

The Dogma of Salvation in Jesus Christ, Presented in Various Ways in Prophesying and Explained in Theology*

The salvation of man by Jesus Christ is the core of the Christian message. Jesus is the Saviour of mankind and His very name was given to Him by the Heavenly Father's, as proclaimed by an angel. The fact of salvation can and must be said to be fortified by dogmatic certainty, derived from the universal and consensual proclamation by the Church of what was previously contained in the Scriptures.

It may come as a surprise that with certainty of fact there is a large discrepancy in the description of how salvation was achieved and how it becomes our property. There are different, quite different ways of presenting this truth, and these differences can be seen both in the *Catechism's* proclamation of the Church and in professional theological studies. The subject of the present article will be the different forms (catechism and theology) that still coexist in today's consciousness of faith: the older ones, anchored in the transmission of the *Catechism of the Council of Trent*¹ and developed within the framework of traditional theology and the more recent ones developed within the framework of the Council and post-conciliar *aggiornamento*, visible in the catechisms² and in theological reflection.

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¹ *Catechismus ex decreto ss. Concilii Tridentini ad parochos Pii V Pont. Maximi editus*, Patavii 1757.

² The bibliographical data will be provided later in the appropriate places.

Post-Trent Proclamation of Salvation

This form was expressed both in the *Catechism of the Council of Trent* and in theological studies. The *Catechism* discusses this issue in several places:

First, when explaining the second article of the *Apostles' Creed*: “in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.”

The faith expressed in this article is the foundation of our salvation and redemption. The biblical basis for this assessment is the text 1J 4:15: “If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in them and they in God.” Confirmation may also be the praise of Peter’s confession contained in Mt 16:17.

The *Catechism* sees the historical and thought context of Christ’s work of salvation in Adam’s sin and its unfortunate consequences for the whole human family. From the state of ruin in which mankind fell, none of the people, not even of the angels, could lift it up. There is only one solution left: the infinite power of the Son of God accepting the weakness of our flesh that could remove the infinite power of sin and reconcile us with God in his blood. The very name Jesus, given to the Child at God’s explicit command, signifies, and announces in Him, the Saviour. This name, known in the Old Testament, belongs to the Son of God in a special way, because *to the people of all times, sitting in the darkness of death and entangled in the cruel bonds of sin and the devil, brought light, freedom and salvation.* He also acquired for them the right of inheritance into the kingdom of heaven and reconciled them to God the Father³.

When discussing the next article (*who was born of the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary*), the *Catechism* says that the Son of God became a man so that we could become sons of God⁴. Of the incarnate Son of God it is said that the Apostle calls him the new Adam, in whom we are all called to life, who has become the cause of grace and glory⁵. The *Catechism* does not enter into a more precise definition of the relationship between incarnation and our salvation, nor does it give us an explanation of how we become sons in the Son and at what moment and by what act Jesus Christ becomes the cause of grace and glory, at the same time gaining for Himself the right to the title of New Adam.

When discussing the fourth article of the *Apostles' Creed* (*suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried*) we first meet the question: what was the reason that the Son of God undertook such a cruel torment. The *Catechism* tells those who ask about the cause to answer that it is made up

³ *Catechismus...*, op. cit., 33.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 46.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 48.

of human sins and misdeeds from all previous and later history. The Son of God, the Saviour, in his Passion was oriented towards this (*hoc spectavit*) in order to redeem and destroy the sins of all times, i.e. to make sufficient and abundant reparation for them to the Father (*cumulate et abunde*)⁶.

On the second question: What benefits and favours the Passion of Jesus brought us, the *Catechism* responds with the statement that the Passion brought us: liberation from sin, freedom from the tyrannical power of the demon, repayment of the penalty due for sins, reconciliation with the Father by a beloved sacrifice, opening the blocked access to heaven⁷⁸.

The *Catechism of the Council of Trent* sees also the salvific dimension of Christ's resurrection, although it places it only in fourth place among the reasons why the very fact of resurrection was necessary. The previous reasons are: 1) the exaltation of the Lord; 2) the revival of faith and 3) the strengthening of hope. After stating these we learn that the resurrection was necessary also because of the completion of the mystery of our salvation and redemption. Through death, Christ freed us from sin, and by resurrection he restored to us the essential favours that we lost through sin. One of these favours is the resurrection of the body which in the resurrection of Christ has its causative and exemplary cause. For the biblical justification of the salvific dimension of the resurrection, the texts of Rom 4:25 and 1 Cor 15:21 are cited. The theological justification for the relationship between the Lord's resurrection and our resurrection the *Catechism* sees in that the humanity of Christ serves as a causative tool for God in the whole salvific work. "That is why, we read, Christ's resurrection became a certain instrument in making our resurrection."⁹

From the texts and thoughts they contain, we can see that the *Catechism of Trent*, using the message of the Bible, was able to point to many aspects of Christ's salvific work in its light. This applies mainly to death and resurrection, with a slight emphasis on the salvific effects of the very fact of the Incarnation.

