

COMMENTARY ON THE “NOTIFICATION” REGARDING JON SOBRINO

Cristianisme i Justícia

THE NOTIFICATION	5
COMMENTARY ON THE NOTIFICATION	
1. On the “Methodological presuppositions”	17
2. The Divinity of Jesus Christ	24
3. The Incarnation of the Son of God	28
4. Jesus Christ and the Reign of God	32
5. The Self-Consciousness of Jesus	34
6. The Salvific Value of the Death of Jesus	36
Conclusions	38
FINAL REFLECTION	41
APPENDIX. TEXTS OF SOME BIBLE SCHOLARS	44

On March 14, 2007, the Roman Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) published a Notification concerning the works of Jon Sobrino *Jesucristo liberador* (1991), and *La fe en Jesucristo. Ensayo desde las víctimas* (1999), The Notification had been expected for some time, since it had already been indiscreetly announced a Curia cardinal. The document concludes that both works "contain notable discrepancies with the faith of the Church". The present Booklet seeks to analyze each of the six chapters of this document. To assure greater fidelity and sincere respect for the interlocutor, we first offer the complete text of the CDF and then, immediately following, our reflections on each of the chapters.

THE NOTIFICATION

* The English translation of *Jesucristo liberador* is: *Jesus the Liberator: A Historical-Theological View*, (Orbis Books, New York, 1993, 2003). All citations will be taken from the English version.

** The English translation of *La fe en Jesucristo* is: *Christ the Liberator: A View from the Victims*, (Orbis Books, New York, 2001). All citations will be taken from the English version.

CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH

NOTIFICATION

on the works of Father Jon SOBRINO, SJ:

*Jesucristo liberador. Lectura histórico-teológica de Jesús de Nazaret (Madrid, 1991)**
*y La fe en Jesucristo. Ensayo desde las víctimas (San Salvador, 1999)***

Introduction

1. After a preliminary examination of the books, *Jesucristo liberador. Lectura histórico-teológica de Jesús de Nazaret (Jesus the Liberator)* and *La fe en Jesucristo. Ensayo desde las víctimas (Christ the Liberator)*, by Father Jon Sobrino, SJ, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, because of certain imprecisions and errors found in them, decided to proceed to a more thorough study of these works in October 2001. Given the wide distribution of these writings and their use in seminaries and other centers of study, particularly in Latin America, it was decided to employ the "urgent examination" as regulated by articles 23-27 of *Agendi Ratio in Doctrinarum Examine*.

As a result of this examination, in July 2004 a list of erroneous or dangerous propositions found in the abovementioned books was sent to the Author through the Reverend Father Peter Hans Kolvenbach, SJ, Superior General of the Society of Jesus.

In March of 2005, Father Jon Sobrino sent a *Response to the text of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith* to the Congregation. This *Response* was studied in the Ordinary Session of the Congregation on 23 November 2005. It was determined that, although the author had modified his thought somewhat on several points, the *Response* did not prove satisfactory since, in substance, the errors already cited in the list of erroneous propositions still remained in this text. Although the preoccupation of the Author for the plight of the poor is admirable, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith has the obligation to indicate that the aforementioned works of Father Sobrino contain notable discrepancies with the faith of the Church.

For this reason, it was decided to publish this *Notification*, in order to offer the faithful a secure criterion, founded upon the doctrine of the Church, by which to judge the affirmations contained in these books or in other publications of the Author. One must note that on some occasions the erroneous propositions are situated within the context of other expressions which would seem to contradict them¹, but this is not sufficient to justify these propositions. The Congregation does not intend to judge the subjective intentions of the Author, but rather has the duty to call to attention to certain propositions which are not in conformity with the doctrine of the Church. These propositions regard: 1) the methodological presuppositions on which the Author bases his theological reflection, 2) the Divinity of Jesus Christ, 3) the Incarnation of the Son of God, 4) the relationship between Jesus Christ and the Kingdom of God, 5) the Self-consciousness of Jesus, and 6) the salvific value of his Death.

I. Methodological Presuppositions

2. In his book *Jesus the Liberator: A Historical-Theological View*, Father Sobrino affirms: "*Latin American Christology... identifies its setting, in the sense of a real situation, as the poor of this world, and this situation is what must be present in and permeate any particular setting in which Christology is done*" (*Jesus the Liberator*, 28). Further, "*the poor in the community question Christological faith and give it its fundamental direction*" (*Ibidem*, 30), and "*the Church of the poor... is the ecclesial setting of Christology because it is a world shaped by the poor*" (*Ibidem*, 31). "*The social setting is thus the most crucial for the faith, the most crucial in shaping the thought pattern of Christology, and what requires and encourages the epistemological break*" (*Ibidem*).

While such a preoccupation for the poor and oppressed is admirable, in these quotations the "Church of the poor" assumes the fundamental position which properly belongs to the faith of the Church. It is only in this ecclesial faith that all other theological foundations find their correct epistemological setting.

The ecclesial foundation of Christology may not be identified with "the Church of the poor", but is found rather in the apostolic faith transmitted through the Church for all generations. The theologian, in his particular vocation in the Church, must continually bear in mind that theology is the science of the faith. Other points of departure for theological work run the risk of arbitrariness and end in a misrepresentation of the same faith².

3. Although the Author affirms that he considers the theological fonts "normative", the lack of due attention that he pays to them gives rise to concrete problems in his theology which we will discuss below. In particular, the New Testament affirmations concerning the divinity of Christ, his filial consciousness and the salvific value of his death, do not in fact always receive the attention due them. The sections below will treat these specific questions.

The manner in which the author treats the major Councils of the early Church is equally notable, for according to him, these Councils have moved progressively away from the contents of the New Testament. For example, he affirms: "*While these texts are useful theologically, besides being normative, they are also limited and even dangerous, as is widely recognized today*" (*Christ the Liberator*, 221). Certainly, it is necessary to recognize the limited character of dogmatic formulations, which do not express nor are able to express everything contained in the mystery of faith, and must be interpreted in the light of Sacred Scripture and Tradition. But there is no foundation for calling these formulas dangerous, since they are authentic interpretations of Revelation.

Father Sobrino considers the dogmatic development of the first centuries of the Church including the great Councils to be ambiguous and even negative. Although he does not deny the normative character of the dogmatic formulations, neither does he recognize in them any value except in the cultural milieu in which these formulations were developed. He does not take into account the fact that the *transtemporal* subject of the faith is the believing Church, and that the pronouncements of the first Councils have been accepted and lived by the entire ecclesial community. The Church continues to profess the Creed which arose from the Councils of Nicea (AD 325) and Constantinople I (AD 381). The first four Ecumenical

Councils are accepted by the great majority of Churches and Ecclesial Communities in both the East and West. If these Councils used the terminology and concepts expressive of the culture of the time, it was not in order to be conformed to it. The Councils do not signify a hellenization of Christianity but rather the contrary. Through the inculturation of the Christian message, Greek culture itself underwent a transformation from within and was able to be used as an instrument for the expression and defense of biblical truth.

II. The Divinity of Jesus Christ

4. A number of Father Sobrino's affirmations tend to diminish the breadth of the New Testament passages which affirm that Jesus is God: "[*The New Testament*] makes clear that he was intimately bound up with God, which meant that his reality had to be expressed in some way as a reality that is of God (cf. Jn 20:28)" (*Christ the Liberator*, 115). In reference to John 1:1, he affirms: "Strictly speaking, this *logos* is not yet said to be God (consubstantial with the Father), but something is claimed for him that will have great importance for reaching this conclusion: his preexistence. This does not signify something purely temporal but relates him to the creation and links the *logos* with action specific to the divinity" (*Christ the Liberator*, 257). According to the Author, the New Testament does not clearly affirm the divinity of Jesus, but merely establishes the presuppositions for it: "*The New Testament... contains eexpressions that contain the seed of what will produce confession of the divinity of Christ in the strict sense*" (*Ibidem*). "*All this means that at the outset Jesus was not spoken of as God, nor was divinity a term applied to him; this happened only after a considerable interval of believing explication, almost certainly after the fall of Jerusalem*" (*Ibidem*, 114).

To maintain that John 20:28 affirms that Jesus is "of God" is clearly erroneous, in as much as the passage itself refers to Jesus as "Lord" and "God." Similarly, John 1:1 says that the Word is God. Many other texts speak of Jesus as Son and as Lord³. The divinity of Jesus has been the object of the Church's faith from the beginning, long before his consubstantiality with the Father was proclaimed by the Council of Nicea. The fact that this term was not used does not mean that the divinity of Jesus was not affirmed in the strict sense, contrary to what the Author seems to imply.

Father Sobrino does not deny the divinity of Jesus when he proposes that it is found in the New Testament only "in seed" and was formulated dogmatically only after many years of believing reflection. Nevertheless he fails to affirm Jesus' divinity with sufficient clarity. This reticence gives credence to the suspicion that the historical development of dogma, which Sobrino describes as ambiguous, has arrived at the formulation of Jesus' divinity without a clear continuity with the New Testament.

But the divinity of Jesus is clearly attested to in the passages of the New Testament to which we have referred. The numerous Conciliar declarations in this regard⁴ are in continuity with that which the New Testament affirms explicitly and not only "in seed". The confession of the divinity of Jesus Christ has been an absolutely essential part of the faith of the Church since her origins. It is explicitly witnessed to since the New Testament.

III. The Incarnation of the Son of God

5. Father Sobrino writes: "*From a dogmatic point of view, we have to say, without any reservation, that the Son (the second person of the Trinity) took on the whole reality of Jesus and, although the dogmatic formula never explains the manner of this being affected by the human dimension, the thesis is radical. The Son experienced Jesus' humanity, existence in history, life, destiny, and death*" (*Jesus the Liberator*, 242).

In this passage, the Author introduces a distinction between the Son and Jesus which suggests to the reader the presence of two subjects in Christ: the Son assumes the reality of Jesus; the Son experiences the humanity, the life, the destiny, and the death of Jesus. It is not clear that the Son is Jesus and that Jesus is the Son. In a literal reading of these passages, Father Sobrino reflects the so-called theology of the *homo assumptus*, which is incompatible with the Catholic faith which affirms the unity of the person of Jesus Christ in two natures, divine and human, according to the formulations of the Council of Ephesus,⁵ and above all of the Council of Chalcedon which said: "...we unanimously teach and confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in divinity and perfect in humanity, the same truly God and truly man composed of rational soul and body, the same one in being with the Father as to the divinity and one in being with us as to the humanity, like us in all things but sin (cf. Heb 4:15). The same was begotten from the Father before the ages as to the divinity and in the latter days for us and our salvation was born as to His humanity from Mary the Virgin Mother of God; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, only-begotten, acknowledged in two natures which undergo no confusion, no change, no division, no separation"⁶. Similarly, Pope Pius XII declared in his encyclical *Sempiternus Rex*: "... the council of Chalcedon in full accord with that of Ephesus, clearly asserts that both natures are united in 'One Person and subsistence', and rules out the placing of two individuals in Christ, as if some one man, completely autonomous in himself, had been taken up and placed by the side of the Word"⁷.

6. Another difficulty with the Christological view of Father Sobrino arises from an insufficient comprehension of the *communicatio idiomatum*, which he describes in the following way: "*the limited human is predicated of God, but the unlimited divine is not predicated of Jesus*" (*Christ the Liberator*, 223, cf. 332-333).

