

NOTIFICATION

on the works of Father Jon SOBRINO, SJ:

Jesucristo liberador. Lectura histórico-teológica de Jesús de Nazaret (Madrid, 1991)¹ and
La fe en Jesucristo. Ensayo desde las víctimas (San Salvador, 1999)²

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 them [cf., for example, *infra* n: 6], 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.

¹ 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.

² 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.

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" (*Ibid*, 30), and "the Church of the poor... is the ecclesial setting of Christology because it is a world shaped by the poor" (*Ibid*, 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" (*Ibid*).

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 faith (cf. Second Vatican Council Decree *Optatam Totius*, 16; John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Fides et Ratio*, 65).

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 expressions that contain the seed of what will produce confession of the divinity of Christ in the strict sense" (*Ibid.*) "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" (*Ibid.*, 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 Lord (cf. 1 Thes 1:10; Phil 2:5-11; 1 Cor 12:3; Rom 1:3-4, 10:9; Col 2:9, etc.) 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 regard (Nicea, DH 125; Constantinople, DH 150; Ephesus, DH 250-263; Chalcedon, DH 301-302) 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 (cf. DH 252-263), 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" (DH 301). 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" (DH 3905).

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" (DH 252). "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" (DH 255). 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 Lord (1 Cor 12:3; Phil 2:11), and that all things are created through him (1 Cor 8:6). 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 *autobasileta* 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" (*Ibid.*).

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 *mediation*, 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 period (cf. Origen, *In Mt. Hom.*, 14:7; Tertulian, *Adv. Marcionem*, IV 8; Hilary of Poitiers, *Com. in Mt.* 12:17). 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" (*Redemptoris Missio*, 16). "Christ not only proclaimed the kingdom, but in him the kingdom itself became present and was fulfilled" (*Ibid.*, 18). "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" (*Ibid.*).

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" (*Ibid.*, 5). 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" (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Declaration *Dominus Iesus*, 15).

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" (*Ibid.*, 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" (*Ibid.*, 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" (Jn 6:46; cf. also Jn 1:18). This unique and singular intimacy between Jesus and the Father is equally evident in the Synoptic Gospels. (cf. Mt 11:25-27; Lk 10:21-22).

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

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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"(Pius XII, Encyclical Letter *Mystici Corporis*, 75; DH 3812).

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" (John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 26).

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" (CCC, 473). "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" (CCC, 474).

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" (*Ibid.*, 202). "...Jesus went to his death with confidence and saw it as a final 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" (*Ibid.*, 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 (cf., for example, Rom 3:25; 2 Cor 5:21; 1 Jn 2:2, etc.). Gospel passages in which Jesus attributes to his death a significance for salvation are not adequately taken into account; in particular, Mark 10:45 (Mt 20:28), "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" (Mk 14:24; cf. Mt 26:28; Lk 22:20). 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 Testament (cf. Jn 13:15; 1 Pt 2:21). 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)" (DH 1522).

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" (DH1529; cf DH 1560).

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" (Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, 7).

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" (CCC, 601).

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 faith (cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Instruction *Donum Veritatis*, 7). 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 Church (cf. *Ibid.*, 6).

Thus the truth revealed by God himself in Jesus Christ, and transmitted by the Church, constitutes the ultimate normative principle of theology (cf. *Ibid.*, 10). 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 truth (cf. Jn 16:13), 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, S.D.B.
Titular Archbishop of Sila
Secretary

EXPLANATORY NOTE
on the
NOTIFICATION
on the works of Father Jon SOBRINO, SJ

1. The Concern of the Church for the Poor

The proper function of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith is the promotion and defense of doctrine on faith and morals for the whole of the Catholic world (cf. John Paul II, Apostolic Constitution *Pastor Bonus*, 48). In this way, the Congregation seeks to be of service to the people of God, and particularly to the simple and poorest members of the Church. From the beginning, this preoccupation for the poor has been one of the characteristics of the Church's mission. If it is true, as the Holy Father has indicated, that "the first poverty among people is not to know Christ" (cf. Benedict XVI, *Lenten Message 2006*), then all people have the right to know the Lord Jesus, who is "the hope of the nations and the salvation of the peoples". What is more, each Christian has the right to know in an adequate, authentic, and integral manner the truth which the Church professes and expresses about Christ. This right is the foundation of the corresponding obligation of the ecclesial magisterium to intervene whenever this truth is placed in danger or negated.

It is because of this right of the faithful to the truth of Christ that this Congregation has seen the need to publish the attached *Notification* concerning some of the works of Father Jon Sobrino, SJ. These works contain propositions which are either erroneous or dangerous and may cause harm to the faithful. Father Sobrino manifests a preoccupation for the poor and oppressed, particularly in Latin America. This preoccupation certainly is shared by the whole Church. The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, in its Instruction on Christian liberty and liberation *Libertatis conscientia* (cf. AAS 79 [1987] 554-599), indicated that "human misery [...] drew the compassion of Christ the Savior to take it upon himself and to be identified with the least of his brethren (cf. Mt 25:40, 45)" and that "The preferential option for the poor, far from being a sign of particularism or sectarianism, manifests the universality of the Church's being and mission. This option excludes no one. This is the reason why the Church cannot express this option by means of reductive sociological and ideological categories which would make this preference a partisan choice and a source of conflict" (68). Previously, this same Congregation in its Instruction on some aspects of liberation theology (*Libertatis nuntius*, cf. AAS 76 [1984] 876-909), observed that the warnings about this theological trend contained in that document were not able to be interpreted as a reproach to those who wish to be faithful to a "preferential option for the poor", nor could they be an excuse for those who remain indifferent to the grave problems of human misery and injustice (cf. *Proemio*).