The incarnation has been included, in accordance with the Anselmian-Thomistic concept, as a necessary condition for salvific death, and more specifically as a requirement for the full atonement of God's justice for the sins of the world.

⁶ Ibid., 58.

⁷ Ibid., 61.

⁸ Ibid., 74.

⁹ Ibid., 73: "Quare eius resurrectio instrumentum quoddam fuit ad resurrectionem nostram efficiendam."

The *Catechism* uses the notion of *satisfaction* (reparation) in discussing the sacrament of reconciliation, seeing in it the third essential part of the Church's sacramental penance. First of all, there is a short definition of satisfaction, understood as compensation for the harm done to another person. The highest degree of satisfaction is contained in the death of Jesus Christ on the cross, through which all our debts against God have been set off, even assuming that God wanted to deal with us according to the strict rigours of the law¹⁰. No creature was able to make such an atonement, and therefore, as John the Apostle testifies, "He Himself is the atonement sacrifice for our sins, and not only for our sins, but also for the sins of the whole world" (1J 2:2).

The *Catechism* describes Christ's atonement as: "full and sufficient satisfaction, fully and justly responding to the accounts of all the crimes committed in this world; its importance also makes human acts meaningful before God, without which it would not be worthy of the slightest attention."¹¹ From the words of the *Catechism* we can see that the doctrine of *Christ's salvation places within the framework of the Anselmian concept of Atonement, which aims to clarify the relationship between the Saviour's work and the situation of the Saviour. The reward given to God for us and in our name is the essence of Christ's action. The act of atonement should include all the consequences of the crucifixion listed above, such as liberation from sin, freeing from Satan's tyrannical power, etc., as well as all the consequences of the crucifixion. And where to put the salvific effects of the resurrection?* The *Catechism* mentions them, but does not elaborate on their explanation. Silence on this subject – similarly as on the Incarnation – is a weakness of the presentation of faith discussed here.

The discussed catechism lecture turns out – at closer look – to be a constituent adaptation to the pastoral needs of the Anselmian-Thomistic concept of salvation. Within this framework, the fundamental role is played by the death on the cross which in itself is the full offsetting of our debts to God and the acquisition by merit of all salvific favours¹².

The Resurrection in the concept of Thomas is treated as *the completion of the work of salvation*, which is to be understood in the sense that just as Christ saved us from all evil by the abolished Passion, so by the glory of the Resurrection

¹⁰ Ibid., 304.

¹¹ Ibid., 305: "Haec igitur plena et cumulata est satisfactio, scelerum omnium rationi, quae in hoc saeculo commissa sunt, pariter eequaliterque respondens: Cuius pondere hominum actiones apud Deum plurimum valent, ac sine eo nulla prorsus aestimatione dignae haberentur."

¹² STh III, 48, a. 1 c; Cf. comment: C. Billuart, *Cursus theologiae (Supplementum), Opus posthumum*, Wirzeburgi 1760, 443-448.

he lifted us up to all good, according to the words of Paul: He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.” (Rom 4:25).

Developing the above thought of Thomas, C. Billuart, a commentator for Thomas¹³¹⁴ says that it is not to be understood in the sense that the resurrection has merited justification, nor merely that it is the model of our justification but that if Christ had not risen we would not have attained the righteousness merited to us by the Passion. For it was decided in God’s ordinances that the Holy Spirit should not be given, that the apostles should not be sent with preaching, nor should the fruits of the Passion be applied to us except after the resurrection, as the words of the Scriptures testify: “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance for[a] the forgiveness of sins” (Lk 24:46); and “the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified” (J 7:39).

The juxtaposition of the teachings of *the Catechism of the Council of Trent* with Thomistic theology shows that their ways of thinking were close, or even overlapping each other. It is therefore hardly surprising that the school theology of the post-Trent period, using the findings of such authorities, followed the marked paths, presenting a soteriology of atonement deserving as the most correct and complete lecture of faith in the salvation of Jesus Christ¹⁵.

In the theological textbooks of the post-Trent period, attention was paid in the first place to the person of Jesus Christ and his living structure (Christology), and only in the second place to his salvific achievements for the good of man (soteriology)¹⁶. Jesus Christ was seen as the Mediator by the power of His own being, revealed in one divine-human person. He is a bridge between people and God.

After this initial arrangement of Jesus Christ as a mediator, the post-Trent theologians moved on to a more detailed description of His salvific function for the benefit of the people¹⁷. There are two trends in this description: 1) specific to Latin Roman schools, and 2) associated with Northern European

¹³ STh III, 53, a. 1 ad 3.

¹⁴ C. Billuart, op. cit., 460.