In reality, the phrase *communicatio idiomatum*, that is, the possibility of referring the properties of divinity to humanity and vice versa, is the immediate consequence of the unity of the person of Christ "in two natures" affirmed by the Council of Chalcedon. By virtue of this possibility, the Council of Ephesus has already defined that Mary was *Theotokos*: "*If anyone does not confess that Emmanuel is truly God and, therefore, that the holy Virgin is the Mother of God (theotokos) since she begot according to the flesh the Word of God made flesh, let him be anathema*"⁸. "*If anyone ascribes separately to two persons or hypostases the words which in the evangelical and apostolic writings are either spoken of Christ by the saints or are used by Christ about Himself, and applies some to a man considered by himself, apart from the Word, and others, because they befit God, solely to the Word who is from God the Father, let him be anathema*"⁹. As can easily be deduced from these texts, the *communicatio idiomatum* is applied in both senses: the human is predicated of God and the divine of man. Already the

New Testament affirms that Jesus is Lord¹⁰, and that all things are created through him¹¹. In Christian terminology, it is possible to say that Jesus is God, who is creator and omnipotent. The Council of Ephesus sanctioned the use of calling Mary Mother of God. It is therefore incorrect to maintain that "the unlimited divine" is not predicated of Jesus. Sobrino's affirmation to the contrary is understandable only within the context of a *homo assumptus* Christology in which the unity of the person of Jesus is not clear, and therefore it would be impossible to predicate divine attributes of a human person. However, this Christology is in no way compatible with the teaching of the Councils of Ephesus and Chalcedon on the unity of the person in two natures. Thus, the understanding of the *communicatio idiomatum* which the Author presents reveals an erroneous conception of the mystery of the Incarnation and of the unity of the person of Jesus Christ.

IV. Jesus Christ and the Kingdom of God

7. Father Sobrino advances a peculiar view of the relationship between Jesus and the Kingdom of God. This is a point of special interest in his works. According to the Author, the person of Jesus as mediator cannot be absolutized, but must be contemplated in his relatedness to the Kingdom of God, which is apparently considered to be something distinct from Jesus himself: "*I shall analyze this historical relatedness in detail later, but I want to say here that this reminder is important because of the consequences [...] when Christ the mediator is made absolute and there is no sense of his constitutive relatedness to what is mediated, the Kingdom of God*" (*Jesus the Liberator*, 16). "*We must first distinguish between the mediator and the mediation of God. The Kingdom of God, formally speaking, is nothing other than the accomplishment of God's will for this world, which we call mediation. This mediation [...] is associated with a person (or group) who proclaims it and initiates it: this we call the mediator. In this sense we can and must say, according to faith, that the definitive, ultimate, and eschatological mediator of the Kingdom of God has already appeared: Jesus. [...] From this standpoint, we can also appreciate Origen's fine definition of Christ as the *autobasileia* of God, the Kingdom of God in person: important words that well describe the finality of the personal mediator of the Kingdom, but dangerous if they equate Christ with the reality of the Kingdom*" (*Jesus the Liberator*, 108). "*Mediation and mediator are, then, essentially related, but they are not the same thing. There is always a Moses and a promised land, and Archbishop Romero and a dream of justice. Both things, together, express the whole of the will of God, while remaining two distinct things*" (*Ibidem*). On the other hand, Jesus' condition as mediator comes solely from the fact of his humanity: "*Christ does not, then, derive his possibility of being mediator from anything added to his humanity; it belongs to him by his practice of being human*" (*Christ the Liberator*, 135).

The Author certainly affirms a special relationship between Jesus (mediator) and the Kingdom of God (that which is mediated), in as far as Jesus is the definitive, ultimate, and eschatological mediator of the Kingdom. But, in these cited passages, Jesus and the Kingdom are distinguished in a way that the link between them is deprived of its unique and particular content. It does not correctly explain the essential nexus that exists between *mediator* and *me-*

diation, to use his words. In addition, by affirming that the possibility of being mediator belongs to Christ from the exercise of his humanity, he excludes the fact that his condition as Son of God has relevance for Jesus' mediatory mission.

It is insufficient to speak of an intimate connection, or of a constitutive relatedness between Jesus and the Kingdom, or of the finality of the mediator [*ultimidad del mediador*], if this suggests something that is distinct from Jesus himself. In a certain sense, Jesus Christ and the Kingdom are identified: in the person of Jesus the Kingdom has already been made present. This identity has been placed in relief since the patristic period¹². In his encyclical *Redemptoris Missio*, Pope John Paul II affirms: "*The preaching of the early Church was centered on the proclamation of Jesus Christ, with whom the kingdom was identified*"¹³. "*Christ not only proclaimed the kingdom, but in him the kingdom itself became present and was fulfilled*"¹⁴. "*The kingdom of God is not a concept, a doctrine, or a program [...], but it is before all else a person with the face and name of Jesus of Nazareth, the image of the invisible God. If the kingdom is separated from Jesus, it is no longer the kingdom of God which he revealed*"¹⁵.

On the other hand, the singularity and the unicity of the mediation of Christ has always been affirmed by the Church. On account of his condition as the "only begotten Son of God", Jesus is the "definitive self-revelation of God"¹⁶. For that reason, his mediation is unique, singular, universal, and insuperable: "...one can and must say that Jesus Christ has a significance and a value for the human race and its history, which are unique and singular, proper to him alone, exclusive, universal, and absolute. Jesus is, in fact, the Word of God made man for the salvation of all"¹⁷.

V. The Self-consciousness of Jesus

8. Citing Leonardo Boff, Father Sobrino affirms that "*Jesus was an extraordinary believer and had faith. Faith was Jesus' mode of being*" (*Jesus the Liberator*, 154). And for his own part he adds: "*This faith describes the totality of the life of Jesus*" (*Ibidem*, 157). The Author justifies his position citing the text of Hebrews 12:2: "*Tersely and with a clarity unparalleled in the New Testament, the letter says that Jesus was related to the mystery of God in faith. Jesus is the one who has first and most fully lived faith (12:2)*" (*Christ the Liberator*, 136-137). He further adds: "*With regard to faith, Jesus in his life is presented as a believer like ourselves, our brother in relation to God, since he was not spared having to pass through faith. But he is also presented as an elder brother because he lived faith as its 'pioneer and perfecter' (12:2). He is the model, the one on whom we have to keep our eyes fixed in order to live out our own faith*" (*Ibidem*, 138).

These citations do not clearly show the unique singularity of the filial relationship of Jesus with the Father; indeed they tend to exclude it. Considering the whole of the New Testament it is not possible to sustain that Jesus was "a believer like ourselves". The Gospel of John speaks of Jesus' "vision" of the Father: "*Not that anyone has seen the Father except the one who is from God; he has seen the Father*"¹⁸. This unique and singular intimacy between Jesus and the Father is equally evident in the Synoptic Gospels¹⁹.

The filial and messianic consciousness of Jesus is the direct consequence of his ontology as Son of God made man. If Jesus were a believer like ourselves, albeit in an exemplary manner, he would not be able to be the true Revealer showing us the face of the Father. This point has an evident connection both with what is said above in number IV concerning the relationship between Jesus and the Kingdom, and what will be said in VI below concerning the salvific value that Jesus attributed to his death. For Father Sobrino, in fact, the unique character of the mediation and revelation of Jesus disappears: he is thus reduced to the condition of "revealer" that we can attribute to the prophets and mystics.

Jesus, the Incarnate Son of God, enjoys an intimate and immediate knowledge of his Father, a "vision" that certainly goes beyond the vision of faith. The hypostatic union and Jesus' mission of revelation and redemption require the vision of the Father and the knowledge of his plan of salvation. This is what is indicated in the Gospel texts cited above.

Various recent magisterial texts have expressed this doctrine: "*But the knowledge and love of our Divine Redeemer, of which we were the object from the first moment of His Incarnation, exceed all that the human intellect can hope to grasp. For hardly was He conceived in the womb of the Mother of God when He began to enjoy the Beatific Vision*"²⁰.

Though in somewhat different terminology, Pope John Paul II insists on this vision of the Father: "*His [Jesus'] eyes remain fixed on the Father. Precisely because of the knowledge and experience of the Father which he alone has, even at this moment of darkness he sees clearly the gravity of sin and suffers because of it. He alone, who sees the Father and rejoices fully in him, can understand completely what it means to resist the Father's love by sin*"²¹.

Likewise, the Catechism of the Catholic Church speaks of the immediate knowledge which Jesus has of the Father: "*Such is first of all the case with the intimate and immediate knowledge that the Son of God made man has of his Father*"²². "*By its union to the divine wisdom in the person of the Word incarnate, Christ enjoyed in his human knowledge the fullness of understanding of the eternal plans he had come to reveal*"²³.

The relationship between Jesus and God is not correctly expressed by saying Jesus was a believer like us. On the contrary, it is precisely the intimacy and the direct and immediate knowledge which he has of the Father that allows Jesus to reveal to men the mystery of divine love. Only in this way can Jesus bring us into divine love.

VI. The Salvific Value of the Death of Jesus

9. In some texts some assertions of Father Sobrino make one think that, for him, Jesus did not attribute a salvific value to his own death: "*Let it be said from the start that the historical Jesus did not interpret his death in terms of salvation, in terms of soteriological models later developed by the New Testament, such as expiatory sacrifice or vicarious satisfaction [...]. In other words, there are no grounds for thinking that Jesus attributed an absolute transcendent meaning to his own death, as the New Testament did later*" (*Jesus the Liberator*, 201). "*In the Gospel texts it is impossible to find an unequivocal statement of the meaning Jesus attached to his own death*" (*Ibidem*, 202). "*...Jesus went to his death with confidence and saw it as a fi-*

nal act of service, more in the manner of an effective example that would motivate others than as a mechanism of salvation for others. To be faithful to the end is what it means to be human" (Ibidem, 204).

This affirmation of Father Sobrino seems, at first glance, limited to the idea that Jesus did not attribute a salvific value to his death using the categories that the New Testament later employed. But later he affirms that there is in fact no data to suggest that Jesus granted an absolute transcendent sense to his own death. The Author maintains only that Jesus went to his death confidently, and attributed to it an exemplary value for others. In this way, the numerous passages in the New Testament which speak of the salvific value of the death of Christ are deprived of any reference to the consciousness of Christ during his earthly life.²⁴ Gospel passages in which Jesus attributes to his death a significance for salvation are not adequately taken into account; in particular, Mark 10:45,²⁵: "*the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many*"; and the words of the institution of the Eucharist: "*This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many*"²⁶. Here again, the difficulty about Father Sobrino's use of the New Testament appears. In his writing, the New Testament data gives way to a hypothetical historical reconstruction that is erroneous.

10. The problem, however, is not simply confined to Jesus' consciousness about his death or the significance he gave to it. Father Sobrino also advances his point of view about the soteriological significance that should be attributed to the death of Christ: "*[I]ts importance for salvation consists in the fact that what God wants human beings to be has appeared on earth [...]. The Jesus who is faithful even to the cross is salvation, then, at least in this sense: he is the revelation of the homo verus, the true and complete human being, not only of the vere homo, that is of a human being in whom, as a matter of fact, all the characteristics of a true human nature are present [...]. The very fact that true humanity has been revealed, contrary to all expectations, is in itself good news and therefore is already in itself salvation [...]. On this principle, Jesus' cross as the culmination of his whole life can be understood as bringing salvation. This saving efficacy is shown more in the form of an exemplary cause than of an efficient cause. But this does not mean that it is not effective [...]. It is not efficient causality, but symbolic causality" [causalidad ejemplar] (*Jesus the Liberator*, 229-230).*

Of course there is great value in the efficacious example of Christ, as is mentioned explicitly in the New Testament²⁷. This is a dimension of soteriology which should not be forgotten. At the same time, however, it is not possible to reduce the efficacy of the death of Jesus to that of an example or, in the words of the Author, to the appearance of the *homo verus*, faithful to God even unto the cross. In the cited text, Father Sobrino uses phrases such as "at least in this sense" and "is shown more in the form," which seem to leave the door open to other considerations. However, in the end this door is closed with an explicit negation: "it is not efficient causality but symbolic causality" [causalidad ejemplar]. Redemption thus seems reduced to the appearance of the *homo verus*, manifested in fidelity unto death. The death of Christ is *exemplum* and not *sacramentum* (gift). This reduces redemption to moralism. The Christological difficulties already noted in the discussion of the mystery of the Incarnation and the relationship with the Kingdom appear here anew. Only Jesus' humanity comes into play, not the Son of God made man for us and for our salvation. The affirmations of the New

Testament, Tradition, and the Magisterium of the Church concerning the efficacy of the redemption and salvation brought about by Christ cannot be reduced to the good example that Jesus gives us. The mystery of the Incarnation, Death and Resurrection of Jesus, the Son of God become man, is the unique and inexhaustible font of the redemption of humanity, made efficacious in the Church through the sacraments.

