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Recension of The Doctoral Dissertation of Rev. Leonard Sanyu

In response to the convocation of the Council of Discipline Theology at the University of Card. Stefan Wyszyński, I present my opinion on the doctoral dissertation written by Rev. **Leonard Sanyu** which is entitled *The Personalistic Christology of Cardinal Christoph Schönborn* and was elaborated under the direction of the prof. dr. hab. Bogumił Gacka.

1. General remarks and problematic of dissertation

The dissertation contains 305 pages and is subdivided into five chapters; the text is accompanied by list of abbreviations, introduction, conclusion and bibliography (very extensive, more than 20 pages). From a formal perspective, it is very well structured, crafted and written with accordance to methodological principles of theological dissertation. Rev. Sanyu uses very clear language which makes his arguments transparent and quite easily readable. From the perspective of knowledge of primary and secondary literature, the Autor proves his expertise in Schönborn studies, and beyond that in the very specialized and complex area of basic notions of Dogmatic Theology, both in systematic and historical perspective. The citations are done properly.



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The work has a precise subject and a research problem, to which the author remains faithful from its beginning to the very end. It is described by the very author as follows: "The purpose and contribution of this study is to foster and further the uncovering of the comprehensiveness which was achieved by the first councils' conception of the mystery of the Person of Jesus Christ as found in Schönborn's Christology. It is an attempt to further the description and appreciation of the truth of the mystery of the Person" (p. 4). The same idea is expressed synthetically by our Author in following way: "This study is focusing on the mystery of the Person of Christ as is presented and described in the Christology of Cardinal Christoph Schönborn, with a keen attention to the personalistic elements" (p. 9). From this setting of problems, it is clear that the primary intention of the author is to show the consistency of the Christology of the great councils of antiquity by showing the idea of the person as contained in and central to them. The spectrum through which the author chooses to view the comprehensive mystery of Christ is the interpretation found in the writings of the Austrian Dominican theologian, Cardinal Christoph Schönborn, the present Metropolitan of Vienna, an outstanding pastor and thinker. With his help, Sanyu performs a personalistic re-reading of the data of the great Tradition. For Sanyu, Schönborn's personalistic interpretation of the data of this tradition is an important contribution to contemporary Christology. A personalistic Christology, as exposed by archbishop of Vienna, can transcend the extreme, reductionistic views of Christology so characteristic of various contemporary theological currents (for instance rejection of doctrine of councils in Nicaea and Chalcedon).

The issues of the work, as can be seen, are complex. It revolves both synthetically around the fundamental shape of contemporary systematic Christology, and at the same time it has a distinctly analytical bent, being a work clearly focused on one of the main contemporary exponents of this Christology. It touches on the great issues of historical (especially patristic) Christology and at the same time is radically contemporary and up-to-date in its problems and intentions. Its great achievement is the combination of historical and systematic research, and on the background of this combination showing the right way of contemporary approach to classical theological issues. This approach can be called correct both because of its faithfulness to the historical sources and because of its eminently modern philosophical and theological sensitivity, which demands that the center of reality be discovered in the person (personalism).

Undoubtedly, such a research program must be regarded as ambitious in its very nature. A careful reading of the dissertation makes it possible to state that not only the initial ambition expressed in the theme of the work is exceptional, but also its concrete implementation in the form of the presented monograph is successful. Sanyu's dissertation may serve as a kind of model for thinking problematically. The author not only sees concrete theological problems, is able to evaluate them



and inscribe them in the broader horizon of the relationship of all the mysteries, but above all he seeks creative answers to them.

2. Structure of dissertation

As I have already mentioned, the work consists of five chapters, remaining in relations of logical succession and dependence to each other. The author puts a lot of effort into a coherent, clear and at the same time detailed analysis of the chosen problematic. In doing so, he demonstrates an awareness of the nature and structure inherent in scientific research, in which detailed, honest analyses form the basis for synthetic conclusions.

Sanyu devotes the first two chapters of his dissertation to the presentation of relevant data concerning the rudimental and inalienable foundations of Christology. The **first chapter** is an extensive source analysis of the second person of the Trinity in his pre-eternal existence. Chapter One begins with a theological hermeneutic of the concept of person, which allows us to express the most basic characteristic of the Son which is his being a person. The doctoral research attention then turns to in-depth analyses of the reality of divine generation, the Son's co-substantiality with the Father, and his filial being the image of the Father. After presenting the eternal character of the person of the Son, Sanyu goes on to characterize the economic mission of the Son (**chapter two**). The subject of research is the person of the Son in his involvement in history. Here the vast number of theological concepts related to the mystery of the incarnation of the eternal Son are reflected upon. Sanyu deals here with personal union and its effect in the form of an exchange of *idiomata*, conceived both in ontological and epistemological manner, relations of human and divine nature, problem of two wills and activities in the incarnated Logos. The Author takes into consideration the Christology of icon and the mystery of Christ's human body as well. Sanyu offers a special treatment to the apophatic dimension of hypostatic union. He affirms that "From Cardinal Schönborn's presentation of the Emperor Constantine V's theology, a conclusion can be made that, we are not to understand the Incarnation to mean the circumscribing of the Divine nature by the Human nature, or the Divine nature as if it were swallowing up the Human nature. This is so because, it is impossible for the infinite to be circumscribed by the finite. It is not possible for the finite to contain the Infinite" (p. 75). Giving current issues in Christology such a statement becomes crucial in the adequate theological understanding of the mystery of incarnation.

