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Oponentsky posudek

### Christologie zdola? Spor o Jacques Dupuise, Rogera Haighta a Jona Sobrina

The dissertation begins with a very clear and well-written introduction that serves to set the tone for the whole dissertation. It presents the aim and method that are going to be adopted, and gives the reader a strong sense of the line of argument that is going to be followed. It is the right kind of length, long enough to ground the work, but not too long to prevent embarking on the investigation. The theme of the thesis can be stated in these words from the Introduction: "V posledu je cílem disertační práce doložit, že christologie zdola v pojetí Dupuise, Haighta a Sobrina – v kritické rozpravě, která je vždy důležitá – je oprávněná a potřebná." The need to do this is against the background of the fact that the Congregation for Doctrine of Faith (CDF) issued notifications against the three authors chosen for consideration in the work (Dupuis, Haight and Sobrino).

The first chapter looks in great detail at these notifications and the background to them, both in the CDF and in the person of Joseph Ratzinger. The logic of the chapter in the dissertation is the following. It first sets out the "problem" – what was the nature of the accusations levelled against the three theologians dealt with in the dissertation, both what is specific and what is in common. It then moves on to look at the development of the CDF in terms of its self-perception of its role, before focussing more narrowly on the theology of Joseph Ratzinger, which served as the benchmark for ideas of legitimacy for the Congregation during his time as its head and during his papacy. In this way the chapter sets out the *status quaestionis* concerning Christology from below and offers a first introduction to the main area of focus in terms of the works of the chosen theologians, and the Magisterial critique of their works. This helpfully sets the boundaries for the development of the thesis over the following chapters.

The strengths of the first chapter are several. It covers a lot of ground, but in a coherent and clear way, so that the reader never gets lost in the detail but retains an overall view of the development of the argument. Although it is apparent where the author's sympathies lie, he goes out of his way to be fair in his presentation of the views of the Congregation and in his treatment of Ratzinger's theology. He has read widely, and is able to choose short and telling quotations to illustrate and expound his argument, without simply stringing together a list of quotations. This in itself is to be welcomed, admired and received with gratitude, and it is indicative of the sure control that is present throughout the work.

The second chapter looks at the common influences on the three theologians with whom the author is dealing in this dissertation. He offers three such clusters of influence – Ignatian spirituality, the theology of Karl Rahner, and the experience of mission. All three are dealt with clearly and well, and it is a pleasure to read such a consistent and well-signposted work, in which each step follows logically and smoothly from the preceding one, so that the overall argument is never lost in the detail, which however is also not ignored. In terms of the spirituality, the main distinction is seen to lie between what one might call textual theory and spiritual praxis, which influences quite significantly what one thinks one finds in the *Spiritual Exercises*. Rahner's influence (which also, as the thesis makes clear, mediates Ignatian spirituality to a contemporary theological world) is also well drawn out. The

missionary dimension of the three theologians is also examined. Here I think the student has made an important point, in seeing that the three authors are fundamentally interested in the mission of the church, in their three very different contexts, which then also explains the differences in their approaches.

The underlying unifying motive (mission) and the necessary differences (context) in their christologies are dealt with in Chapters 3, 4 and 5. The third chapter contains an exposition of the theology of Jacques Dupuis, especially of his Christology. As in the previous chapters, the material is handled well, giving evidence of extensive reading of both primary and secondary sources, and a confident ability to construct an argument out of this material. The four areas that the chapter concentrates on – Dupuis' method, his Trinitarian Christology, what he has to say about salvation and about the encounter with the other – seem to me to be key ones.

The fourth chapter continues in the same vein as the third chapter, this time concentrating on the Christology of Roger Haight. It looks at his epistemological grounding, the idea of symbolic mediation, pneumatic Christology and the development of his ideas. Once again, it is an excellent chapter, in which Haight is given a fair hearing, and his ideas and thought presented in a coherent and well-argued way. I particularly like the way (present also in Chapter Three) that at least the footnotes continue the dialogue between the three authors, and use the other two to expand and illustrate the specific person being dealt with (so here for example Sobrino especially is used with reference to Haight). This is very helpful and gives a unity to the thesis.

The fifth chapter, as the preceding two, succeeds in an admirable way in presenting clearly and concisely the major impulses of the Christology of Jon Sobrino. In my opinion, the author has understood well Sobrino's theology and the reasons behind it, and presents them succinctly but fully. What I particularly liked in this chapter were a couple of times (in footnotes) when the author engages in the discussion between Ratzinger and Sobrino, or at least their understandings of who Jesus is, and thus makes clear what the terms Christology from above and below really mean. I think the areas that are chosen (the method Sobrino works with, his historical-theological reading of Jesus, his engagement with the tradition of the church and the idea of discipleship) are indeed important ones for Sobrino, and so appropriate. Again, there is wide reading both of primary and secondary texts.