The Council of Trent, in its Decree on Justification, states: "*When the blessed 'fullness of time' had come (Eph 1:10; Gal 4:4), the heavenly Father, 'the Father of all mercies and the God of all comfort' (2 Cor 1:3), sent his own Son Jesus Christ to mankind ... to redeem the Jews, who are under the Law, and the Gentiles 'who were not pursuing righteousness' (Rom 9:30), that all 'might receive adoption as sons' (Gal 4:5). God has 'put Him forward as an expiation by His Blood, to be received by faith' (Rom 3:25), for our sins and 'not for our sins only, but also for the sins of the whole world' (1 Jn 2:2)*"²⁸.

This same decree affirms that the meritorious cause of justification is Jesus, the only Son of God, "*who, 'while we were still sinners' (Rom 5:10), 'out of the great love with which He loved us' (Eph 2:4) merited for us justification by His most holy passion and the wood of the cross, and made satisfaction for us to God the Father*"²⁹.

The Second Vatican Council teaches: "*In the human nature united to Himself the Son of God, by overcoming death through His own death and resurrection, redeemed man and remolded him into a new creation (cf. Gal 6:15; 2 Cor 5:17). By communicating His Spirit, Christ made His brothers, called together from all nations, mystically the components of His own Body. In that Body the life of Christ is poured into the believers who, through the sacraments, are united in a hidden and real way to Christ who suffered and was glorified*"³⁰.

On this point, the Catechism of the Catholic Church says: "*The Scriptures had foretold this divine plan of salvation through the putting to death of 'the righteous one, my Servant' as a mystery of universal redemption, that is, as the ransom that would free men from the slavery of sin. Citing a confession of faith that he himself had 'received', St. Paul professes that 'Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures' (1 Cor 15:3). In particular Jesus' redemptive death fulfils Isaiah's prophecy of the suffering Servant. Indeed Jesus himself explained the meaning of his life and death in the light of God's suffering Servant*"³¹.

Conclusion

11. Theology arises from obedience to the impulse of truth which seeks to be communicated, and from the love that desires to know ever better the One who loves - God himself - whose goodness we have recognized in the act of faith³². For this reason, theological reflection cannot have a foundation other than the faith of the Church. Only starting from ecclesial faith, in communion with the Magisterium, can the theologian acquire a deeper understanding of the Word of God contained in Scripture and transmitted by the living Tradition of the Church³³.

Thus the truth revealed by God himself in Jesus Christ, and transmitted by the Church, constitutes the ultimate normative principle of theology³⁴, Nothing else may surpass it. In its

constant reference to this perennial spring, theology is a font of authentic newness and light for people of good will. Theological investigation will bear ever more abundant fruit for the good of the whole People of God and all humanity, the more it draws from the living stream which - thanks to the action of the Holy Spirit - proceeds from the Apostles and has been enriched by the faithful reflection of past generations. It is the Holy Spirit who leads the Church into the fullness of truth³⁵, and it is only through docility to this "gift from above" that theology is truly ecclesial and in service to the truth.

The purpose of this *Notification* is precisely to make known to all the faithful the fruitfulness of theological reflection that does not fear being developed from within the living stream of ecclesial Tradition.

The Supreme Pontiff Benedict XVI, at the Audience granted to the undersigned Cardinal Prefect on October 13, 2006, approved this Notification, adopted in the Ordinary Session of this Congregation, and ordered it to be published.

Rome, from the Offices of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, November 26, 2006, the Feast of Christ, King of the Universe.

William Cardinal LEVADA *Prefect.*

Angelo AMATO, SDB Titular Archbishop of Sila, *Secretary.*

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- 1 Cf. for example, *infra* n. 6.
 - 2 Cf. Second Vatican Council Decree *Optatum Totius*, 16; John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Fides et Ratio*, 65: AAS 91 (1999), 5-88.
 - 3 Cf. 1 Thes 1:10; Phil 2:5-11; 1 Cor 12:3; Rom 1:3-4, 10:9; Col 2:9, etc.
 - 4 Cf. Councils of Nicea, DH 125; Constantinople, DH 150; Ephesus, DH 250-263; Chalcedon, DH 301-302.
 - 5 Cf. DH 252-263.
 - 6 Chalcedon, *Symbolum Chalcedonense*, DH 301.
 - 7 Pius XII, Encyclical Letter *Sempiternus Rex*: AAS 43 (1951), 638; DH 3905.
 - 8 Council of Ephesus, *Anathematismi Cyrilli Alex.*, DH 252.
 - 9 *Ibidem*, DH 255.
 - 10 Cf. 1 Cor 12:3; Phil 2:11.
 - 11 Cf. 1 Cor 8:6.
 - 12 Cf. Origen, *In Mt. Hom.*, 14:7; Tertulian, *Adv. Marcionem*, IV 8; Hilary of Poitiers, *Com. in Mt.* 12:17.
 - 13 John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio*, 16: AAS 83 (1991), 249-340.
 - 14 *Ibidem*, 18.
 - 15 *Ibidem*.
 - 16 *Ibidem*, 5.
 - 17 CDF, Declaration *Dominus Iesus*, 15: AAS 92 (2000), 742-765.
 - 18 *Jn* 6:46; Cf. also *Jn* 1:18.
 - 19 Cf. Mt 11:25-27; Lk 10:21-22.
 - 20 Pius XII, Encyclical Letter *Mystici Corporis*, 75: AAS (1943) 230; DH 3812.
 - 21 John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 26: AAS 93 (2001), 266-309.
 - 22 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 473.
 - 23 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 474.
 - 24 Cf., for example, Rom 3:25; 2 Cor 5:21; 1 Jn 2:2, etc.
 - 25 Cf. also Mt 20:28.
 - 26 *Mk* 14:24; cf. *Mt* 26:28; *Lk* 22:20.
 - 27 Cf. *Jn* 13:15; 1 Pt 2:21.
 - 28 Council of Trent, Decree *De justificatione*, DH 1522.
 - 29 *Ibidem*, DH1529; cf. DH 1560.
 - 30 Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, 7.
 - 31 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 601.
 - 32 Cf. CDF, Instruction *Donum Veritatis*, 7: AAS 82 (1990), 1550-1570.
 - 33 Cf. *Ibidem*, 6.
 - 34 Cf. *Ibidem*, 10.
 - 35 Cf. *Jn* 16,13.

COMMENTARY ON THE NOTIFICATION

1. ON THE "METHODOLOGICAL PRESUPPOSITIONS"

1.1. Affirmations of Sobrino

The Notification discusses the following four affirmations: a) the poor as *a substantive reality are the setting of (Latin American) Christology* that must be *present in any concrete setting* where Christology is done (p. 47); b) this means that "the poor *raise questions* and also *offer a fundamental direction*" (p. 50); c) the poor are the "*ecclesial setting of Christology*"; and d) "the social setting is, then, what is most decisive for faith, what is most decisive for configuring the Christological *way of thinking* and what both requires and facilitates the epistemological break" (p. 52).

1.2. Explanation of these affirmations

First of all, it seems to us that these affirmations do nothing more than establish as a source of theological knowledge five New Testament teachings:

1. *The poor are the proprietors of "God's project"* ("for theirs is the Kingdom": Luke 6,20). For this reason Saint Ignatius of Loyola wrote: "His friends and chosen ones, beginning with his most holy Mother and the apostles ...

were commonly poor people. ... The poor are so great in the divine presence that it was mainly for them that Jesus Christ was sent to earth. ... So much did Jesus Christ prefer them over the rich that he decided to choose the whole of the most holy college [of apostles] from among the poor and to live and converse with them; he desired to leave them as princes of the Church and constitute them as *judges over* the twelve tribes of Israel, that is, *over all the faithful*. Poor people were his *advisers*, so exalted is their state" (*Letter to the Padua community*). It does not seem, then, that those poor people whom Jesus called proprietors of the Kingdom and whom Saint Ignatius called God's "advisers" would be, for a theologian, deficient aids for interpreting the faith; they at least should be a better hermeneutical aid than those of whom the gospel says: "Woe to you that are rich".

2. *The encounter with the poor is the decisive place of the encounter with God*. The words "You did it unto me" are not spoken of those who "performed miracles" or who made their squares available for preaching, but of those who gave food to the hungry, those who visited the prisoners and the sick, etc. (Matthew 25,31 ff.). These words dictating the ultimate fate of

human beings do not simply enunciate a supererogatory ethical attitude that “deserves respect”, as the Notification claims; they speak rather of an encounter with God.

3. *The signs for recognizing the one sent by God are good news for the poor, and hope for those who have no hope* (“the lame, the blind, the deaf” in the messianic language of Isaiah: Matthew 11,2 ff.). Only with great difficulty can any reflection be done about the Christ of God if no heed is paid to these signs that identify him.

4. The poor and the oppressed of the earth constitute today the visages of Christ crucified, as was taught by the Latin American Bishops’ Assembly of Puebla, over which John Paul II presided in 1979 (see no. 31 ff.). Therefore, if theology is an ecclesial discipline and the Church can (and must!) define itself as a “Church of the poor” (John XXIII), then it appears legitimate to project onto the poor something of the Pauline theology of the cross: “*I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified*” (1 Cor 2,2). Although it might be said that this Pauline affirmation is polemical and, in this sense, unilateral, it is impossible to prescind from it in doing theology. A theology apart from the cross would not be Christian, even though the cross does not exhaust the whole thematic of Christology.

5. The reason for such a position is that Christology is not simply a metaphysical reflection on the abstract possibility of God becoming human, but, over and above this, it is a reflection on *the God made human who “though he was rich, yet for our sake became poor, so that by his poverty we might become rich”* (2 Cor 8,9).

Disregarding all these biblical principles of Christological hermeneutics would leave theologians open to the Protestant accusation that the Catholic Church elevates the Magisterium above the Word of God. This accusation has been rejected often by the Catholic Church, and we are absolutely sure that the Roman Curia would reject it also.

Moreover, the question of theological settings is well known in the theological tradition, at least since Melchor Cano (16th century). *These theological settings are of different kinds*: some are “proper” and can be fundamental, such as scripture, tradition and the Church itself; some are “interpretative”, such as the Councils, the Church Fathers and the Magisterium; and others are “derived” (*alieni*), such as natural reason, philosophy and history (see D.Th.C. IX, 712-747). If history is already a classic “theological setting”, there can be no doubt that the enormous wound of poverty and misery configures for us today the very shape of history. Melchor Cano argued that trying to do theology only from the former kind of settings (proper and interpretative) was characteristic of “*pia rusticitas*”, a kind of pious illiteracy. Some modern theologians have even added other theological settings, such as art (e.g., M. D. Chenu), and this was recognized by John Paul II in his *Letter to Artists*.

All these considerations make it clear that *it is both possible and Christian to speak of the poor as a theological setting for some Christologies*. The fact is that expressions such as “the hermeneutic privilege of the poor” or “the authority of the victims” did not originate with the theology of liberation, but rather with the theology of our developed world.