¹⁵ L. Ott, *Précis de théologie dogmatique*, Paris 1955, 267-277.

¹⁶ Cf. F. Dziasek, *Jezus Chrystus – Boski Posłaniec, I Traktat chrystologiczny*, Poznań-Warsaw-Lublin 1962; *Jezus Chrystus – Zbawcze Misterium, II Traktat soteriologiczny*, Poznań-Warsaw-Lublin 1962.

¹⁷ A good description of the textbook soteriology of the pre-conciliar period is presented in: H. Kessler, *Die theologische Bedeutung des Todes Christi. Eine traditionsgeschichtliche Studie*, Düsseldorf 1970, 11-18.

centres¹⁸. The textbooks of the “Roman” tendency taught that Jesus saved mankind by his passion and death, interpreted in Thomistic categories of atonement, merit, sacrifice and redemption. In the way of addition (*Scholion*) it was said in these textbooks that also “descent into hell,” resurrection and ascension have some salvific meaning. Textbooks from northern centres usually presented a slightly different order in the lecture on soteriological doctrine. Salvation was presented as a process realised in the three functions of Jesus Christ: as prophet, king and priest. The first rose to the surface in teaching, the second in glorious rule, and the third in sacrificial torment and glorious heavenly worship. The most important element for our salvation is the priestly function, and the main effort to explain theology has been concentrated around it. In the very explanation of the salvific significance of Jesus’ death, the two tendencies do not actually differ, seeing in it the atonement, merit, sacrifice, and redemption.

It is worth noting that already in the pre-conciliar period attempts were made to combine the salvation of mankind with the whole event of Christ, encompassing the whole human existence of Jesus Christ, from the Incarnation to the glorious exaltation.

2. Dutch Catechism (“De Nieuwe Catechismus”) as an Attempt at a Breakthrough in Soteriology¹⁹

The *Dutch Catechism* places the matter of human salvation against the background of widespread human misery, which gives rise to a sense of emptiness, pain and misery. A person living in the world does not enjoy a state of sufficient and certain happiness. One can only long for such a state and really misses it. Some ideological doctrines (Marxism, humanism), as well as the great world religions (Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam), are coming forward with a cure for this situation. “The Catechism discusses the soteriological proposals of these ideologies and religions, stating that they are fundamentally inadequate.”²⁰ This is particularly evident in the proposal of secular soteriology which wants to link liberation from life’s deficiencies exclusively with the progress of knowledge and

¹⁸ H. Kessler calls this second tendency “German” theology. It seems that this term tightens the scope of this tendency, which was not alien to Polish theology.

¹⁹ I use the Italian version of the Catechism: *Il Nuovo Catechismo Olandese, Torino-Leumann 1969. This version includes the translation of the original as well as: Dichiarazione della Commissione Cardinalizia del 15 ottobre 1968 and Supplemento al_Nuovo Catechismo.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 325-333.

the development of civilization. The *Catechism* notes that the message of progress can make a bitter mockery of a human being at critical moments of life. “Try to talk about the progress of mankind – we read in the text – to someone who has a daughter mortally wounded in front of him in a road accident.”²¹ Progress can – and often actually does – have even more tragic consequences in terms of the suffering and death of millions.

Does Jesus Christ free us from this unhappy condition? The *Catechism* sees the answer to this question in an old Christian statement: Jesus is alive. It declares victory over sin and death. For the ailing father it carries a message: Your daughter will live and will live in her own personal reality. Without resurrection, our faith loses its meaning, making us people worthy of pity and, at the same time, deceivers in the most important problem of humanity. Jesus’ resurrection means that the works undertaken on earth will find their fulfilment in glory²².

From the Gospel’s message we learn that we have been saved not only by Christ’s resurrection, but also by his death. How to understand that death can save someone? It is a mystery that cannot be entirely expressed in words, even if the heart grasps what it is all about. However, it is necessary to stop at this point in order to move away from the one-sided concepts with which this truth has managed to integrate. Unilateralism can be seen in such an approach to salvific death, in which death serves to rectify the violated juridical order, where a misdemeanour is painfully punished. The *Catechism* departs from this view, replacing the juridical order with a personal layout. This system of negligence towards God is repaired by apology and active fulfilment of love, i.e. a noble life in which God has a liking. The Father expected such a life from Jesus and will meet with such a life. A beautiful life led Jesus to a violent death, before which He did not retreat, remaining faithful to His chosen path. In this way, says the *Catechism*, Jesus attained forgiveness for us, and about death, as an expression of supreme obedience, we can say that it was wanted by God²³. It is difficult to say, however, that God waited until the blood flowed and that it was only this blood that soothed Him.

The authors of the *Catechism* recall from the New Testament those words which describe the process of our salvation. These are: redemption, reconciliation, justice, blood, sin. Do they really serve – as some people want – to express the idea of a bloody restoration of the order?