Chapters three and four demonstrate a good understanding of the novelty of the treatment of Christological issues inherent in the Viennese theologian. For Schönborn, a Dominican, proves to be a faithful disciple of Thomas Aquinas, who decided to include in his exposition of Christology, in addition to the classical metaphysical approach, detailed reflections on the



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mysteries of Jesus' life. Schönborn's Christology - in imitation here of the great Dominican teacher Aquinas - is not limited to the presentation and conceptual analysis of Christology. At its essential point, Schönborn's Christology, as skillfully discerned by Sanyu, becomes an in-depth theological meditation on the Gospel accounts of Jesus' gestures and words, the specific events of his life as they were remembered and transmitted by the evangelists. The third chapter focuses on presenting Schönborn's understanding of Jesus' life as described by the gospels and tradition. The fourth chapter presents the Christology of Jesus' last days, his passion, death and resurrection. In this way, Sanyu, shows that Schönborn understands the mystery of the person of Jesus very dynamically, historically. The person is not just an object of metaphysics and its speculations. The essence of the personal life is revealed in the host of stories, events, encounters, words. The personal identity of the Son can be seen in the perspective of his concrete historical existence.

The last, **fifth chapter** of the assessed work contains a presentation of the soteriology of the metropolitan of Vienna. Salvation is first presented as the work of the whole Trinity, so that against this Trinitarian background the centrality of the saving action of the Son can be described. His work is presented from the perspective of its four constitutive features (merit, satisfaction, sacrifice, ransom) and the five aspects proper to it (love of God, self-giving of the Son of God, substitution, gift of freedom, deifying adoption). The chapter does not limit itself to a description of the work of Christ, but also makes detailed analyses of the human response to that work and its patient assimilation into human existence. The part of the chapter dedicated to the question of the need of the Church deserves great attention. The setting of ecclesiology in the perspective of Christology is original and corresponds not only to the approach of the analyzed author, but also to the spirit of the teaching of the Magisterium (cf. Dominus Iesus). The whole analysis of Schönborn's soteriology is completed by Sanyu by outlining the contours of his eschatology.

It should be noted that the structure of the work clearly demonstrates that Sanyu is already quite a mature theologian. The quoted texts and the entire bibliography testify to his very good orientation in the theological literature. The proposed analyses are adequate in relation to the analyzed texts of the author in question. Finally, the whole reflection, the way it is conducted, the constant linking of various dimensions and aspects of the Christian mysteries, allows us to see in Sanyu a researcher fascinated by the beauty of the truths of faith, who understands their ecclesial need and sees the wage of their existential interpretation.



3. Some critical remarks

a/ Before publishing his textbook on Christology in the Amateca series, Schönborn, published his famous study on the icon. This book is a kind of quasi-integral Christology, which reveals that the original Christological intuitions of the Viennese archbishop are related precisely to the icon and its meaning. Unfortunately, Sanyu devotes rather little space to this issue, which gives the impression that he does not recognize the importance of this issue in the historical development of the Christology of the analyzed author.

b/ Extensive knowledge of the literature and issues related to Christology and dogmatics in general, makes Sanyu's reflections not always focus on the subject of the work. The vast amount of literature cited is sometimes used not so much to illuminate Schönborn's Christology as to give an integral presentation of Christology itself. However, the object of his work is Schönborn's personalistic Christology and not Christology in general.

c/ In this respect, the work lacks an in-depth and explicit presentation of the sources of Schönborn's personalistic view on Christology. Sanyu also does not distinguish the status of the sources considered (textbook, monograph, book on spirituality, meditations), which unfortunately does not allow for a full understanding of the passages analyzed in the context of the whole. All these make it difficult to assess how the author ultimately understands Schönborn's contribution to Christology.

d/ Surprisingly, there is no reference to the important monograph in the work of the Viennese cardinal dedicated to Sophron of Jerusalem: *Sophrone de Jerusalem: Vie Monastique et Confession Dogmatique* (Paris 1972).

e/ on page 46 Rev. Sanyu summarizes the views of Schönborn who, approaching Balthasar's position, maintains that the kenosis of the Son is “the self-abasement of God the Father”. This sentence is highly controversial and would require some kind of critical comment that would show that Sanyu understands the importance of such a statement.

f/ on page 20 there is a statement: “The doctrine of two natures of the Incarnate Son of God is unthinkable without the Nicene *homoousios*”. This should be clarified, as it remains unclear in itself.

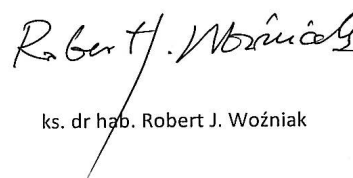


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4. Conclusion

In summary, Rev. Sanyu's work is extremely relevant to theology and the Church, it is both of a high academic level and existential at the same time. Despite my aforementioned critique, I state that it fulfils all exigencies set before works of such type. It is well worth to be accepted and honored as a doctoral dissertation and then published in its entirety. Therefore, I am asking the departmental authorities to admit Rev. Leonard Sanyu to the next stages of the doctoral procedures in accordance with applicable law.



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