In addition to such theological matters, however, we should observe that today some 20% of humankind (mostly in the Christian nations) amass more than 80% of the planet's wealth, thus consigning to poverty and exclusion nearly two-thirds of the earth's population, that is, more than three billion human beings who are children of God and whom we Christians confess to be "recapitulated in Christ". Until the 18th century the level of wealth in the richer nations of the world was approximately two to three times greater than in the poorer ones; today (according to different calculations) the level of wealth is between sixty and ninety times greater in the richer nations as compared to the poorer ones.

These conditions are not chosen by us but are rather imposed by the reality of God's world, so that in doing theology we cannot ignore them or adopt a neutrality that sees no need to take them into account. To do so would run the risk of creating a theology that effectively negates the six principles mentioned above. That would be very grave error indeed, for such a way of proceeding would not be understood by the faithful and would produce scandal and discredit for the Church.

1.3. The Roman Notification's criticisms of these affirmations

The CDF first disallows Sobrino's confession by alleging that "the ecclesial foundation of Christology may not be identified with 'the Church of the poor', but is found rather in the apostolic faith transmitted through the Church", and giving as the reason for this that "theology is the science of the faith".

The CDF argues, secondly, that Sobrino's false theological setting underlies all the accusations contained in the document.

Finally, the CDF refers to three such accusations right in the introduction, leaving the others for the following chapters. These three concern Sobrino's statement about the dangerous aspects of the dogmatic formulas of Christology, for which statement, according to the CDF, "there is no foundation". Sobrino is also criticized for considering that the dogmatic development was "ambiguous and even negative" and so has produced a Hellenization of Christianity.

1.4. Commentary on these criticisms

1. We agree with what the CDF says about the faith transmitted by the Church as the setting for Christology. It seems to us, though, that such a position does not negate the earlier affirmations of Sobrino since the two groups of affirmations are not contradictory: they are what in logic is called "sub-contrary propositions". The reason they do not contradict one another is that "the eminent dignity of the poor in the Church" (to use the well-known phrase of Bishop Bossuet) *forms part of that ecclesial setting for Christology*. Read in the light of that eminent dignity, the CDF's comment about how "admirable... [Sobrino's] preoccupation for the poor and oppressed is" sounds rather like derogatory praise.

On the other hand, the term "science" as applied to theology cannot be understood in the same univocal (and not analogous) sense as the mathematical or experimental sciences. Such an understanding would deprive theological reflection of all

spiritual experience and of what is understood as “wisdom” as opposed to mere knowledge. Theology would thus become a dead letter that does not enliven. Such a procedure would be against what Pope Gregory IX was already recommending to theologians in the 13th century: that they not look like “charlatans of God”, but rather be “experts in God” (DH 824: “*teodociti*, and not *theophanti*”).

2. If there is no contradiction between the CDF and Jon Sobrino on this point, then it cannot be true that “the lack of due attention that he pays to ... the theological founts ... that he considers ‘normative’ ... gives rise to concrete problems in his theology”. We will analyze further on, as does the Notification, the issues concerning the divinity of Christ, his consciousness and the value of his death. Right now we restrict ourselves simply to the concrete problems that the CDF points out in this first chapter. First, it says, “the manner in which the author treats the major Councils of the early Church is equally notable, for according to him, these Councils have moved progressively away from the contents of the New Testament”. Second, it questions Sobrino’s affirmation that, while the conciliar decrees “are useful theologically, besides being normative, they are also limited and even dangerous, as is widely recognized today”.

First of all, these statements by Sobrino cannot be due to his particular Latin American situation, since they are shared by many theologians in the developed world and in Asia. Moreover, to be strictly orthodox it is sufficient to recognize that the conciliar documents are theologically

useful and normative, and Sobrino does this. It is not clear, then, why he deserves to be condemned for his statement, though he does add that such decrees can be dangerous. Moreover, the same CDF recognizes that those dogmatic formulas are in fact “limited”, because they do not express nor can they express the mysteries of faith.

3. Furthermore, we sincerely believe that it is possible to affirm that some conciliar formulas are nowadays dangerous, without thereby being remiss in fidelity to the Church’s faith. We say this for five reasons.

3.1. First, as Pascal pointed out, everything that is limited becomes dangerous when it is absolutized and made into something not only normative but unique. No one can believe that the faith should respond only to the questions and problems with which it was confronted in the first six centuries of the Christian era. If that were the case, then theology, as the science of the faith, would be reduced to a piece of museum science.

3.2. Second, with the passage of time, the meaning of words can change. This happened between the second and the fourth centuries in the case of the Greek term *hypostasis*, which was first condemned and later accepted. It happens also with the word “person”, if we compare its use in the Christological dogmas and in modern-day language: stating that in Jesus Christ there is only one person, who is divine, normally leads the modern mentality to believe that Jesus lacked a human psychology, which is what today defines a “person”. Such a belief would be equivalent to the Apollinarian heresy¹.

3.3. Third, a text without its context can be made into a pretext. For example, the proceedings of the council of Chalcedon show that its Christological formula was approved as a condemnation of heresies and not as an absolute explanation of Jesus' identity. Actually, the same proceedings reveal that concerns about the dangerousness of the formula were shared by many of the council fathers who, while fully accepting it, did not want it to be seen as a credo (or "symbol" of faith) or as a "mathematics of the faith". It was requested that the formula not be proposed to the people as a statement of faith for baptism or for the preparatory catechesis (and such has been the case in our baptismal liturgy), but that it be something "reserved to the bishops for the struggle against heresies". Epiphanius of Pergamus and 14 other bishops of his region wrote to the pope, St Leo, that the formula of Chalcedon was not a "symbol of faith" (or creed), but rather a "shield against the heretics". Later on it was explained that the formula should be understood from a "missionary, not an Aristotelian" point of view ("*piscatorie, non aristotelice*", according to the formula that has come down to us). This was a way of avoiding an excessive indebtedness of Christology to Hellenism². That fact that

some of these opinions did not gain official approval does not mean that those proposing them were not *entirely within the ambit of ecclesial orthodoxy*.

3.4. Fourth, the conciliar dogmatics can become dangerous if it is made out to be *the totality of Christology*, because the councils (responding only to a question particular to Greek wisdom, of how it is possible to affirm humanity and divinity simultaneously) prescind from other New Testament teachings about the incarnation: its kenotic character, its universal or recapitulating character and its historical character.

That is to say: a) in the *concrete* incarnation that we have known, God not only became human but also became "flesh" (John 1,14). (This word does not quite coincide in meaning with "human", for it stresses all the aspects of our being human that we might consider "unworthy" of divinity.) Jesus humbled himself; he stripped himself of his divine condition, acting and presenting himself "as just another man" (Phil 2,6 ff.). To forget this humbling of God is to obscure the revelation of his complete solidarity with us.

b) Furthermore, in the incarnation that we have known, "God in some way beca-

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1. The CDF at one point cites the encyclical *Sempiternus Rex* of Pius XII (1951), but it fails to note that this encyclical underwent a modification between the time of its first appearance in *L'Osservatore Romano* and its definitive publication in *Acta Apostolica Sedes*: the first text condemned those who allowed an "at least psychological" subject to exist in the humanity of Christ. The second text is more vague and condemns only those who allow a "*sui iuris*" subject. In this way the pope refused to enter into the dispute between Galtier and Parente (who were accusing one another of Nestorianism and Monophysitism).
 2. See *Acta conciliorum oecumenicorum*, II, 5, 48-90. And A. GRILLMEIER, *Jesus Christus im Glauben der Kirche*, I, 765-67.; *Mit Ihm und in Ihm*, 283-300. Some of the expressions used are: "non est fidei symbolum sed sicut definitionem ad peremtionem nestorianae vesaniae" (ACO 5, 70). "Veluti scutum contra haereticos et non mathema fidei"; "nequaquam veluti mathema aut symbolum his que baptizantur tradimus sed ad bella hostium reservamus" (59).

me one with all human beings”, as the Second Vatican Council taught (GS 22). In so saying the Council was recovering a patristic teaching that saw in Jesus Christ “the womb” by which God gives himself to all humanity. Thus the incarnation is not the exclusive privilege of one alone, but is God’s embrace of all human beings.

And finally: c) the historical dimension is part of our human nature, which was “perfectly so” in Jesus. God incarnates himself in such a way that he must pass from being Son of God “according to the flesh” to being Son of God “according to the Spirit” (Rom 1,1 ff.). Thus does he reach his proper “fullness” (*teleiôsis*): the same word that in Matthew 5,48 defines God’s perfection is used by the New Testament to say that Jesus - who was from the beginning the “glory” and the “stamp” of God’s being - had need to reach the fullness of his being (Hebrews 1,3 and 2,10; 5,9).

These three most important teachings were not considered by the conciliar dogmatics because they did not relate to the question being posed in the first centuries. Excluding these teachings from Christology, however, and making the conciliar formulas not only assertive but unconditional would lead to a heterodox Christology. For that reason it can be argued, on the basis of the most serious orthodoxy, that the conciliar formulas, besides being valid and normative, can also be dangerous. However, the peril of the dog-

matic formulas is not so much in the formulas themselves as in their being read out of their proper context and being made into criteria for understanding the scriptures, instead of the reverse.

3.5. The Notification goes on to insist that Sobrino, while recognizing the normative character of the first councils as regards Christology, considers their development to be “ambiguous and even negative”. The ambiguity is the same kind that Cardinal Newman detected in the First Vatican Council when he wrote, without dissenting from it, that “other councils will have to finish the work”³³ (as indeed the Second Vatican Council tried to do, by complementing the doctrine of the primacy of the pope with that of episcopal collegiality). And Newman had become Catholic precisely out of fidelity to the papacy.

This is an absolutely normal practice in the history of theology and the magisterium. In making such claims, Sobrino is accused of “not taking into account the fact that the *transtemporal* subject of the faith is the believing Church”. We admit that we do not understand very well what this expression means. The Church is not a *transtemporal* subject, but a perfectly temporal one, and from its temporality it is open to eternity through the faith that it professes and that the ancients admirably formulated thus, in reference to the incarnation: “the Eternal made temporal!”. The Church is the community of believers that is continually passing through human history. We

3. “The dogmas concerning the Trinity and the Incarnation were not structured all at once, but piece by piece. One council did one thing, another did a second thing... And finally the totality of the dogma was constructed. But the first portion would have seemed extreme and raised controversies. And these controversies led to a second or third council; and these did not undo the first council but explained and completed what the first one had stated. The same thing is happening now: future popes will clarify, and in a certain sense will limit, its power” (*Letter to Miss Holmes*).

fear that such a confession of a “transtemporal” church might lead to a kind of docetism or ecclesiological monophysitism. In any case, however, to avoid accusations and to respect the formula of the CDF, we do not consider the formula to be strong enough to prove that Sobrino’s thesis contains “notable discrepancies with the faith of the Church”.

4. The same is true with respect to Sobrino’s affirmation that the councils meant “a hellenization of Christianity”. Such an affirmation may be arguable, but it is not heterodox, for it is an affirmation of *facts*, not of *truths* of the faith; indeed, it relates not only the conciliar formulas but also to all the later theology. Besides, it is an opinion shared today by many theologians. Finally, it is perfectly compatible with the other affirmation which the CDF places in opposition to it (and which we also agree with): “Through the inculturation of the Christian message, Greek culture itself underwent a transformation from within and was able to be used as an instrument for the expression and defense of biblical truth.” Surely there was a certain transformation of Greek culture, but, as happens in every inculturating endeavor, Christianity continued to pay a price which limited it: what has said above about the inadequacies of the Chalcedonian formula makes that clear. Once again we are dealing with propositions that are not contradictory but complementary.

