, then we can rightfully ask ourselves about what God might be 'saying' to us today, particularly in terms of the 'signs of our times'.<sup>4</sup> Jesus' promise to remain with us always, until 'the end of the age' (Mt 28:20), would be pointless unless his presence was going to be active, disclosive, prophetic, healing, challenging and empowering. In this sense, therefore, revelation is hardly 'closed'.

The apostolic generation may have ended with the death of the last apostle; the canon of Scripture may have been definitively fixed for centuries. But there is nothing closed about God's dealings with the human race; God's hands are certainly not tied by human claims about definitiveness, finality or irreformability. If as individuals and as communities we are always capable of deeper and richer prayer, then as individuals and as Church we are likewise capable of 'tasting and seeing' the mystery of God with ever greater sensitivity, gratitude and wonder. The Bible is a great word about God, but it is not humanity's only word about God, or its most accurate and complete word, or its last word. Such adjectives are simply out of place. Anyone who attempts to compare genuine experiences of God runs the risk of falling into great immodesty, if not irreverence. None of us would ever dare to say, 'My prayer is better than yours'. Yet Christians might be tempted to harbour such judgements in secret when they observe the pluralism which characterizes the religious world of today. Some of our theological rhetoric, like old wineskins, does not tolerate well the dizzying action of the Spirit. Maybe because we have been so accustomed to claiming and justifying Christian uniqueness, we do not possess at this moment a Christian theological language which does justice to the profound religious complexities of our time and place in history. Someday, however, we shall.

If the Christian doctrine of revelation affirms, at least from the viewpoint of religious experience, that there can never be closure in the matter of God's addressing us, it also affirms that a world without God is unthinkable. Or rather that a world in which all stories and remembrances of God had been completely obliterated from humanity's memory would become pure torment; such religious amnesia would presage the dreaded reign of the great beasts of Revelation 13.<sup>5</sup> We can conceive a world with a much smaller Christian presence and not lose heart, but not a world totally without God.<sup>6</sup> A world without God would be a world overwhelmed by darkness. Christian faith insists, of course, that this has not happened: 'The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it' (Jn 1:5). And Christian hope knows that 'even the darkness is not dark to you' (Ps 139:12).

Men and women, we believe, are created for conversation with God; the divine signature is indelibly imprinted upon our minds and hearts. That signature is also imprinted across the length and breadth of human history, particularly the history of those living in exile from their true homeland,<sup>7</sup> deprived of their rights and dignity as children of God: the poor, the powerless and voiceless like the biblical orphans and widows, the exploited ones at the bottom of every human society, the slaves, the masses of immigrants, refugees and political prisoners. To find where God might be in human history, as followers of Jesus we need only to look for the signs of his cross and to the darkness which has marked so many lives. To hear God in history, we begin by learning how to pay attention to the desperate voices of the crucified and abandoned ones. Jesus, after all, was not the first human being to pray the anguished words of Psalm 22, and he certainly would not be the last.

A conversation with God which is not at the same time a conversation with the world of the poor simply fails as an expression of genuine Christian prayerfulness.<sup>8</sup> Perhaps it was just this sort of reasoning which led the author of the letter to the Hebrews to write: 'Remember those who are in prison, *as though you were in prison with them*; those who are being tortured, *as though you yourselves were being tortured*' (Heb 13:3).

We are not only, in Karl Rahner's memorable title, 'hearers of the word'; we are also bearers of the word. The doctrine about revelation maintains not just that God speaks to men and women; the Church's teaching holds further that human beings are by nature capable of discerning God's word and according it the major place

in their lives. The gospel text 'Blessed rather are those who *hear* the word of God and *obey* it!' (Lk 11:28) would be religiously meaningless unless the capability of hearing and responding to God's word belonged to how we had been fashioned 'in the beginning'.