²¹ Ibid., 336.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid., 338: “In questo senso possiamo dire che la sua morte fa parte della volontà del Padre.”

Jesus “redeemed” us by His death. This word reminds us of the freeing of Israel from Egypt. This means that the people have become God’s property anew. Similarly, through the death of Jesus, we begin to belong again to God through a renewed covenant.

In the New Testament we continue to read that through Jesus’ death we were “reconciled” to God. A careful reading shows that the New Testament does not say that God has reconciled himself to us but that we have reconciled ourselves to God. It turns out that there was no need to reconcile an angry God with man but only to lead a wicked man to God. Here too it is a matter of renewing the covenant. This renewal is accomplished through God’s “righteousness” which is not limited to the strict requirement of punitive retribution but is manifested in God’s creative power, which makes us righteous and good.

Then we have the word “blood.” During the last supper the Lord spoke: “for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins” (Mt 26:28). The word “blood” is extremely important for understanding Jesus’ work. It refers to the blood of the covenant of Sinai: a sacrifice was made there for Yahweh, while the blood that already belonged to God was used to sprinkle the people. Blood is a gift from God to Israel: one and the same blood (read: life) in God and in people. The fraternity of blood creates a kind of kinship²⁴. In this arrangement, the blood of Jesus is not so much a gift to God, but rather a gift from God to people. Jesus gives His blood to us, and God’s blood becomes our blood. We become close to God as part of a new covenant in blood.

Finally, we encounter the word “sin” at St. Paul’s in this context: “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” (2 Cor 5:21). What does the text want to say? Most likely, Jesus joined our world, marked by sin and death. He became a part of this world in order to give us his holiness here. He becomes subject to the curse, as hanging on a tree, to free us from the curse over our curses²⁵.

According to the authors of the *Catechism*, all these expressions signify Jesus’ obedience, His devotion to the cause until his death. They do not say that God needed Jesus’ suffering as a substitute punishment for us²⁶. Rather, God needed His life as a substitute for love in our name. This love had to pass through death, and that is why we can say that we were saved (redeemed) by Jesus’ death.

²⁴ Ibid., 339.

²⁵ Ibid., 340.

²⁶ Ibid.: “Non significano perciò che il Padre abbia avuto bisogno delle sofferenze di Gesù come punizione sostitutiva al nostro posto.”

In summing up his arguments, the *Catechism* asks the question: can we express in short words the way in which the Lord saves us? He attacks evil and sin at the very root, when he becomes obedient until death. In this obedience the true Good Man is revealed. His Spirit tries to prolong this goodness in us, making what is called a new birth in man. The new birth puts mankind in the face of the duty to work to overcome sin and misery. On this way a man united in solidarity with Christ can come to the glory of the Resurrection, that is, to victory over all forms of evil.

The version of the doctrine of salvation in Jesus Christ presented by *Nieuwe Katechismus* provoked very different reactions, from words of appreciation to severe criticism²⁷. Among the critical voices, the first and most important is the assessment contained in the *Declaration of the Cardinal Commission* of 15 October 1968²⁸. The *Commission*, without assessing the catechism concept as a whole, points to those elements which it lacks and which should be present. In the *Catechism*, the essential elements of the doctrine of reparation, which are part of the faith, must be laid out without any doubt, as the Commission demands. In support of this request, the *Declaration* quotes biblical, patristic and magisterial texts in which – in the opinion of its authors: there is a teaching of compensation. Compensation is closely linked to the concept of merit, about which, according to the Commission; we are taught by our faith and therefore merit must also be included in the description of Christ's salvific work. By his Passion, the Saviour compensated in the eyes of his heavenly Father for all the sins of the world and made grace be restored to mankind as the favours merited to him by his Head²⁹.

The text of the *Catechism*, corrected in accordance with the above recommendations, can be found in the *Supplemento* appended thereto³⁰. The meaning of this improved version is synthetically expressed by its last sentences: "Holy, innocent and without blemish (cf. Hebrews 7:26) – not affected by any punishment by the Father himself – accepted his sinful brothers as their mediator (cf. 1 Timothy 2:5) that death which was for them the wages of sin (cf. Rom 6.23). In this way he repaired before God all their crimes and merited the fact that

²⁷ Cf. *Report über den Holländischen Katechismus. Dokumente – Berichte – Kritik*, Freiburg/Br 1969.

²⁸ *Dichiarazione della Commissione Cardinalizia sul "Nuovo Catechismo"* ("de Nieuwe Katechismus"), in: *Nuovo Catechismo Olandese*, Torino 1969, 3-12.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 7f.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 46-48.