1.5. Conclusion concerning theological presuppositions

We believe we can state that there is nothing contrary to the Christian faith in af-

firming that the poor are a theological setting (not exclusive, but yes privileged, and a ‘sign of the times’ for today). We further believe that Sobrino’s categorizing as dangerous a dogmatic formula that is recognized to be normative, his calling ambiguous (or even negative at a give moment) a particular theological development, or his stating that Christianity was hellenized are all positions that may legitimately be held and discussed, but *in no way are they contrary to the essence of the apostolic faith transmitted by the Church*. They belong to that area that St Augustine classified as “*in dubiis libertas*” (freedom in doubtful matters), when he was demanding “*in necessariis unitas*” (unity in necessary matters).

In trying to find a mediating balance between the two positions, we would do well to recall the old principle of Thomas Aquinas: “*quidquid recipitur ad modum recipientis recipitur*” (every thing takes on the form of that which receives it). If the form in which Jon Sobrino receives the legacy of Christological tradition has been able to condition his mode of expression, then the Roman Congregation should never forget that it also has its “*modum recipientis*”, which has likewise been able to condition both its reading of that tradition and its reading of the books of Jon Sobrino. The CDF makes no effort to detach itself from that inevitable particularity, even though it is commissioned to act not *in the name of a particular setting*, but from a universal perspective (*katholika*).

We have extended ourselves more in this section, since it is so decisive for the whole document of the CDF. In the following sections we will attempt to be more brief.

2. THE DIVINITY OF JESUS CHRIST

The argument of the CDF in this chapter is that Sobrino tends to “diminish the breadth” both of the divinity of Jesus and the New Testament witness about same. The document therefore states that, although Sobrino “does not deny the divinity of Jesus, ... nevertheless he fails to affirm Jesus’ divinity with sufficient clarity”.

The Congregation finds evidence for the first complaint in statements of Sobrino to the effect that Jesus “was intimately bound up with God” or had a “reality that is of God”. It finds evidence for the second complaint in his affirmation that Jesus was not talked about as God in the early years of Christianity, except “in seed”, and that the explicit confession of divinity came only later (almost certainly after the fall of Jerusalem).

2.1. Certain observations

Before commenting on these three statements of the Notification, we need to make certain observations:

a) Scientific rigor requires us to consider not only isolated texts, but everything that the author in question has written. Therefore, without any pretension at completeness, we offer here various other texts of Sobrino, which the CDF does not cite and which readers of the Notification are not likely to know either:

“The formula ‘Jesus is the Lord’ expresses something new and unheard of: the making equivalent, in some way, of Jesus and Yahweh.” (*La Fe* 234)... “John’s prologue presents Jesus as the Word, and presents the Word as God. Other parts of the NT also affirm that Christ participates in God’s reality [with quotes from Heb 1,3; Col 2,9].” ... “Finally, there are two texts in the Johannine writings that call Jesus God. The Gospel concludes, in its original ending, with the confession of Thomas, ‘My Lord and my God’. The first letter of John also ends with a confession: ‘This is the true God and eternal life’.” (*La Fe* 287 - Spanish edition).

In our sincere opinion, these statements in no way diminish the breadth of the New Testament passages, nor do they affirm the divinity of Jesus “with insufficient clarity”.

b) For the sake of precision we should note that the accusatory phrase used by the Notification (“According to the Author, the New Testament does not clearly affirm the divinity of Jesus, but merely establishes the presuppositions for it”) deforms and falsely hardens Sobrino’s thought, which we find better expressed in this statement of his: “In the New Testament Jesus is not expressly called God; rather his divinity is first affirmed in an implicit and seminal way, and only later explicitly”. We point out these

differences because, at the moment of passing judgments of heterodoxy, no effort should be spared as regards precision. And also because this formulation of ours (if it interprets Sobrino correctly, as we think it does) is nowadays almost a common thesis in theology.

c) In effect, most of what Sobrino says about the New Testament is not original, but is taken from various contemporary exegetes and theologians (U. Wilckens, R. Brown, W. Kasper, X. Leon-Dufour, H. Schürmann,...). Many modern-day Christologies (among them that of W. Kasper as bishop and cardinal) defend the seminal character of the scriptural witness and try to show, as Sobrino does also, that there exists a continuity - broken and discontinuous - between the New Testament confession of Jesus' Transcendence and the conciliar affirmation of divine consubstantiality. Those authors have not suffered any condemnation for their views, and it would therefore seem necessary to show that Sobrino deforms their thought or cites them badly, something the Notification fails to do. It would be unfortunate to leave the impression that the heterodoxy of an affirmation derives not from its content, but from the person who makes it.

After these prior observations, we make a quick commentary on the affirmations of Sobrino that have been called into question.

2.2. Commentary

1. It is true that in the new Testament there are very few texts (2 or 3), and those quite late, which *expressly* call Jesus God. Of the texts that speak of Jesus (and not of the Son), those that certainly call Jesus God are John 20,28, Tito 2,13 and 2 Peter 1,1

(Romans 9,5 is debated). To these can be added the texts that speak more generally of the *Son* as God, namely Hebrew 1,8-9 and John 1,18. This scarcity of texts can be explained historically: in the earliest Christian preaching the word "God" could not readily be used because in the pagan world the term would evoke simply one of the various divinities of Olympus; within the realm of strict Jewish monotheism, on the other hand, it would be understood as nothing less than idolatry.

But such limitations are not important, since from the very beginning the divine condition of Jesus was effectively confessed in an implicit and seminal manner: for example, Old Testament texts referring to God are applied to him, or he is said to renounce the dignity of his divine condition at great cost (Phil 2,6) - something that our criticized author explicitly affirms. Sobrino adds that "the only text in which, according to some authors, Jesus is called God *before the fall of Jerusalem* is Romans 5,9b, although the acclamation found here may be directed not to Jesus but to God, as other authors maintain" (p. 170). Such a statement reproduces faithfully the present state of exegesis. Sobrino is not being unduly obscure in his respect for New Testament usage, which, as Karl Rahner showed years ago in a famous text, reserves the expression "God" (*ho Theos*) exclusively for designating the Father.

2. We should add that, perhaps due to an unfortunate typographical error, the Notification uses the phrase "believing *explication*" instead of the phrase "believing *explicitation*", which Sobrino uses in both the Salvadoran and the Spanish editions of his work. That change of words could be important when trying to elucidate this matter.

3. We do not understand the following statement of the CDF: “To maintain that John 20,28 affirms that Jesus is ‘of God’ is clearly erroneous, in as much as the passage itself refers to Jesus as ‘Lord’ and ‘God’ . Similarly, John 1,1 says that the Word is God.” And we do not understand it for two reasons: a) Sobrino himself completes his affirmation with the phrase that we have just cited from page 287: “There are two texts in the Johannine writings that call Jesus God. The Gospel concludes, in its original ending, with the confession of Thomas, ‘My Lord and my God’ .” How is it possible that the CDF should cite one text and not this other one?

But besides: b) in the phrase cited by the Notification, the context makes clear that the expression “reality of *God*” is not to be understood in a broad sense applicable to any reality; rather it speaks of a super-added ontological belonging (an expression we use to paraphrase the more typical “hypostatic union”). Given the linguistic structure of Spanish, the expression “Jesus is God” (which is not false, of course) can easily lead to the monophysite error of thinking that Jesus’ human nature was his very divinity. That is to say, the expression “Jesus is God” is not spoken *in the same sense* as the expression “Jesus is man”. For that reason, theological tradition has expressed faith in the divinity of Jesus not so much by the formula “Jesus is God” as by the expression “Son of God”. This teaching is quite common today in any Christology.

4. When Sobrino writes that the divinity of Jesus was affirmed only after a *long period* of believing explicitation, the CDF thinks that this statement “gives credence to the suspicion that the historical develop-

ment of dogma, which Sobrino describes as ambiguous, has arrived at the formulation of Jesus’ divinity *without a clear continuity* with the New Testament”. But Sobrino is not at all referring here to later dogmatic development: rather, when he speaks of a “long period”, he explicitly specifies “*the fall of Jerusalem*”, that is, the year 70. Now the texts cited in the first section, the letter to Titus and the Johannine writings, are from the end of the first century, while the second letter of Peter is usually dated at the beginning of the second century. Only the text of Romans 9,5 is prior to the year 70, and exegetes debate whether its use of the word “God” refers to Jesus Christ.

As regards the ambiguities of dogmatic development, we have already commented on them in the previous section, and our conclusion was *not* that they lacked *continuity* with the New Testament, but rather that they did not capture *the totality of New Testament teaching*.

2.3. In conclusion

We sincerely believe that Sobrino cannot be accused of diminishing the divinity of Jesus Christ or of not affirming it with sufficient clarity. We are convinced that both Sobrino and the Congregation would concur in the statement that closes this section of the Notification: “The confession of the divinity of Jesus Christ has been an absolutely essential part of the faith of the Church since her origins. It is explicitly witnessed to since the New Testament.” It would be calumnious to claim that Sobrino denies that statement. The only difference might be that the CDF document seems interested only in the word “God” (or divi-

nity), while Sobrino (more in keeping with the tone of the New Testament) is above all attentive to the novelty of that God revealed in Jesus, who does not coincide with the God of Greek philosophy. This attentiveness is seen, for example, in Sobrino's repeated affirmations concerning the title "Lord", which is not professed simply by

saying that Jesus is Lord, but by inverting the terms: "The Lord? He is Jesus!" (*Kyrios Iêsous*). Attention is thus paid not only to the datum but to the contents of the datum.

Thus brings us to the third chapter of the Notification, dedicated to the incarnation.

3. THE INCARNATION OF THE SON OF GOD

3.1. The judgment of the Notification

Quoting Sobrino's phrase, "the Son (the second person of the Trinity) took on the whole reality of Jesus", the CDF judges that Sobrino thereby "introduces a distinction between the Son and Jesus which suggests to the reader the presence of two subjects in Christ: the Son assumes the reality of Jesus... It is not clear that the Son is Jesus and that Jesus is the Son." According to this judgment, "Sobrino reflects the so-called theology of the *homo assumptus*, which is incompatible with the Catholic faith". Secondly, the CDF accuses Sobrino of inadequate understanding of a scholastic adage called *communicatio idiomatum*, which we will explain below.

3.2. Commentary on the first accusation

The distinction between Jesus and the Son does not necessarily imply a Nestorian-styled Christology of the *homo assumptus*. Rather, the distinction simply implies that the one who pre-exists eternally is not the man Jesus, but "the second person of the Trinity", as Sobrino expressly says. It was for that reason that the Church Fathers used to distinguish between "*Logos incarnandus*" and "*Logos incarna-*

tus" (in Greek: *Logos endiathetos* and *Logos proforikos*).

Furthermore, Sobrino's use of the verb "took on" (= "assumed") does not imply that Nestorian type of Christology, but refers rather to the fullness of the incarnation. Certainly Sobrino could have cited here St Augustine's explanation ("the humanity of Jesus is created upon being assumed") and would thus have made his intentions more clear. But not citing a statement is not equivalent to denying it, above all when the context shows that Sobrino's intention, in speaking of "the whole reality of Jesus", is not to claim that Jesus first existed and then was assumed by God (which is how the CDF statement reads). Rather, Sobrino's clear intention was to indicate that no dimension of human reality was left unassumed by God (as if God, to make himself present, needed to take away space from humans or render them useless, as the Apollinarian heresy claimed). Sobrino's aim, then, is to stress, along with the New Testament, that nothing of what is human is left outside the incarnation, as was stated in an axiom of Gregory Nazianzen, whom Sobrino expressly quotes on page 334: "What is not assumed is not healed. What is united with God is what is saved". Can it be that St Gregory thereby espouses a theology of the "*homo assumptus*"?

As a confirmation of the aforesaid, we cite the following paragraph of the private response that Sobrino gave to the first, non-public document of the CDF. (According to the same CDF, this response “does not prove satisfactory since, in substance, the errors that gave rise to the communication of the list of propositions still remain.”) In that first response Sobrino wrote as follows.