To say that we are bearers of God's word means that revelation becomes incarnate within us as women and men of faith; the word of God comes to expression within our minds and imaginations, and informs all that we say and do. The life of a believer is itself the primary and basic confirmation of the truth that God's self-communication is ongoing and that the promise Jesus made to remain with us always is constantly being fulfilled.

***Reading with Pope John the 'signs of the times'***

John XXIII employed this phrase four times as a section heading in his 1963 encyclical letter *Pacem in terris*.<sup>9</sup> In each instance, the signs he appealed to were of a secular character. 'Our age has three distinctive characteristics,' he writes. Then he enumerates: 'workers all over the world bluntly refuse ever to be treated as if they were irrational objects without freedom'; they demand and have a right to a share in anything touching upon their social and economic well-being. Next, 'women are becoming ever more conscious of their human dignity'; women are insisting that they be treated justly. Finally, 'there will soon no longer exist a world divided into peoples who rule others and peoples who are subject to others'; the march towards full political freedom is irreversible. He later mentions under this heading that 'modern times' are characterized by the writing of civil constitutions and enshrining in them fundamental human rights, and the political wisdom that disputes are better resolved by negotiation than by weapons. And finally he singles out the creation of the United Nations and its Universal Declaration of Human Rights (in 1948) as 'an important step on the path toward the juridico-political organization of the world community'.

It is impossible not to be struck by one particular attitude in that encyclical (an attitude which also carried through Vatican II's *Gaudium et spes*), namely, its sober, non-defensive openness to the world. The Pope saw positive developments and forces at work in human societies; he read the signs of the times and welcomed the message they gave. Darkness and pessimism did not overcome his sense of God's faithfulness as he thought about the Church and the aspirations of the modern world.

*No sign except the 'sign of Jonah'*

John XXIII had borrowed this phrase, of course, from Matthew's Gospel:

The Pharisees and Sadducees came, and to test Jesus they asked him to show them a sign from heaven. He answered them, 'When it is evening you say, "It will be fair weather, for the sky is red." And in the morning, "It will be stormy today, for the sky is red and threatening." You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times. An evil and adulterous generation asks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah.' (16:1-4, NRSV)

Jesus' adversaries were looking for evidence that Jesus' mission and message were truly from God, but in the exchange Jesus moved the meaning of the word 'sign' from that of miraculous proof or confirmation to that of parable. The adversaries wanted divine testimony; Jesus directed them to pay the closest attention to the events and circumstances of their historical moment. Luke's version of this episode makes the point clear: 'But why do you not know how to interpret the present time?' (Lk 12:56). The scandal here is that as experts or professionals in religious matters the Pharisees and Sadducees did not know how to discern. As discerners they had failed miserably; their 'eyes' were not healthy. Hence Jesus' admonition: 'therefore consider whether the light in you is not darkness' (Lk 11:35).

Needless to say, the meaning of the above passage hinges in large measure on the phrase 'sign of Jonah'. There could be a reference here to Jesus' being raised from the 'belly' of death. In an earlier scene Matthew had made this association explicit; the connection seemed evident to him: 'For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so for three days and three nights the Son of Man will be in the heart of the earth' (Mt 12:40).<sup>10</sup> What is probably more remarkable about the ancient story, however, at least from the standpoint of a Jewish prophet, was not Jonah's experience inside the fish but his astonishment that Gentiles should have responded so promptly and so contritely to the preaching of a messenger dispatched by the God of Israel. What is to be made of the surprising fact that Gentiles responded to God's word more readily than the children of Abraham? That repentance

occurred outside the pale of Israel's temple, cult, priesthood and Scripture? That revelation had truly happened among the pagans?