The conclusion offers a reflection on the question of Christology from above and below, and seeks to demonstrate that both have a place, though the second has a certain priority. I think this is well-argued, and there is a return to the first chapter with a consideration of the CDF's critique. Again, there is a maturity in the argument here that is to be highly recommended, and the conclusion seems to me to follow naturally from the work that is presented. The bibliography is very impressive, and it seems to me that the important works (in a number of languages) have been noted.

Before saying anything else, the first thing that must be noted is that this dissertation quite clearly more than meets the requirements for a doctoral thesis. There is throughout a sense of someone who is in control of his material and who knows where he wants to go with it. The reading is extensive, and serves to corroborate the argument. Sometimes when students read so much, there is a sense that they have got lost in their material, and simply string quotations together, but here the literature is used in the construction of an argument that is clearly stated and that holds together throughout the work. Although obviously I am not the

best qualified to judge the quality of the Czech, at least for me the dissertation seemed to be well-written, comprehensible without being simplistic. I was mainly struck by how few errors in footnoting or in language that I came across (with the proviso that I cannot entirely guarantee the standard of Czech!).

For the defence, I would have a number of questions. These are not to be taken as implying any negative critical judgement on the thesis, but rather are to be taken as indicating the interest that it aroused in me as a reader. Thus, the questions are a way of trying to take the debate further forward, and also hopefully to offer some areas for thought for when the thesis is published, which I sincerely hope that it will be. The first question concerns the order chosen. Why was this order (starting with the notifications, and then only later going on to look at the three theologians in more detail) chosen? What are the advantages and disadvantages of this choice? The aim of the research is readily apparent and clearly stated. However, it would be interesting to hear in the defence if it would be possible to phrase this aim in either a question or a thesis. This, I think, would help both the reader of the future book, and also those in the defence commission who have not read the work to understand very clearly what it is that is being done. Thus, a question and the answer that the thesis gives to it would serve as a helpful summary.

Another question that arises out of the dissertation as a whole is the following. Especially the Czech translation that has been chosen for "theology from the margins" (teologie na hranici/hranicích) raises the question if it is possible to go beyond the boundaries or borders, if there can be "illegitimate" theology, and if so, who can make that judgement and on what grounds? I would be interested to hear the student's reflections on this question in the defence.

In respect of the second chapter and the three theologians, it would be interesting (if necessarily difficult) to consider the fact that all three have worked and lived for long periods outside of Europe / North America (indeed for Sobrino nearly all of his life as a Jesuit). Surely this is not irrelevant in conversation with Joseph Ratzinger who quite explicitly (and not just in his choice of the name Benedict as Pope) wanted to concentrate on the European continent as the place where the gospel most urgently needed to be heard. Though this does not necessarily make him Eurocentric, it does place him in a very different context and the experience of living outside of Europe / North America is one he never had, thus the questions that were raised by this fact were ones that he has never had to face. I think here there are questions about authority – who decides that your questions and responses are too influenced by the culture whilst mine are not, but instead offer timelessly true answers to perennial questions for all of humanity?

One other question that might be interesting to consider in the defence is the role of phenomenology, important for Rahner as well as for Haight (and I think to some extent for Dupuis too). Is this one of the issues at stake, to do with the legitimacy of a more phenomenological approach in theology?

In the third chapter, my impression is that *Towards a Christian Theology of Religions* is more cited in the footnotes than *Who do you say I am?* I am willing to be corrected on this point, but if it is the case, it would be interesting to know why there seems to be more concentration on Dupuis' work on interreligious questions than on his specifically Christological work. The dissertation may, in its published form, be strengthened by having

a brief summary paragraph at the end of each of the three expository chapters, linking what has been said to the aim of the dissertation. Again, this will help keep the reader on track.

As an overall verdict, then, this is an extremely impressive doctoral dissertation, certainly one of the best that I have read. It is indeed quite ambitious, taking on three major twentieth and early twenty-first century theologians, as well as Joseph Ratzinger, but it manages not to get lost in the detail, but to use the materials gathered to construct a convincing argument. Not only do I have no hesitation in declaring that it should go ahead to the defence, I would restate my conviction that it should definitely be published. It will be a real contribution to the Czech theological scene, and if it is possible for it to be translated, it can contribute to a wider debate.

If it is published, though, I think I would recommend two things for further reflection, which are related. The first is the order, and the second is the title. At the moment, the title suits the order, but the question is whether it suits the content, since in fact the three chapters on Dupuis, Haight and Sobrino are not really about disputes (spory) about their work, but critical expositions (and again I must say first-rate critical expositions) of their Christological approaches. And I am still not sure how helpful the division between Christology from above and below is, a point that in the end the author himself seems to support. And even if it is helpful, is it the real point of the disagreement between the theologians and the CDF? I think it would be good to clarify this a bit more in the published version of the dissertation. But I should finish by congratulating the student on writing a really excellent thesis, and one which is most definitely worthy of the award of a doctorate.

Tim Noble, PhD

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