God's grace was given anew to mankind, which (mankind) itself in the person of its Head contributed to its restoration."³¹

The amendments introduced at the request of the *Commission* have, as can be seen from the sentences quoted, made the lecture on soteriology in the "New Catechism" similar to traditional structures in which the pillars are the ideas of reparation and merit. Needless to say, the lecture has lost much of its attractiveness which does not automatically mean that it loses value. One has to be very cautious with valuing assessments at all which results from the fact that all theological descriptions with great difficulty come close to the deepest sense of the mystery of salvation. It is not easy to assess the degree of this approach, and thus it is difficult to issue censorships valuing individual concepts.

Theology of the Post-conciliar Period on Salvation

The Second Vatican Council is undoubtedly a turning point in Catholic theological thought. In fact, this applies to all issues, even those that were not explicitly addressed in the teaching of the Council. The recommended, or only permitted, new methods of studying the content of revelation and the ways of interpreting it in history have led theologians to new statements that had not previously been predicted but which reach very deeply into the content of the salvific message.

Contemporary theology, as M. Flick notes³², accepting the revealed message of salvation achieved by the cross, evaluates with a great deal of criticism the juridical patterns used in various theories of "alternative compensation" presented. Special resistance is faced with concepts that emphasize the influence that Jesus would have on His heavenly Father to forgive mankind its guilt. These concepts – even if they could refer to some biblical texts – are essentially anthropomorphic images of God, seen together in the qualities of mercy and justice. It is absolutely impossible to say that the emphasis placed by Paul on the "righteousness of God," which shone in the passion and death of Christ, is the one which reveals itself in the release of the innocent Christ into the hands of his enemies³³.

In the Old Testament, *God's justice means first and foremost faithfulness to God's promises made within the framework of a covenant. God remains faithful to the covenant even if the other side is unfaithful: He announces a new covenant to transform the human heart into faithfulness, so that the people will*

³¹ Ibid., 51.

³² M. Flick, *Croce*, in: *Nuovo dizionario di teologia*, Milan 1977, 268.

³³ Ibid.

also become righteous. This happens in the New Covenant when Christ, dead but resurrected for our salvation, becomes the source of the Holy Spirit for his Church, who enables the faithful to follow a similar filial attitude as the Saviour revealed. In the Gospel, therefore, "God's righteousness" is revealed not because God demands compensation of the sinful debt but because in Christ all the salvific promises are fulfilled.

The love of God, which is revealed in the salvific process, is completely different from human love; humans strive for the values they lack; the Divine shares values with others because it has their fullness. The love through which the Father gives the Son so that the world may live is not "own" love, offended by sin and seeking reparation, but an altruistic and creative love, overflowing, seeking the right reception. Christ's role in the work of reconciliation is not to give the Father what he does not have and what he wants to receive, but to receive what the Father has and what he wants to communicate. "In the opinion of M. Flick, the "love of Christ towards the Father (and with the Father towards the world) is the clearance through which the faithful and creative love of the Father penetrates the world, is received with dignity in this world and fulfils in it the role of a constant source of love."³⁴

What role – with the vision of salvation outlined above – grants a crucifix death? In his answer, the author quotes three reasons that seem to speak for the necessary inclusion of the cross in the process of our salvation. First, the cross appears as a natural consequence of the condition of the Son of God, incarnated in a world dominated by sin. The God, incarnated spontaneously and naturally, felt in solidarity with the brothers and sisters tormented and enslaved in this world and, as a consequence of this solidarity, sought to renew the face of the created world. He wanted a new order, according to God's love plan. This undertaking, realised in the words of the message and in liberating actions, evoked hatred and active resistance from a world dominated by sin and evil. The Jews and the pagans spoke out unanimously against Jesus, obedient to the selfish aims of their own particular reasons. If we accept as a real phrase: the "Father wanted the cross," then it must be understood in the sense that the cross was part of the general expectation of the faithful love of the Son, ready for everything in the fulfilment of God's³⁵ salvific role.

The second reason, which seems to demand the cross, lies in the fact that it is the existential condition for the appearance of this filial love thanks to which

³⁴ Ibid., 269.

³⁵ Ibid.

the love of the Father is accepted in the world. Mature and developed love is not only a spontaneous impulse but is a conscious and responsible commitment of the person, even devotion to another person. This personal involvement is virtual as long as it is not enforced by the circumstances. In Christ, this ultimate surrender to the Father – and by the will of the Father also to mankind – takes place only on the cross (cf. J 15:13). In suffering, Christ learned “obedience,” i.e. it was only there that his perfect love for the Father was expressed (Heb 5:8). The Father “wants” the cross, but not for himself, he wants unconditional, concrete and total love, including its causes, conditions and consequences. Christ on the cross accepts the Saviour’s calling³⁶.

The third reason for the cross seems to be the fact that the cross is a clear testimony to the highest value of God’s will for which everything is worth sacrificing and that in the service of the brothers and sisters man achieves his full development. At Calvary, therefore, an unprecedented event took place, namely, a testimony of love for the Father and for the brethren, which infinitely prevails over the false testimonies of our sins, and thus “restores” the latter³⁷. This “restoration” is not about taking something away from creation and handing it over to God, but, on the contrary, it allows God to pour out his fullness into a creation that does not have it.