In short, interpreting the sign of Jonah calls for a special hermeneutic: it requires a readiness to discern God's presence and action in unfamiliar, unlikely places. Jesus' reply obviously is not about discovering how to predict the future, not even about making accurate weather forecasts. He is speaking about taking appropriate measures in light of the political, religious and social realities of the time. What started out as a hostile demand for a miraculous sign wound up as an examination of discernment skills.<sup>11</sup> The religious professionals regarded Jesus and everything he represented not as a welcome development but as dangerous, subversive and evil. Jesus, they had claimed, was in league with the devil (see Mt 3:22). Yet in this episode it was the religious experts who had put Jesus to the test, not Satan.

### *What are the signs of our times?*

If we are on the right track in connecting revelation with the 'signs of the times', then we can legitimately ask, 'What are some of the illuminating moments of our time at the close of the twentieth century, and what might God be saying to us by means of them?' For by saying that the mystery of God can be experienced, we have to consider not only those interior moments when a person may be consciously attending to the Spirit's presence in, say, the Psalms, the Gospels, the liturgy, or devotional practices. There is the further moment of history itself, the political and social experience which defines our time and place at the close of the second millennium and the dawn of a new century. Following the lead of John XXIII and the Council, we confidently believe that God is still being revealed in the signs of the times, in the political and social circumstances of our particular historical moment. Scripture, after all, is like a mirror, reflecting in its inspiration, composition and transmission the worlds from which the biblical books emerged. History itself may well be the ongoing word of God, of which Scripture for us is a privileged though not exhaustive reflection.

John XXIII showed admirable foresight when he highlighted the forces of democratic reform throughout the world, the aspirations of economically and socially disenfranchised peoples, the urgent desire for nuclear disarmament, and the consciousness-raising and consequent empowerment taking place among women. There were other 'signs' as well, yet all of them shared one important feature: they

provided a sense of direction as to where the Spirit has been drawing us, thereby reconfirming the gospel text 'and the darkness did not overcome it'. The signs helped us to focus on what we should be thinking about, praying over and doing as followers of Christ. From prayerful consideration would come strategies of action and co-operation with other people of goodwill. Looked at with eyes of faith, problems become challenges, and challenges pave the way toward unity and peace.

### *Signs from within the Church*

With the hindsight of nearly forty years, we can only admire and applaud John XXIII's vision. Prompted by the same spiritual impulse, we might even venture to add some 'signs' of our own. What Christians in some circles perceive to be the theological annoyance of religious pluralism, for example, becomes an opportunity for discovering new dimensions within the Christian religious experience. The political problems caused by religious fundamentalism in various parts of the world create the possibility of arriving at a view of our basic human identity based not on ethnicity and culture, but on solidarity and compassion. The problem of diminishing numbers among religious communities and ordained ministers invites us to envision a Christian spirituality consistently rooted in baptism and eucharist, and to envision a laity confident of its vocation and fully empowered to be Church. The problem of dissent with respect to some of the Church's teaching about sexuality and the debate prompted by the sense some women have of being called to participate in ordained ministry have already challenged the Church to a more authentic appropriation of the gospel.

Perhaps no developments have been more impressive than the rich outpouring of Catholic scriptural studies in the second half of our century, together with the corresponding renewal of our liturgical forms, and the great numbers of lay men and women pursuing advanced theological studies. What we have been witnessing in the years since the Council is an historical enactment of the gospel text: 'And no one puts new wine into old wineskins . . . one puts new wine into fresh wineskins' (Mk 2:22). The sign here is that the Spirit has been preparing the Church to step into a vastly different religious and cultural world. We might also think of the sign of Catholics and Protestants praying and worshipping together, or the even more astonishing sign of Christians talking about ethical sensibilities and religious experience with Hindus, Muslims and

Buddhists. Our dogma, our practice and our prayer are gradually being liberated from the darkness of historical blindness, spiritual isolationism, theological triumphalism, and even from the residual intellectual imperialism of western culture.