In this point it is necessary to recall that in God the “assuming” need not presuppose the existence of a *prior* reality already formally constituted, as if the Logos made his own what before already had autonomy. That is to say: it is not the case that ‘Jesus’ already existed and the Logos assumed him afterwards. In order to understand that “the whole reality of Jesus” of which I speak is not a reality that is already constituted *opposite* the Logos, suffice it to recall the well known phrase of Augustine about the humanity of Jesus: *ipsa assumptione creatur*. That is, the humanity is created upon being assumed. It was not created first and then assumed. There are not then two subjects. Nor are there two subjects in my Christology. I am not a Nestorian, nor has it ever occurred to me to think that way. And I do not think that it is possible to detach the ‘literal tenor’ of my text, as something that would be ‘incompatible with the Catholic faith’. As far as I know, nobody has understood it that way”.

How is it that the CDF has placed no value on this other text already known to it, which avoids ambiguities and clearly saves the integrity of the incarnation? How is it that the CDF has not taken into consideration, either, the quote of Gregory Nazianzen, which also eliminated the ambiguities that the Congregation supposedly

saw? We sincerely do not understand this. Indeed, by taking isolated phrases, it could well be argued that the CDF makes its accusation of the CDF on the basis of a heterodox and monophysite Christology.

Let it be clear, nonetheless, that we do not make such an accusation: we only state that it could be made if one were to ignore that traditional counsel of Ignatius Loyola: “Every good Christian is more ready to put a good interpretation on another’s statement than to condemn it as false” (*Spiritual Exercises* 22). In this case, it seems to us, the practice of such Christian readiness would have required of the CDF nothing more than a due consideration of *all the statements* of Sobrino’s book.

3.3. The second accusation

As regards the so-called “*communicatio idiomatum*” (= exchange or communication of properties), we have already stated that it is a technical term that is not easily understood and needs a minimal introduction.

Traditional Christology taught that, by virtue of the incarnation, we can predicate of God human properties (e.g., God suffers), and we can predicate of humans divine properties (e.g., the mother of Jesus is the mother of God, or Jesus is worthy of adoration). Initially this was aimed at safeguarding *God’s solidarity with human beings and the elevation of humans by God*, in line with the classical axiom of the Church Fathers: “God became man so that man might become God”.

It must be added that later on theologians made this joyous message into an object of subtle distinctions (and disputes) which, rather than safeguarding God’s lo-

ve and the dignity of human beings, aimed at demonstrating the subtlety or the curiosity of the scholastic intellectuals. In these disputes what we stated before was often forgotten, namely, that in Jesus God had emptied himself of his divine image and became not only human nature, but human history.

After making this clarification of terminology, we return to our analysis.

The CDF accuses Sobrino of “inadequate understanding” of that communication of properties. It bases its judgment on this statement of Sobrino: “the limited human is predicated of God, but the unlimited divine is not predicated of Jesus”. In reality, an inadequate understanding of a theological axiom does not constitute a deviation from the faith of the Church, so that it hardly seems proper that it should be the object of a public accusation on the part of authorities. All the same, the Notification takes this step because it finds there a *confirmation of its prior accusation* (of Sobrino’s professing a Christology of the “*homo assumptus*”). It thus concludes that “this Christology is in no way compatible with the teaching of the Councils of Ephesus and Chalcedon”. As can be seen, this is an extremely harsh accusation. The affirmation which the CDF sets over against Sobrino’s is that “the human is predicated of God and the divine of man”.

3.4. Commentary

To be sure, Sobrino’s statement may be somewhat imprecise in saying that the divine *is not predicated* of Jesus.

Nonetheless, Sobrino introduces a nuance, since he speaks of the “*unlimited*” divine, which helps to suggest the true meaning: what is predicated of the earthly Jesus is not the whole of the divine.

However, the statement cited by the Notification exaggerates in the opposite direction by simply claiming, in referring to the earthly Jesus, that “the divine is predicated of man”. Such a claim, as we have said already, ignores the New Testament teaching about kenosis and about the distinction between the Resurrected One and the earthly Jesus. If the whole of the divine were predicated of the man Jesus, it would be necessary to say that the earthly Jesus was impassible (so that he would not have suffered), that he was immortal (so that his death would have been merely apparent), that he was eternal (so that he would not really have been born), that he could not be tempted (contrary to the witness of the gospels) ... Such arguments in defense of a determined a priori conception of divinity would eviscerate the revelation of God’s solidarity in becoming identified with what the fourth gospel calls “the flesh” (in the non-sexual, but still negative, sense that the term has in John’s gospel).

In other words: the communication of properties cannot eliminate the scandal of that passage in the letter to the Hebrews (5,9): “*although he was the Son*”, Jesus experienced many human limitations. It simply cannot be argued a priori that “*since he was the Son*”, he was free of those limitations (something that can indeed be said of the risen Jesus). Such an argument would inevitably imply heresies of a

4. Cf. J. SOLANO *De Verbo Incarnato*. En “*Sacrae Theologiae Summa*”, BAC, Madrid 1961, 163-167. Solano recognizes, for example, that it is not permitted to say “Jesus is incorporeal” (p. 166), as is evident.

Docetic or Apollinarian type, which are incompatible with the faith of the Church. For this reason scholastic Christology itself was, on this point, more cautious than is the CDF, for it discussed the possibility of predicating abstract or concrete attributes, positive or negative ones, etc⁴.

And these fine distinctions perhaps relate to what we saw earlier, when speaking of theological method: doing theology by taking the poor as a Christological setting makes it easier to understand that *Christology is a revelation of the love and*

the unconditional solidarity of God with this unjust and sinful world. Trying to do theology from a supposedly neutral setting might turn Christology into a purely deductive speculation that fails completely to reveal God's saving love. The Church Fathers, despite their inculturation into Greek philosophy, were by no means indifferent to such a soteriological concern.

After these discussions of more dogmatic matters, there remain three other exegetical points, referring to Sobrino's reading of the scriptural texts.

4. JESUS CHRIST AND THE REIGN OF GOD

This chapter of the Notification contains only one accusation: Sobrino “advances a peculiar view of the relationship between Jesus and the Kingdom of God”, since the Kingdom is “evidently considered to be something distinct from Jesus himself”. The CDF is correct in saying that we cannot fashion a concept of the Kingdom of God according to our own fancies. Theological rigor demands that we seek out the original meaning of the term. Let us try to do so then.

4.1. The biblical meaning of the Reign of God

a) The expression “Reign of God” comes from the Old Testament (*Malkut Yahweh*), where it describes a human situation in which the reign of the true God frees human beings from the false gods who do not give people life, but rather enslave them. Intrinsic to this situation is the double term *Shedaqah u Mishpat* (justice and right).

b) Jesus takes this Old Testament notion to be concrete expression of the fatherhood of God that he is announcing. To pray “Your Kingdom come” is like asking that the Father’s Name be glorified on our earth, where up till now God’s fatherhood has been profaned by the prevalence of violence and death. Jesus announces, besides, that human beings should first seek the

Reign of God “and its justice” (Matthew 6,33), a word that some interpret as simple interior rectitude and others as Old Testament justice.

c) In this human (and divinely humanized) situation Jesus has a fundamental role, not only as proclaimer but also, in a certain sense, as realizer. With him the Kingdom *in some way* arrives, but the Kingdom is not *completely* identified with him (as it is identified, for example, with that typically Jesuan expression: “Son of Man”). Let a few examples from the gospels and other NT writings suffice:

– When Jesus preaches, “Repent for the Kingdom of God is at hand” (Mark 1,15), he does not mean to say: “Repent for I am here”.

– When in the Our Father we pray “Thy Kingdom come” (Matthew 6,10), we are not asking for the coming of Jesus but for the arrival of that situation imbued with God.

– The saying of Jesus, “If it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the Kingdom of God has come upon you”, (Luke 11,20) does not identify Jesus and the Kingdom either.

– The parables that frequently begin with the words “The Kingdom of God is like ...” are not saying the Jesus is like (leaven, a seed, a net, etc.).

– St Paul defines the Kingdom of God as “justice and peace and joy in the Holy

Spirit” (Romans 14,17). These words do not aim at being a definition of Jesus Christ, although Paul would agree that such virtues derive from our “being in Christ”.

– In 1 Corinthians 15 the end of history is described as a progressive liberation from human slaveries, the last of which is death. Paul then adds that Jesus then “delivers the Kingdom to the Father . . . that God may be everything to everyone” (1 Cor 15,24,28). This does not mean that Jesus delivers himself over, but rather delivers the situation achieved by him, which includes all of creation.

4.2. Summing up

It seems, therefore, that the Bible distinguishes between Jesus and the Kingdom of God. Nevertheless, it can still be affirmed that Jesus and the Kingdom are identified with one another, as long as this affirmation does not suppose a *total* identification. We thus fail to understand how the CDF can write that “it is insufficient to speak of an intimate connection, or of a constitutive relatedness between Jesus and the Kingdom, or of ‘the finality of the mediator’, if this suggests something that is distinct from Jesus himself. In *a certain sense, Jesus Christ and the Kingdom are identified*”. The words we have italicized say the very same thing as Sobrino! And the Notification, in order to condemn him, later forgets about its own nuance and *totally* identifies Jesus and the Kingdom.

The Mediator always relates to something different from himself (in this case, Jesus Christ relates to God and to human beings). What Sobrino wishes to exclude (correctly) is the idea that there can be a mediator without mediation, with the result that human beings end up excluded from

the sonship of Jesus instead of being “children in the Son”. The Notification assails this statement of Sobrino: “Christ does not, then, derive his possibility of being mediator from anything added to his humanity; it belongs to him by his practice of being human”. The statement may be ambiguous, but it does not mean that Sobrino “excludes the fact that his condition as Son of God has relevance for Jesus’ mediatory mission”, as the CDF claims. The transcendent dimension is included in the very expression that Sobrino uses: *Christ* (not Jesus). This language is taken from the first letter to Timothy, where it is stated that there is only one mediator, *the man* Christ Jesus (2,5). Should we therefore condemn that wording of the New Testament for excluding “the fact that his condition as Son of God has relevance for Jesus’ mediatory mission”? Quite sincerely, we do not understand.

4.3. In conclusion

Sobrino might well be criticized for his claim that early Christianity forgot about the Kingdom of God. Such a claim is not really just, for it ignores the social situation in which Christianity had to be disseminated: it was a persecuted minority group expecting an imminent return of Jesus. His complaint, all the same, alerts us that we need to recover that notion of the coming Kingdom (as modern theology has indeed done) and that such recovery does not involve forgetting or replacing the person of Jesus Christ, but rather highlights the full restoration of all things in him.

At the same time, we believe that the Notification can be justly criticized because, in its eagerness to condemn, it has ended up forgetting its own qualification, “in a certain sense”, and identifying Jesus and the Kingdom totally.

5. THE SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS OF JESUS

The topic of the faith and the consciousness of Jesus (like several other topics of Christology) is not *strictly speaking* a matter of Christian faith, but of information, even though, of course, the desire to obtain such information may be logical and devout. Still, we need to limit ourselves to what is provided us by the data, and precisely because the data are scarce, dispersed and unsystematic, there exist diverse theological opinions.

The New Testament calls Jesus the “pioneer and perfecter of the faith” (Heb 12,2) in a context which treats of our own faith. Sobrino gives great importance to this text, which the Notification never mentions in its argumentation: Jesus is the one who places himself at the head of the disciples in their journeying, and in this sense he is the new way (Heb 10,19-20). To that end, however, it was proper that he become in everything like his brothers and sisters (2,17). As does Sobrino, Hebrews 12,2 maintains the equality of human beings and also the difference. In contrast, the Notification barely maintains the equality of Jesus with other human beings.