Closing the lecture on our own concept of the truth about salvation through the cross, M. Flick notes that when we want to express the change made by Christ the Saviour in the world, we must use the terminology appropriate to describe reconciliation between people. In this situation, the following terms are useful and legitimate: The “redemption” and “satisfaction.” However, it must be immediately added that these expressions must be purged of everything that could obscure God with a mist of shortage, selfishness or predilection in evil, even if only physically. The expressions used must be compelled to convey the Father’s attitude conditional upon having the fullness and the purest love enlivened.

The author attaches a methodological-practical warning to the substantive reflection which boils down to not falling into a mistake similar to the one committed by followers of Anselmian theory. They were too sure that their theory was exhausting the message of salvation through the cross. Nor can such an attitude be adopted in today’s concepts, since they also do not exhaust to the end the mystery of the cross, which, as St. Paul testifies, always escapes any assessment of the wisdom of this world (1Cor 1:18-31).

³⁶ Ibid., 270.

³⁷ Ibid.

The discussion of the soteriological thought of M. Flick shows that he focused his attention on the salvific significance of crucifix death, seen in systems different from those usually adopted after Anselm or Thomas of Aquinas. From this lecture emerges the indispensability of the death on the Cross for our salvation, although its function must not be reduced primarily to the payment of our sinful debts or the equivalent merit (*de condigno*) of God's favours to us.

The renewed theological lecture on the salvific significance of the whole mystery of Jesus Christ – and not only his death – can be found in the writings of another Roman theologian, namely J. Alfaro, professor of Roman Gregoriana³⁸. The starting point for his reflection is the statement that the fundamental theme of all the New Testament writings – while maintaining significant differences in approach – is the announcement of the definitive completion and disclosure of God's salvific work in Jesus Christ and of the call to people to participate in this mystery through a free decision towards Christ and through Christ towards the salvific love of God³⁹. This theme is outlined in the synoptics, matures in Paul's statements, and reaches its relative fullness in John's works⁴⁰. Patristic theology, taking advantage of biblical inspirations, saw the salvation of man as participation in the mystery of Christ, and through him in the mystery of the Holy Trinity⁴¹. From the reflections on biblical and patristic thought, the author comes to such conclusions as to the relationship between the mystery of Christ and our rebirth by grace: It is conspicuous that all patristics is a profound and essentially Christlike concept of grace; Patristic theology presents itself at this point as a faithful follower of neo-aesthetic thought⁴².

The above conclusions have a right to be a guideline for today's theological thought, seeking an adequate way of expressing the truth about salvation in Jesus Christ. The doctrine of Scripture, taken over and interpreted by Tradition, is the only reliable source of information about the contents of the faith for theology of all times – and therefore also for us. Theology must not deviate from this source under the threat of losing its proper tasks.

The basic idea of Tradition can be seen in the conviction that the Incarnation is the same as the divinisation of Christ's humanity, and in and through

³⁸ J. Alfaro, *Cristologia e antropologia. Temi teologici attuali*, Assisi 1973, 46-155; esp. 79-113.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 46.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 46-83. There are so many pages devoted to J. Alfaro's analysis of biblical data.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 83. A detailed presentation of the biblical and patristic texts cannot be rendered here; moreover, the author is not original in these areas, which is understandable, if only because they do not belong to his speciality.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 105.

it the divinisation of the whole human race takes place. The grace of Christ identifies with the Incarnation as a sovereign and absolutely free act of God. It is the grace of God's filial attitude of Man-Christ, i.e. His personal relationship with God as His own Father. Christ's humanity has been divinised by virtue of the act of the Incarnation, which means that Christ's grace identifies itself with the Incarnation and therefore, from its very essence, has a Trinitarian character, i.e. it contains within itself Christ's personal reference to the Father and to the Holy Spirit.

The incarnation, as it assimilates the human being through the Word, is realised gradually in the human existence of Christ, starting with the Incarnation, finding its peak in death and reaching its fullness in the resurrection. The gradual completion of the Incarnation coincides with the gradual divinisation of the humanity of Christ, fully divinised only in the Resurrection. Incarnation, death and resurrection are three fundamental stages of one and the same mystery, namely, "becoming human like us" of the Son of God⁴³.