The remembrance of John Paul II landing in so many countries over the course of his pontificate is yet another 'sign'. The Church has dramatically bridged the world. No one place, not even Rome, can be the Church's true centre, for the 'centre' is neither cultural nor hereditary, but demographic; the Church's centre exists wherever the people of God live. As the Pope travelled, the Catholic imagination has travelled with him, and the pressing concerns of the nations have become ever more deeply our own. The mystery of God is being revealed to us today with breathtaking freshness in terms of a Church without a geographic centre and a spirituality that transcends national and cultural boundaries. This might not have been the point the Pope intended to make as he travelled the globe, but one effect of his journeys has been to demythologize the location of Rome and to enlarge the theological and pastoral significance of the world's great population centres.

### *Signs from the heart of the world*

Yet there are secular points of light to mention as well as religious ones. Several years ago I was visiting a village church in India. On the table in the priest's kitchen sat a pitcher of milk with a cloth over it. Despite the protective net, ants had found their way into the milk. 'Why don't you set the pitcher in a pan of water?' I asked my friend. 'Because', he replied, 'the ants just build bridges, one over the other, so that they can cross to the pitcher.' I watched incredulously while he demonstrated. The ants patiently engineered their bridge to food and salvation. 'And there you have it,' the priest exclaimed, 'a parable in action! A few die that the colony might live. Like ants crossing over one another, the famished people of the world are going to make their way across rivers and oceans, across every obstacle rich nations set up, until they get what they need to survive.'

Two things that have worsened since John XXIII wrote his great social encyclicals are the condition of the poor and their numbers. No sign stands out so sharply as the plight of the world's destitute. The great migrations caused by tribal hatreds in Africa, or refugees displaced by ethnic violence and unemployment spilling across borders into Europe or the United States, are symptomatic both of the



sinfulness of the world and the determination of the poor to find or to create lasting sanctuaries. Anyone who watches the nightly newscasts or reads the daily newspaper cannot fail to answer the question 'Where is God speaking to us today?' with the words 'There, in the faces of our suffering sisters and brothers'. How could one ever separate the mystery of God from God's people? Given the gospel story, it would be unrealistic to think that the divine mystery would reveal itself in a manner that would not bring us directly into the lives and fortunes of communities of suffering, or that the Church's daily eucharistic remembrance of Jesus would not include, of necessity, a 'critical remembrance of suffering humanity'.<sup>12</sup> Discovering and experiencing the living God among those men and women who are languishing in the worlds figurative dungeons of poverty, racial hatred, exploitation and greed may be to understand, perhaps for the first time, why even the abode of death – the deepest darkness imaginable – is not impervious to God (Ps 139:8b).

*Solidarity: the globalization of the human spirit*

Perhaps no 'sign of the times' is more important than the fact that we are developing souls which reach out to embrace the world. Solidarity as both the consequence and the expression of having made a preferential option for the poor is fast becoming the premier Christian virtue of our time, generating new forms of asceticism and holiness.<sup>13</sup> The globalization of the economy is a precursor of the far more radical transformation which has started taking place within the human spirit. Powerful technological and economic forces may be tying men and women more closely to one another, but the globalization of the human spirit could well bring us to a new moral and spiritual threshold. Jesus' words about the poor being given the kingdom of God and the meek inheriting the earth sound more like a promise to be welcomed than a warning about impending judgement to the degree that our prayer and our politics are rooted in a solidarity with those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. Solidarity, in other words, gives rise to an experience of God which is distinctive. In experiencing God, one is also experiencing the life of God's people. The more realized our solidarity becomes, the more the people of God become the interior horizon within which every conversation with God takes place.

Compassion and solidarity, I would argue, deserve to be differentiated, although never separated. In an address to Polish pilgrims, John Paul II spoke of the need to reconsider solidarity as moral

behaviour and a virtue. Quoting what he had already written in *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, the Pope told the visitors:

[Solidarity] is not a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of so many people, both near and far. On the contrary, it is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say, to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all.<sup>14</sup>

Compassion (or mercy) is clearly a supreme gospel virtue (see Luke 6:36 and 10:37), but it often appears to be more of a reaction to particular instances of suffering than a state of mind and heart resulting from having identified oneself with the victims of history. Solidarity implies a crossing over, at least in one's loyalties and prayer, to the side of the poor. Economically secure Christians, for example, could experience compassion towards human beings in need without having undergone the interior transformation that comes from making a preferential option for the poor.