The citations clearly show the position of the Church with regard to this complex problem: "The evil inequities and oppression of every kind which afflict millions of men and women today openly contradict Christ's Gospel and cannot leave the conscience of

any Christian indifferent. The Church, in her docility to the Spirit, goes forward faithfully along the paths to authentic liberation. Her members are aware of their failings and their delays in this quest. But a vast number of Christians, from the time of the Apostles onwards, have committed their powers and their lives to liberation from every form of oppression and to the promotion of human dignity. The experience of the saints and the example of so many works of service to one's neighbor are an incentive and a beacon for the liberating undertakings that are needed today" (*Libertatis conscientia*, 57).

2. Procedure for Examining Doctrinal Teachings

This Notification comes as a result of a careful study of the writings of Father Sobrino according to the procedure established for the examination of doctrinal teachings. It may be helpful to explain briefly the way in which the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith proceeds towards a judgment on writings that appear to be problematic. When considering whether the writings of a certain Author present doctrinal difficulties or might damage the faith of the people of God, the Congregation initiates a procedure regulated by the *Agendi Ratio in Doctrinarum Examine*, whose latest edition was approved by Pope John Paul II on 29 June 1997.

The *ordinary process* entails sending the material in question to several experts for their review and opinion. The results of this, containing all the documentation required for the study of the case, is placed before the *Consulta*, a standing committee of the Congregation comprised of experts from various theological disciplines. The entire file, including the minutes of the discussion and the written opinions and evaluations of the Consulters regarding the existence of doctrinal errors or dangerous opinions in the writings, is then submitted to the *Ordinary Session* of the Congregation. This *Ordinary Session*, comprised of the Cardinals and Bishops who are members of the Congregation, undertakes a detailed examination of the entire question and decides whether or not to notify the author about the problems encountered. The decision of the *Ordinary Session* is then submitted for the approval of the *Supreme Pontiff*. Once approved, a list of erroneous propositions or dangerous opinions is sent to the Author through the Bishop or Religious Superior. The Author then has a period of three months in which to offer a reply. If the *Ordinary Session* considers this reply to be sufficient, no further action is taken. If it is judged insufficient, then it must be decided what measures to adopt. One such measure would be the publication of a *Notification* which details the erroneous propositions or dangerous assertions of the Author.

When the writings of an Author are judged to be clearly in error and, at the same time, when their diffusion could present a danger or has already proven to be of grave damage to the faithful (cf. *Agendi Ratio*, 23), the process can be abbreviated. A *Commission* of experts is assembled and given the task of determining the erroneous propositions. The findings of this *Commission* are submitted to the *Ordinary Session* of the Congregation. In cases where the propositions are judged to be in fact erroneous and dangerous, the Congregation, after the approval of the *Holy Father*, transmits a list of these propositions through the Ordinary to the Author. The Author is then given two

months in which to offer a correction or response. This response is examined by the *Ordinary Session* and the appropriate measures are taken.

3. The Particular Case of Father Sobrino

In the case before us now, the *Notification* itself indicates the steps that were taken according to this abbreviated *urgent examination*. This procedure was judged necessary given the wide diffusion of Father Sobrino's works, particularly in Latin America. In these works, one encounters grave deficiencies both in terms of methodology and content. Without repeating here what is treated in detail in the *Notification*, we note that among the primary methodological deficiencies of Father Sobrino is the affirmation that the "Church of the poor" is the ecclesial "setting" of Christology and offers it its fundamental orientation. This disregards the fact that it is only the apostolic faith which the Church has transmitted through all generations that constitutes the ecclesial setting of Christology and of theology in general. Father Sobrino tends to diminish the normative value of the affirmations of the New Testament as well as those of the great Councils of the early Church. These methodological errors give rise to conclusions which do not conform to the doctrine of the Church in certain key areas: the divinity of Jesus Christ, the Incarnation of the Son of God, the relationship of Jesus with the Kingdom of God, Jesus' self-consciousness, and the salvific value of Jesus' death.

In this regard, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith wrote: "a theological reflection developed from a particular experience can constitute a very positive contribution, inasmuch as it makes possible a highlighting of aspects of the Word of God, the richness of which had not yet been fully grasped. But in order that this reflection may be truly a reading of the Scripture and not a projection on to the Word of God of a meaning which it does not contain, the theologian will be careful to interpret the experience from which he begins in the light of the experience of the Church herself. This experience of the Church shines with a singular brightness and in all its purity in the lives of the saints. It pertains to the pastors of the Church, in communion with the Successor of Peter, to discern its authenticity" (*Libertatis conscientia*, 70).

It is hoped that this *Notification* will offer to both the pastors and to the faithful of the Church a secure basis, founded upon the doctrine of the Church, upon which to judge these questions, which are relevant both for theology and pastoral practice.