In the history of theology, Saint Augustine was the first to deny the faith of Jesus. He did so by means of an a priori deduction: if Jesus was God, it follows that God cannot have faith in God. Augustine had an undeniable influence on the deductive Christology of the subsequent western tradition. Nonetheless, in the twentieth century the theme was once again recovered: we need mention only the book of Cardinal Urs Von Balthasar (*La foi du Christ*, Paris 1968), in whose prologue another cardinal (Henri De Lubac) wrote that the book was proof that after the Council excellent theology was still being done, “in which boldness and fidelity were still sisters” (p. 9). We read in that same book: “Jesus is an authentic man, and the inalienable nobility of man is his ability, and even his duty, to freely project the plan of his existence into a future which he does not know. If this man is a believer, the future into which he propels and projects himself is God in all his divine liberty and immensity. Depriving Jesus of that possibility and making him advance towards a goal that is known beforehand and distant

only in time would be to strip him of his dignity of being human. For that reason the text of Mark must be authentic: “Nobody knows that hour, ... not even the Son” (p. 181). From that point onwards, at least, the topic of the faith of Jesus has been present in almost all Christologies, along the same line as Sobrino’s statements.

Not one of the texts (of John and the synoptics) adduced by the CDF states that “the filial and messianic consciousness of Jesus is the direct consequence of his ontology as Son of God made man”. What is quite impermissible nowadays is affirming the nature of Jesus’ consciousness on *the basis of a syllogistic deduction* like the one elaborated by Augustine. That would mean once again developing Christology from the prior supposition that “since he was the Son”, Jesus had to be of such and such a nature. Such a position would contradict the decisive teaching of the letter to the Hebrews: that Jesus, “although he was the Son”, learned by his own sufferings to accept with confidence God’s designs, and in this he was just like us. The hypostatic union will, in the end, serve as a formulation that seeks to *interpret* the New Testament representations, but it is not the *basis* of them. And for an incarnation that takes into account the kenosis of God and the historicity of Jesus (as we previously saw that the New Testament does), it cannot be said that the hypostatic union *necessarily requires* the vision and knowledge of the plan of salvation.

The claim, therefore, that by the hypostatic union Jesus had from the beginning

the experience of an immediate vision of God is only a theological opinion, today a minority one, that runs the risk of eliminating all human spaces from Jesus’ consciousness: doubt, sadness (Mk 3,5), confidence (Heb 5), the sensation of abandonment (Mk 15,34), fear, dread and anguish (Mk 14,33-34).

This is the current state of the question on this topic. Therefore, as a minimum, we can say that it is quite difficult to understand how the CDF in its argumentation fails to cite any biblical texts and proceeds in a purely a priori, deductive manner. It is good to recall that, starting from *Divino afflante Spiritu* (1943) and passing through *Dei Verbum* (1964) and the instruction *Sancta Mater Ecclesia* (1965) on the historicity of the gospel accounts, right up to the 1993 document *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, the only kind of interpretation that is not accepted by the Magisterium is the literalist one. And the reading of the Notification seems to us to be clearly literalist.

To sum up then: the CDF has condemned Sobrino on the basis of a minority theological opinion and exegetical criteria that do not adhere to what the Magisterium itself recommends; it has not condemned him on the basis of “the faith of the Church”. We refer the reader to texts 1 and 2 of our appendix, and we call to mind once again that wise saying of Saint Augustine: “unity in what is necessary, liberty in what is doubtful, charity in everything”.

6. THE SALVIFIC VALUE OF THE DEATH OF JESUS

Almost every objection that is made against Sobrino is to be found in the first paragraph of the chapter of the Notification that we will treat here: “In some texts some assertions of Father Sobrino make one think that, for him, Jesus did not attribute a salvific value to his own death: “*Let it be said from the start that the historical Jesus did not interpret his death in terms of salvation, in terms of soteriological models later developed by the New Testament, such as expiatory sacrifice or vicarious satisfaction [...]. In other words, there are no grounds for thinking that Jesus attributed an absolute transcendent meaning to his own death, as the New Testament did later*” (*Jesus the Liberator*, 201).

This accusation suggests the following reflections:

1. Let us observe first, for reasons of strict logic, that the problem is not whether “some affirmations” give rise to a certain

idea, but whether *all his affirmations* give rise to it. Sobrino himself writes *immediately following the texts quoted* by the CDF: “In sum, some indications of what Jesus was thinking we can find concentrated in the account of the last supper, understood not as an isolated event, but in relation to his whole life”. And he concludes: “Although this is a post-Easter interpretation, its overall salvific and positive meaning has *an important historical nucleus* that points towards what Jesus thought of his own death. The decisive thing is that Jesus states that his life is ‘for’, ‘on behalf of’ (*hyper*) others and that this produces a positive fruit in others. This is an understanding of the life of Jesus as service and, finally, as *sacrificial service*” (*Jesucristo Liberador*, pp. 320-22, ed. salvadoreña). Sobrino is here much less radical than other exegetes. Why did the CDF not consider these lines instead of citing a mutilated text?

2. Neither is it the same thing to claim that “Jesus did not attribute a salvific value to his death” (CDF) as to speak of a salvific value according to the “categories that the New Testament later employed” (Sobrinó). What is excluded here is not all salvific meaning, but only that which is expressed in the later models. Perhaps Sobrinó’s expression “transcendent *absolute* meaning” may sound ambiguous. In the rest of the paragraph, however, Sobrinó does no more than reproduce what is being said today by good biblical science, both Catholic and Protestant. More than fifty years ago now, S. Lyonnet, eminent professor of the Pontifical Biblical Institute of Rome, explained how, where and why those New Testament categories (redemption, expiation, vicarious satisfaction) were born when the gospel began to be preached. In the narratives of the life of Jesus, there are no data that would orient us towards that type of salvific category except the text of Mark 10,45 (“The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”) Most exegetes today, however, consider more historically credible the Lukan version of that text, which contains only the first clause (Luke 22,24-27).

Obviously, almost all exegetical opinions are debatable, but nowadays it is historically most probable that Jesus, as he saw his life unfolding, was interpreting it in categories of service or commitment. Along the same lines, the German exegete H. Schürmann coined the category of “pro-existence”, and Sobrinó seems to be following him. In any case, it cannot be said that

the words service and commitment are lacking in “salvific value”.

3. In reality, what is being discussed in this final chapter is not a matter of the integrity of the faith, but is rather part of the terrain of biblical exegesis. Sobrinó limits himself to saying what the majority of exegetes are saying nowadays. For this reason we find it unnecessary to comment on the rest of this chapter, and not only for this reason, but also because the two positions here in conflict (Sobrinó’s and the CDF’s) are *mere consequences* of what we saw in the previous chapter on the faith of Jesus. If Jesus did not have faith, but knew beforehand all the plans of God, then all the later New Testament categories might well be apply to his view of his death. But as long as in Jesus, “although he was the Son”, there was that human space described in the words of Von Balthasar cited in the last section, then Sobrinó’s opinion appears to be the most fitting.

In conclusion

We believe that what is at issue here is not be any discussion of strict orthodoxy. We find it helpful to note that what is fundamentally being debated in these two opposed positions is whether Jesus was a simple marionette of God with a human façade, or whether he was truly the presence, the image and the human life of God among us. It is for that reason that we prefer Sobrinó’s opinion also on this point. We refer the reader to texts 3 and 4 of the appendix.

5. *De peccato et redemptione*. Vol II: *De vocabulario redemptionis*. Pontificio Instituto Biblico. Roma 1960.

CONCLUSIONS

From all the prior analyses we would draw the following conclusions, which we propose in the form of theses.

1. The explanation that Jon Sobrino gives of the theological setting of his Christology is acceptable and is in no way heterodox.

2. This choice of theological setting does not give rise to other possible errors with regard to conciliar formulas.

3. The declaration that the Chalcedonian formula is normative but dangerous does not contain any deviation with respect to the faith of the Church.

4. Sobrino's statements about the divinity of Jesus are faithful to the data of the New Testament and, besides, they do not originate with him, but come from what is affirmed today by most exegetes and Christology scholars.

5. Only from a monophysite perspective could Sobrino be accused of falling into the "*homo assumptus*" heresy.

6. Sobrino's conception concerning the relation between Jesus and the Kingdom is correct. The Notification risks deforming that relation by asserting a complete identification between them.

7. Sobrino's opinions about the faith of Jesus are shared today by a majority of theologians.

8. His opinions regarding the salvific value of the death of Jesus do not belong properly to the realm of orthodox belief but to that of exegetical science.

9. Of the two opposed opinions we are considering, one of them takes biblical research into account, and the other does not. Both opinions are legitimate from the point of view of orthodox belief, but what is quite impermissible is to condemn the first opinion on the basis of the second, for that would be equivalent to substituting fundamentalist belief for the science of faith.

FINAL REFLECTION

1. On the basis of the foregoing analysis, we believe we can state that Sobrino's books there do not contain "notable discrepancies with the faith of the Church", but at most discrepancies with a particular given theology, which does not exhaust the expression of that faith.

Furthermore, it is evident that all human words can be distorted if they are not treated with sufficient impartiality: the gospels report that even Jesus was questioned by his enemies "ut caperent eum in sermone" (to entangle him in his talk: Mt 22,15). Such an attitude contrasts with the one that the pope himself humbly requests of those who read his recent book on Jesus: "*I only ask of readers a prior sympathy, without which no understanding is possible*". We might ask ourselves whether the CDF has been lacking in that prior sympathy and has for that reason failed to understand Sobrino's texts.

2. If, as the CDF says, theology is the "science of the faith", then it may be affirmed that the Notification is also lacking in the theological competence necessary for passing judgment from science's *universal perspective* rather than from a *particular vision*, such as might be had by any theologian who has lost sight of the global panorama of the state of research. This the only way to understand how Sobrino is

condemned for opinions that are expressed today by an infinity of theologians who have not been called to order.

3. A declaration with theological pretensions cannot prescind from its pastoral significance, which is the reason for theological thought. This Notification, whose propagation is inevitably beyond control, is surprising for its coldness, its carelessness in interpreting Sobrino's thought and its lack of sensitivity in perceiving and responding to the religious concerns of believers and non-believers who live immersed in the dominant culture. These defects will harm not only Sobrino but also, and more seriously, millions of men and women who desire to live their Christianity in tune with the epoch in which they are living. For that reason the Notification might turn out to be a scandalous document.

4. Therefore we have thought it necessary, from a pastoral point of view, to manifest our opinion publicly, for such a manifestation is coherent not only with the right of public opinion in the Church (so well defended by Pope Pius XII), but also with the propriety of denouncing the harm that could follow on an action of ecclesiastical authority. Saint Thomas held this teaching from the perspective of morality. And from the perspective of spirituality, the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius, assu-

ming that incorrect actions of ecclesiastical superiors can sometimes occur, propose this double condition for resisting such actions: striving for what is pastorally best, and seeking the most advantageous way for remedying the evil (EE 362). We believe that these are the reasons that justify the present booklet.

5. For the Church's good and for its credibility, and above all for the defense of the faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, it is most desirable that those who exercise in the Church the service of truth be outstanding for that capacity for "comprehension" (in the double sense of the word in Spanish: heartfelt and intellectual), without which there can be no hope of being assisted by God's Spirit.

6. Human existence is inevitably conflict-ridden due to our limitations and our sinfulness. But both natural reason and especially the Gospel teach us that there are two ways of viewing that conflictivity when it presents itself: the correct way se-

eks a solution in which both sides win; the incorrect way seeks the victory of one side only and the elimination of the adversary⁶.

We opt decidedly for the first way because the second, in the long run, ends up also mutilating the winner and might well provoke the grave warning of Jesus: "The hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God" (John 16,2). What a tragic destiny for so many religiosities and moralities!