### ***Revelation is mostly ordinary***

The Church teaches that Scripture is inspired, yet there are many texts both of a religious and non-religious character which 'inspire' us even though they do not enjoy inspiration in the technical sense. For some people, revelation is primarily a language event. In reading a biblical text, a person is moved by the words of the text and in them discovers meaningfulness; the truth of God is 'revealed' on the sacred page. This sort of thing happens all the time, of course, apart from reading the Bible.

Consider for a moment the text of Matthew 25:31–46, the great judgement scene. We read the passage, think about its message and are moved by what the passage is saying to us. Perhaps we catch a new insight into the way God has identified with men and women in desperate conditions, or draw a connection between images in the passage and similar encounters we may have had with people in distress. The moment of revelation for us as readers could be simply the realization of the truth behind Jesus' words, a realization which stirs us to speak to God.

But we might also imagine any number of situations in which the message of the gospel story comes home to us forcefully in real life, and not just while quietly meditating on the gospel text. Coming face to face with an individual imprisoned, or bedridden, or panic-

stricken and away from home, or traumatized by hunger, we may receive an immediate awareness of the presence of the risen Jesus; or perhaps later, Emmaus-like, we come to recognize that we had actually encountered Jesus. The point is that revelation occurs endlessly in events, in actions and in everyday circumstances. For the most part the 'deeds of God' do not consist of stunning miracles and wonders; God's doing is an integral part of the ordinary, often messy situations of everyday life, which is exactly what St Ignatius recommends we think about at the end of the Exercises in the 'contemplation for attaining love'. Precisely for this reason we can consider the 'signs of the times' to be instances of revelation. Matthew could not have given us the graphic, moving description of the final judgement scene unless he had already discovered in real life the mysterious reality revealed in the story. And the same point could be illustrated in terms of many other elements in the gospel narratives. For those who are healthy (Lk 11:34), that is, for those who see and live by faith, the familiarity (and sometimes the opaqueness) of what they witness and listen to each day yields to the penetrating light of God's Word. Such people are not merely passive observers, dull listeners and unthinking actors in the world's daily drama. Rather, they are ever reading and reacting to the present moment.

For a believer, God's self-disclosure or self-communication usually happens in humble, ordinary events and circumstances. It is taking place continually in the lives of devout men and women who share our particular moment in history. The presence of the risen Christ associated with Scripture and sacrament does not displace the presence of God elsewhere, in other texts, in other symbols and rituals, and in other religious traditions. The grace of finding God in all things would be unthinkable if God's revealing action could be circumscribed by the intrinsic limitations of our theology or our spirituality, or false dichotomies between sanctuary and world.

But that puts things negatively. The conviction that God can be found in all things, even in suffering and the belly of death, is probably the central expression of the Easter experience, for the resurrection celebrates the abiding presence of God-in-Christ and life-giving hope. For those who have eyes for it, Easter is a sign for all times of divine solidarity with the human condition, a sign which is both promise and judgement. It is a promise to remain with us until 'the end of the age' (Mt 28:20), and it is a judgement against those whose preferential option is to stand anywhere except alongside

God's poor. After all, it was the *crucified* One who was raised from the dead.

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#### NOTES

1 Exx 15. See *Saint Ignatius of Loyola: personal writings*, translated with introduction and notes by Joseph A. Munitiz and Philip Endean (London: Penguin Books, 1996), p 286 (emphasis added). Ignatius was not the only saint to run into trouble, of course: both John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila had their share. See, for example, Gillian Ahlgren, *Teresa of Avila and the politics of sanctity* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1996).

