

Preface

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The question of the social dimensions of the Gospel message is as ancient as the Gospel itself, going back to the testimony of Jesus. He called for personal conversion and for love of God and of one's neighbour to be put into practice, with all the consequences that this should have for the establishment of just and respectful relationships between people. From this arose the harsh reaction of a political power that was indistinguishable, at that time, from religious power. Theologically, the subject is rooted in the very heart of the Good News, for the proclamation of the reign of God is *already* present in history, though not *yet* in its plenitude, as the traditional expression puts it. This is what M.-D. Chenu was referring to when speaking of 'the law of incarnation' as an accurate interpretation of subjects such as the one we are discussing. Concerning as it does the tension between two 'poles' (the 'now' and the 'not yet'), it is not surprising that the greatest threat to our understanding of the social repercussions of the Gospel should come from the overestimation of one of these positions, or from the reduction to one of them alone. This has been witnessed throughout history.

There have been times in which the *now* of the kingdom of God has been accentuated to such a degree that the Church was almost absorbed within a society formed by Christianity, and there was a tendency – painting with a broad brush – to identify both with the historical realisation of the kingdom of God. I refer to the period when Christendom was formed, a period that lasted several centuries and that has left its imprint on the life and thought of Christianity. In politics, at the opposite extreme – although, paradoxically, with a similar theological mentality to one we have just discussed – the Church lived through moments in which that risk of identification of the kingdom of God with the here-and-now came from those who were striving for revolutionary change as a means to end social oppression, and who thus presented the renewal of society that they desired as implying nothing more nor less than the establishment of the kingdom of God's justice upon earth. Both positions – the first, something of great historical significance and which, indeed, lasted for centuries, and the second, the unrealised plan of a few – should rightly be rejected by a theology faithful to the Good News of Jesus.