In the divinisation of Christ's humanity through the Incarnation is initially contained (*radicalmente*) the divinisation of people. Patristic theology saw the Incarnation in itself as a forgiving grace for all mankind. Incarnation by its very essence is an act of solidarity between the Son of God and people: by becoming a man like us, He makes us sons of God. In the divinised humanity of the Son of God, all people were destined for filial adoption. The grace of a Christian is the grace of divinisation, which in turn is nothing more than participation in the divinisation of Christ's humanity through the Incarnation. This leads to the conclusion that the grace of a Christian cannot be thought of outside the Incarnation, because grace identifies itself with divinisation, and this in turn identifies itself with the Incarnation. The grace of Christ is reduced to the sonship of God, and our grace is a filial adoption, or sonship in the Son: *fili in Filio*.

The salvific and divine meaning of Christ's death and resurrection is justified by the fact that people are included in Christ. Here we deal with the mystery of Christ's inclusion in our death and, on the other hand, the inclusion of people in His victory over death. This victory is made available to us by the power of the Holy Spirit, to whom mankind was endowed after Christ's glorification.

It follows from the above suggestions of patristics that grace is not merely a liberation from sin, but first and foremost a divinisation. The dependence

⁴³ Ibid.: "Incarnazione, morte e resurrezione costituiscono le tre tappe fondamentali di uno stesso mistero: il farsi uomo come noi del Figlio di Dio."

of man's divinisation on the Incarnation of Jesus Christ is absolute: the event of Jesus Christ is in itself our salvation, and Christology becomes soteriology⁴⁴.

It is worth noting that Greek and Latin patristics, in order to express the state of our salvation in relation to the work of Christ, uses such notions (of biblical origin) as: "community of life," "participation," "solidarity," "inclusion" (corporate personality). These terms clearly belong to the area of interpersonal relations, exceeding the scope of the order described by the causal categories⁴⁵.

The ideas, alive in patristic theology, mentioned above, began to descend into a state of oblivion in the Middle Ages. The incarnation ceased to be attributed with salvific significance without seeing in it the source of divinisation, and the grace itself was not seen in the perspective of Christ alone (connected only with Christ). Christ's mediation began to be reduced to the atoning and compensating dimension of his death and to the instrumental causality of his humanity. The post-Trent Scholastica has reached a complete separation between the Incarnation and grace; it lacked the salvific dimension of the Incarnation and the Resurrection⁴⁶. It is only in recent decades that they have tried to refer to a rich patristic tradition, although it is difficult to say that this reference is sufficient. Much remains to be done⁴⁷.

Part of the work waiting for the theology is taken up by J. Alpharo himself in the work "Christ the sacrament of God."⁴⁸ It starts with the statement that the Incarnation is the definitive surrender of God to man, that is, the supreme act of God's grace. In the process in which the Son of God assimilates humanity, God reveals and gives Himself as the Father of the man of Christ, and in Christ the Father of men. The mystery of Christ is to unite the divine person with an authentic human being: the man Jesus became personally the Son of God. This sonship of God is an un-created grace (*gratia increata*) that embraces the whole human reality of Jesus and places it in a filial relationship with the Father. This is achieved through the Incarnation, in which God gives Himself to the man Christ as Father (the Son's own person boils down to receiving substance from the Father: *sussistente ricevera*). Giving oneself to God as the Father of Christ is the basis of all God's giving to people. The Incarnation, the possibility of which is based on a personal mystery in God, is a fundamental grace on which all

⁴⁴ Ibid., 106.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 107.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 108. The author believes that there is still no good reason to explain the departure of medieval theology from patristic thought. The very departure is described as "deviation."

⁴⁷ Ibid., 109.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 132-141. Cristo sacramento di Dio.

other graces depend and in which all other graces participate. Uncreated grace, i.e. the surrender of God in the process of Incarnation, is responded to by the human nature of Christ by created grace (*gratia creata*), which takes the form of divinisation of his humanity⁴⁹.

God the Father, the ultimate source of the salvific order, predicted and decided that the Incarnation is the way of salvation for all people, and not just the divinisation of the humanity of Jesus himself. Through the Incarnation God becomes the Father of Christ: the eternal birth for its personal end has the man Jesus. In the Son, who has become a man, God extends his fatherly love to all people (Eph 1:5). The Son of God, through his authentic humanity, is united with the entire human community to the extent that the Father recognises us as his sons.

Becoming a man, the Son of God accepted our mortal destiny as his own in order to make us partakers of his glorious destiny through his death and resurrection. Incarnation implies, by its very essence, the solidarity of the Son of God with the whole human family. The salvific value of the Incarnation is based on this solidarity. In Christ, the Son of God incarnate, God said His definite “yes” to our salvation⁵⁰.