2 See Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Origen: spirit and fire: a thematic anthology of his writings*, translated by Robert J. Daly SJ (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1984), pp 218–257.

3 *Christ: the experience of Jesus as Lord* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1980). My aim in this article is not to present a fully worked out theology of revelation. For that, one would best consult, e.g., Avery Dulles, *Models of revelation* (New York: Doubleday, 1983; reprinted by Orbis Books, 1992); Heinrich Fries, *Fundamental theology*, translated by Robert J. Daly SJ (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1996), pp 179–381; or Richard McBrien, *Catholicism* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994 (new edition)), pp 227–273.

4 This celebrated gospel phrase appears in the opening of paragraph 4 of Vatican II's *Pastoral constitution on the Church in the modern world*. And as the accompanying note to this paragraph in the volume *The documents of Vatican II* edited by Walter Abbott reminds us, this phrase was a favourite of John XXIII, especially in his encyclical *Pacem in terris*.

5 See Rahner's meditation on the word 'God' in *The content of faith: the best of Karl Rahner's theological writings*, edited by Karl Lehmann and Albert Raffelt, translation edited by Harvey D. Egan SJ (New York: Crossroad Publishing Co., 1992), pp 205–211.

6 Thomas Merton's 1961 reflections along this line make interesting reading in light of what has taken place in the Church and in the world over the past thirty-seven years. See *Turning toward the world: the journals of Thomas Merton* volume 4, edited by Victor A. Kramer (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), pp 138–139. Merton was here reacting to what he perceived to be the excessive confidence in Rahner's thinking about the future of Christianity.

7 In his book *Jesus and the victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), N. T. Wright takes the historical experience of Israel's exile as the controlling metaphor underneath Jesus' message of the kingdom of God. The return from exile thus becomes a way of signifying God's saving, liberating action on behalf of the people. While the memory of the Babylonian exile would have been more recent for Jesus, the memory of the exile in Egypt might have been more paradigmatic of God's liberating power.

8 I have developed this point in *To hear the word of God, listen to the world: the liberation of spirituality* (New York: Paulist Press, 1997), see pp 1–43.

9 The heading occurs in the encyclical above, nos 39, 75, 126 and 142. The document can be found in *The gospel of peace and justice: Catholic social teaching since Pope John*, presented by Joseph Gremillion (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1976).

10 Readers may recall that Thomas Merton picked up on this allegorical sense of the gospel passage in *The sign of Jonas* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Co., 1956). He wrote: 'The life of . . . every Christian is signed with the sign of Jonas, because we all live by the power of Christ's resurrection'. Then he added: 'But I feel that my own life is especially sealed with this great sign . . . because like Jonas himself I find myself travelling toward my destiny in the belly of a paradox' (pp 20–21). Later in the book Merton elaborated a little (pp 329–330). It is not likely, however, that Jesus himself would have taken the 'sign of Jonah' to be a death-resurrection symbol. In Merton's life, the real paradox may have been the constant tension he experienced between his desire for solitude and for solidarity; he was caught, prophet-like, between two very different worlds. In this sense, Merton remains one of the signs of our times.

11 See Daniel J. Harrington SJ, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1991), pp 243–246.

12 The phrase comes from Edward Schillebeeckx, *op. cit.*, pp 670ff.

13 There is no need to underscore for readers of *The Way* the critical importance of the notion of the option for the poor in contemporary theology and spirituality; the literature on this topic is extensive. One might consult, for example, Pedro Casaldàliga and José-María Vigil, *Political holiness: a spirituality of liberation*, translated by Paul Burns and Francis McDonagh (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1994; published also by Burns & Oates (1994) under the title *The spirituality of liberation*), pp 137–143; or Juan Luis Segundo, *Signs of the times: theological reflections*, translated by Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1993), pp 119–127 and 128–148.

14 The address can be found in the English edition of *L'Osservatore Romano* for 4 December 1989 (no 49, p 10).