7. We conclude therefore by stressing that there are words in the Notification with which we are in complete agreement. They are the final words of this document we have analyzed, and we would not like to make them our own: "The purpose of this *Notification* [in our case: of this booklet] is precisely to make known to all the faithful the fruitfulness of theological reflection that does not fear being developed from within the living stream of ecclesial Tradition." Beyond the possible successes or failures of such development, we would like to give thanks for those words.

Signers:

Xavier Alegre Santamaría, Doctor in Sacred Scripture and Professor of Bible.

Dolores Aleixandre, Licensed in theology and Professor emerita of Bible.

Antoni Badía Graells, Licensed in theology and Professor emeritus.

Antoni Blanch Xiró, Licensed in theology and Doctor in Literature.

Joan Carrera i Carrera, Doctor in moral theology and Professor of morals.

Antoni Comín i Oliveres, Doctor in political sciences and Licensed in philosophy.

Elvira Durán Farell, Licensed in philosophy and Professor of Ethics.

Jaume Flaquer García, Candidate for Doctor in Theology and Professor of Christology.

6. This was reflected in the words of a Curia cardinal cited by Bishop Casaldàliga: "Before Aparecida convenes, there will not remain a single liberation theologian". It may well be said that such words do a sad disservice both to Christianity and to the Church.

Joaquín García Roca, Doctor in theology and CEIM's director.
José Ignacio González Faus, Doctor in theology and Professor emeritus.
Josep Giménez Meliá, Doctor in theology and Professor of systematics.
María Teresa Iribarren, Licensed in theology.
Josep Mària Serrano, Licensed in theology and Doctor in economic sciences.
Ferran Manresa Presas, Doctor in theology and Professor of systematics.
Jesús Martínez Gordo, Doctor in theology and Professor of systematics.
Javier Melloni Ribas, Doctor in theology and Professor of spirituality.
Joaquín Menacho Solà-Morales, Engineer and bachelor in theology.
Darío Mollá Llacer, Licensed in theology, specialist in ignatian spirituality.
M^a Dolors Oller i Sala, Doctor in Law.
Llorenç Puig Puig, Doctor in physical sciences and Licensed in theology.
Josep M^a Rambla Blanch, Doctor in theology and Professor of spirituality.
Jesús Renau i Manén, Licensed in theology and Professor of spiritual theology.
Francesc Riera i Figueres, Licensed in theology and Professor of New Testament.
Ignasi Salvat Ferrer, Doctor in canon law and Ecclesiastical judge.
José Sols Lucia, Doctor in theology and Professor of ethics.
Oriol Tuñí Vancells, Doctor in theology and Professor of sacred scripture.
Javier Vitoria Comerzana, Doctor in theology and Professor of systematics.
Josep Vives i Solé, Doctor in philosophy, Licensed in Theology and Professor emeritus.

APPENDIX: TEXTS OF SOME BIBLE SCHOLARS

1a. “The Catholic exegete . . . will be diligent in making use of the new methods of exegesis and especially those offered by the universally recognized historical method. . . . The Catholic exegete will put into practice the recommendation of Pius XII of happy memory, which obliges him ‘prudently to investigate how the form of expression or the literary genre adopted by the sacred writer can lead to a genuinely correct interpretation; and the exegete should be convinced that this part of his office cannot be neglected without causing grave harm to Catholic exegesis..

“Where fitting, the exegete will be allowed to examine the eventual positive elements offered by the “form-history method” and to use the method appropriately for a fuller understanding of the Gospels. He will do so, however, with caution. . . . There can be no doubt that the apostles presented to their listeners the authentic sayings of the Lord and the events of his life with that fullness of intelligence which they enjoyed after the glorious events of Christ and through the illumination of the Spirit of truth. . . . It can thus be deduced that, like Jesus himself after the resurrection, ‘they interpreted to them’ (Luke 27) both the words of the Old Testament and their own words (Luke 24,44 ff; Acts 1,3); in this way they explained their deeds and their words according to the needs of their listeners...

The exegete should investigate what was the intention of the evangelist in presenting a saying or a deed in a certain form and a certain context. The truth of the narration is not called into question by the fact that the gospels order the sayings and the deeds of the Lord differently and express his sayings not word for word but with a certain diversity, while keeping the meaning.

If the exegete does not pay due attention to all these things having to do with the origin and composition of the Gospels and does not take advantage of the worthy contributions of recent studies, he will not really fulfill his office of investigating what the intention of the sacred authors was and what they really said”.

Instruction of the Pontifical Biblical Commission of April 21, 1964.

DH 4402, 4403, 4405, 4407.

1b. “As is known *Divino Afflante Spiritu* especially recommended to exegetes the study of the *literary genres* used in the sacred books; it even stated that the Catholic exegete

should 'be convinced that he cannot neglect this part of his mission without great damage to Catholic exegesis' (*Enchiridion biblicum*, 560). This recommendation arises from the desire to understand the sense of the texts with the greatest exactitude and precision and therefore according to their cultural and historical context. A false idea of God and the Incarnation leads some Christians to adopt a contrary orientation: they tend to believe that, since God is the absolute Being, each one of his words has an absolute value, independent of the conditioning factors of human language. According to them, there is no need to study these conditioning factors in order to make distinctions that might relativize the meaning of the words. But that results in their being deceived and in their effectively rejecting the mysteries of scriptural inspiration and the incarnation, while holding fast to a false notion of the absolute Being. The God of the Bible is not an absolute Being who, crushing all that he touches, annuls differences and all nuances. . . . Far from annulling differences, God respects and values them (cf. 1 Cor 12,18.24.28). When God expresses himself in human language, he does not give each expression a uniform value, but employs with great flexibility all the possible nuances, while also accepting their limitations. This is what makes the task of the exegetes so complex, so necessary and so exciting. No aspect of language can be ignored."

JOHN PAUL II in presenting the Document of the Biblical Commission
of April 23, 1993. Ed. de PPc, 2000, p. 11 ss⁷.

2. "The human self-consciousness of Jesus presented itself before God like any other human consciousness, in the distance of his created being, in liberty, obedience and adoration. . . . In this sense it is true, and we need not hide the fact, that Jesus proclaims the Kingdom of God and not himself." Jesus is therefore the culminating point or the original, "exemplary" case (cf. thesis 13 e) of the man who - in a transcendental understanding - finds himself oriented "towards the limitless mystery which is the principle and the support of act and objective and which we call God" (thesis 13a).

He is the "man for others" because he is the "man for God"... "Jesus knows himself to be radically close to God, who is not for him a mere cipher for the meaning of the human condition; precisely for that reason he knows himself to be in radical solidarity with those who are socially and religiously marginalized, because it is precisely these whom his 'Father' loves." "The man Jesus is (absolutely) authentic man because, throwing his lot in with God and with humans in need of salvation, he forgets himself and exists only in that forgetfulness." His "function" is of the utmost relevance; it is precisely what reveals his "essence"...

7. Incomprehensibly, this 1993 Instruction of the Biblical Commission has not entered into the catalogue of the new edition (DH) of the Magisterium of the Church.

“The pre-Easter Jesus freely confronted death, considering it at least ... to be the destiny proper to a prophet, a destiny that ... was framed within God’s design for the world’s pardon, which Jesus knew to be near”.

W. THÜSING, in RAHNER-THÜSING, *Cristología*, pp.145.146.

[NB *The theses refer to statements of Rahner that Thüsing is commenting on*].

3. “If I for my part think that Jesus did not expressly pronounce these words [referring to the words of the Eucharist that give an expiatory meaning to his death and to Mark 10,45), it is due to reasons of a critical order.” ... “In this availability for the event, in this acceptance of the future as it reaches him, there is in Jesus something very different from a confession of impotence and the will to share our weakness: there is besides, or perhaps we should say there is first of all, the trace of his divine condition. It is we, conscious of our limits, who have to make plans and calculations in order to organize our future and defend ourselves from the dangers that threaten us. It is we who conceive of divine omnipotence according to the model of a plan that develops, or an operation that is carried out, almost instantly; it is we who conceive our freedom as the power to upset the mechanism. But that omnipotence, which we attribute to God, is only a caricature: the future that we think we are putting in God’s hands is not the future, but the past that we project forwards. ... The force of (Jesus’) announcements does not reside in some divining power that would have allowed Jesus to describe beforehand an event that would be impossible to predict humanly. None of his announcements rests on a sign of this type; rather, all are based on the consciousness that Jesus has of manifesting on the part of God a unique role in the world, of having to execute it to the very end, even to a cruel and scandalous death, and of decoding, opportunely, with a lucid gaze, through the events and the persons he encounters, the future that awaits him”⁸.

X. LÉON-DUFOUR, *Jesús y Pablo ante la muerte*,
Madrid: Cristiandad 1982, pp. 89-90

4. “Habitually projected onto Jesus are the later interpretations of the primitive community and even of Paul. This is quite understandable, especially when Jesus himself is thought to have believed that he was fulfilling on earth the prophecy of the Servant of Yahweh. Thus, Mark 10,45 has been seen as an ‘admirable synthesis’ of the theology of the Son of Man in glory and the theology of the Suffering Servant. The presentation is doubtless admirable, but does it go back to Jesus himself? We have just seen that the text of Mark 10,45, the only one of this type before the passion narrative, cannot be traced back

8. J. GUILLET *Jésus* 167-170.

to Jesus with certainty. On the other hand, the New Testament texts⁹, that explicitly cite Isaiah 53 do not deal with ‘vicarious expiation’¹⁰. The passion narratives do not allude to that prophecy with the same perspective; the only text with that meaning is found in the first letter of Peter¹¹, and a single text is not sufficient witness for the existence of a ‘cur

9. Mt 8,17; Lk 22,37; Jn 12,38; Acts 8,32f.; Rom 10,16; 15,21; 1 Pet 2,22.

10. A. George quite keenly stresses that Luke has left out the idea vicarious expiation in order to express the abasement of Jesus: *Le sens de la mort de Jésus pour Luc*: RB 80 (1973) 196-197 (*Études sur l'oeuvre de Luc* [Paris 1978] 195-196).

11. 1 Pe 2,21-24.

12. This should not be taken to mean that Jesus considered his death as an ordinary event of his life, that is, simply its end. But still, Jesus did not explicitly confer a meaning on his suffering; it will be the letter to the Hebrews that reveals the painful aspect of his passion.

rent tradition'. We cannot, therefore, seriously assert such a synthesis in order to attribute to Jesus such an interpretation. It is safer to posit that he did not view his threatened death in a sacrificial perspective¹².

It does not follow from this that Jesus did not find any meaning for his death within the plan of God. At the end of chapter 1 we recognized that, in the eyes of Jesus, the essential thing was that God was present in the unfolding of the history of the people of Israel. Therefore whatever referred to death in general was true also of the personal death of Jesus. Before the threat of death, Jesus continued to proclaim the message of God's kingdom. The failure that made itself ever more evident did not deter him from his determination to serve God and humankind faithfully. He viewed that failure within the grand design of God and placed himself at the crest of the line of prophets, as the persecuted just one *par excellence*. He did not suffer death passively, but accepted it. His confidence in God did not diminish; rather, it assured him the final triumph over death. In sum, in the eyes of Jesus death makes sense only in function of his life of fidelity to the mission, of which it is the culmination, and in reference to God who justifies that life by the resurrection...

On the other hand, Jesus' death cannot be reduced simply to that of any prophet or any just person. Jesus presented himself as one who had a unique relation with God and a unique relation with all human beings. In this sense also his person reveals itself as unique and necessarily provokes the question: Who is this man? - and not only the question but the urgent invitation to respond. In this way there emerges the interpretation that will see in the death

of Jesus an event that extends to the multitude (for all). But the matter is not yet made explicit, and the historian can only resolve the question by having recourse to the witnesses of the resurrection, through whom God reflects an answer that only he can give."

X. LÉON-DUFOUR, *Jesús...*, pp. 95-96

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