In the Incarnation, the Son of God accepted our human existence (not only nature), subject to the law of death. Death is contained in the very act of acceptance of human existence. This fate, written down in accepted nature, was approved without hesitation by the sinless Jesus in obedience to the Father and in love for people, His brothers and sisters. Christ’s death was not an accidental result of the Incarnation, but the pinnacle of authentic “being human” of the Son of God. Not only death itself, but also its free acceptance in loving obedience to the Father was implied in advance in the Incarnation. Death itself belongs to the human condition of Christ, and its filial acceptance corresponds to his attitude as the Son of God. As a man, Christ had to taste the bitterness of death, and as the Son of God, he was obliged to sacrifice his life in filial obedience to the Father’s will. The Incarnation included Christ’s destiny to sacrifice his life in obedience to the Father and for the salvation of people. From this we can see that the priestly function of Christ finds its basis in the very ontical constitution of the Son of God incarnate. The grace created by Christ (divinisation of humanity) expressed itself in urging Him to offer His sacrifice to the Father for His brothers and sisters. Death is the final phase of the “figure of the servant” of the Son of God, that is, his acceptance

⁴⁹ Ibid., 133.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 135.

of our existence, marked by the law of sin and death. On the cross, the highest degree of solidarity between the Son of God and sinful humanity is revealed and realised. The universal salvific value of Christ's death for all mankind is anchored in this solidarity; Christ sacrificed his life to the Father as the Head and sole Priest of all mankind. Through the cross, the Son gives himself completely to the Father in response to the Father's devotion to the Son in Incarnation⁵¹.

By giving his Son to death for the salvation of mankind, God declares and makes his grace definitive. In Christ's death, God gives us His Son, and in the Son He gives Himself to us. The cross is the highest effective sign of the Father's salvific love, which should be understood in the sense that even God cannot give a greater sign.

If Christ, as a true man, should have tasted the bitterness of death, then, in turn, as the Son of God, He could not ultimately remain under His authority. By his free and absolute acceptance of Christ's death he broke its power. The Incarnation was of itself directed to the death of the Son of God and through death to His glorious resurrection. In the resurrection, the divinisation of Christ's humanity is finally completed: from that moment he becomes "Lord" as a participant in the glory and power of the Father. In the Resurrection the process of assimilation of human nature by the Son of God closes: it began in the Incarnation.

Christ's belonging to the human community as its Head gives the resurrection a universal salvific value. Christ was glorified as the firstborn among the other brothers and sisters, so his adoption includes the inclusion of other people in it⁵². In the Resurrection, the human existence of Christ achieves a new way of life, called *aeternitas participata*. The Glorious Lord lives and works outside of time and space, which means that His work is not subject to limitation of space and time.

The glorification of Christ in the resurrection gives him the power to send down the Holy Spirit on people. The Spirit acts in the human heart, evoking in it a filial attitude towards God. The Holy Spirit unites us with Christ and His life included in the life of the Holy Trinity. So through Christ, in the Holy Spirit, we share in God's inner life⁵³.

From the presented arguments of J. Alfaro we can see that salvation is directly and almost necessary connected with the Incarnation of the Son of God, understood as a whole, i.e. spread over all stages of the union of the Divine Person with human reality. Thus, our salvation in its objective fulfilment (*redemptio*

⁵¹ Ibid., 137.

⁵² Ibid., 139.

⁵³ Ibid., 140.

obiectiva) depends on the overall “event” of Jesus Christ. The salvation contained in the “event” of Jesus Christ is offered to man as a gift and an opportunity which he must make use of, assimilating it through his own attitude and the acts born out of it (faith, love, baptism, sacraments, etc.). This assimilation can be called subjective salvation (*redemptio subjectiva*).

The soteriological concepts (catechism and theology) presented above will be well complemented at the end with comments by J. Galot, author of an extensive volume of Catholic soteriology. “To the question: Why did you come Christ? It seems to impose – *as the author believes* – a clear answer in its simplicity: Christ came for the salvation of people. In fact, this short answer covers such a complicated reality that it cannot be comprehended in a single collective view. The work of Christ contains a multitude of aspects which must be strongly sought, while at the same time striking a balance between the different points of view, which are treated as complementary and mutually reinforcing. Too often, however, in soteriology there are definitely simplified, one-sided solutions, and thus insufficient.”⁵⁴

I do not know whether J. Galot’s opinion on simplified solutions cannot be referred to those mentioned in this article. However, a degree of unilateral simplification seems appropriate and close to them. One could even risk claiming that without simplifications – and even without a certain one-sidedness – it is impossible to talk about the truth of salvation at all. Confronted with human reason, it surpasses it to such an extent that there is nothing left for it but to confine itself to listing selected aspects of the mystery of salvation, and thus to submit to some necessary one-sidedness. This forced one-sidedness must be remembered and taken into account by the theologian in his reflection on salvation. This will protect him from the presumptuous certainty of the full adequacy of his own concepts⁵⁵.

⁵⁴ J. Galot, *Gesù Liberatore*, Firenze 1978, 445.

⁵⁵ The article stops at the threshold of the “Catechism of the Catholic Church,” published a few months ago (the Polish version is still not available). It is a conscious decision, dictated by the need for a separate and exhaustive study of the soteriology of this important document.