



**The *Totus Christus* and the Crucified People:
Re-Reading Augustine's Christology from Below
with the Salvadoran Jesuits**

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“The poor will save the world.”
- Ignacio Ellacuría, SJ¹

Despite the “absolute” claims of Christian dogma and doctrine, christology has never been completely fixed, entirely contained, or total, nor has it remained confined to the figure of

¹ Quoted in Jon Sobrino, “*Extra Pauperes Nulla Salus: A Short Utopian-Prophetic Essay*,” in *No Salvation Outside the Poor: Prophetic-Utopian Essays* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2008), 76.

Jesus the Christ alone. This is not only a claim put forward by postmodern,² liberationist,³ feminist,⁴ and postcolonial⁵ christologies, but a sensibility implied by some christologies judged to be thoroughly “traditional” by ecclesial authorities such as the christology of Augustine. This paper will explore the radicality of one particular theme of Augustine’s christology, the “whole Christ” of head and members or *totus Christus*, and will attempt to re-read this theme as a fruitful (if ambiguous) symbol for contemporary political theology. This will be accomplished by reading the theme of *totus Christus* alongside the christology of the Salvadoran Jesuits Jon Sobrino and Ignacio Ellacuría, finding echoes of this radical-traditional image in their language of the salvific character of the “crucified peoples” of the world.

Reading Augustine alongside two contemporary liberation theologians from El Salvador might seem like a strange project, especially in light of the way liberation theologies are generally perceived to be suspicious of “the” theological tradition. Liberation theology’s “break with tradition” was famously announced in Gustavo Gutiérrez’s description of a “new way” of doing theology in his *A Theology of Liberation*.⁶ Stressing the inadequacy of “traditional” theology and the need for a completely new method, some liberation theologians have stressed

² Roger Haight, *Jesus: Symbol of God* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1999).

³ Mark Lewis Taylor, *Remembering Esperanza: A Cultural-Political Theology for North American Praxis* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1990).

⁴ Rosemary Radford Ruether, *To Change the World: Christology and Cultural Criticism* (New York: Crossroad, 1981); Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Consider Jesus: Waves of Renewal in Christology* (New York: Crossroad, 1990).

⁵ Wonhee Anne Joh, *Heart of the Cross: A Postcolonial Christology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006); Muriel Orevillo-Montenegro, *The Jesus of Asian Women* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2006).

⁶ Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation*, rev. ed., trans. Caridad Inda and John Eagleson (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1988), 12.

what seems to be the absolute incompatibility of “traditional,” Western theology with liberationist concerns. For example, a 1976 meeting of liberation theologians declared in its final statement: “We reject as irrelevant an academic type of theology that is divorced from action. We are prepared for a radical break in epistemology which makes commitment the first act of theology and engages in critical reflection on the praxis of the reality of the Third World.”⁷ Feminist theologians, too, have often rejected much of “the” tradition in an attempt to banish sexism from Christian “God-talk.”⁸ A more recent example is the series preface to a recent collection of liberationist and postcolonial theological essays in which the editors state, “Liberation theologies are born from the struggles of the poor and the oppressed, struggles that were translated into an epistemological break with *the whole of the Western theological tradition.*”⁹ Statements like these suggest that “traditional” theology and progressive-liberating theologies are always and everywhere opposed, generating a mutual suspicion between liberationists and ecclesial protectors of “tradition” or theologians who stick close to “traditional” sources for theology.

This perceived (and often very real) mutual suspicion would suggest that, despite his popularity as a source among many political theologians, Augustine would not be a helpful resource for those theologians who continue to commit themselves to constructing theologies

⁷ Ecumenical Dialogue of Third World Theologians, “Final Statement,” in *The Emergent Gospel: Theology from the Underside of History*, ed. Sergio Torres and Virginia Fabella (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1976), 269.

⁸ Judith Chelius Stark, “Introduction,” in *Feminist Interpretations of Augustine*, ed. Judith Chelius Stark, Re-Reading the Canon Series (University Park: Pennsylvania University Press, 2007), 38–9.

⁹ Marcella Althaus-Reid, Ivan Petrella, and Luiz Carlos Susin, eds., *Another Possible World, Reclaiming Liberation Theology Series* (London: SCM Press, 2007), ix (emphasis added).

from a liberationist or postcolonial perspective. But while these theologies do indeed break with “traditional” theology in many ways, at their best they also see themselves “as maintaining a basic link of continuity with the living tradition of the faith of the Christian church.”¹⁰ In its two-fold approach of criticism of the tradition’s weaknesses and retrieval of its “overlooked but fruitful theological strains,”¹¹ liberationist theologies of various kinds resist absolutizing themselves or placing themselves above other theologies and do not merely emphasize the difference between themselves and the “classic” tradition of theology, but also seek to emphasize a kind of continuity.¹² Or as James Cone puts it, “Theology cannot ignore the tradition. While the tradition is not the gospel, it is the bearer of an interpretation of the gospel at a particular point in time. By studying the tradition, we not only gain insight into a particular past time but also into our own time as the past and the present meet dialectically. For only through this dialectical encounter with the tradition are we given the freedom to move beyond it.”¹³

Knowing, then, that ignoring such an influential theological figure as Augustine can have negative consequences, an interesting array of theologians with liberationist commitments have taken on the project of critical and constructive engagement with his theology.¹⁴ Acknowledging

¹⁰ Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff, *Introduction to Liberation Theology*, trans. Paul Burns (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1987), 36.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*, 65.

¹³ James H. Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, rev. ed. (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1997), 75–6. See also his earlier discussion of “the tradition” in *A Black Theology of Liberation*, Twentieth Anniversary ed. (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1990), 33–5.

¹⁴ Other contemporary theological movements, such as Radical Orthodoxy, have engaged Augustine as well. Our focus here, of course, is on a liberationist reading of Augustinian themes.

the negative impact that some of his thought has had upon Western Christianity, a recent collection of feminist scholarship has engaged Augustine in a sort of “salvage operation” to recover aspects of his thought that might be compatible with feminist thinking.¹⁵ Some choose to engage him precisely because they know the damage that can occur when they leave interpretation to those who would distort his theology or use it to legitimize the subordination of women. Similarly, “Mennonite Catholic” theologian Gerald Schlabach engages Augustine with his own central commitment to nonviolence squarely in mind, despite the latter’s obvious association with the development of Christian “just war” teaching. “Admittedly, I approach Augustine looking for fault lines in his thought—openings through which I and other like-minded Christians may enter into his views without necessarily accepting them wholly. Even so, I must also admit to a certain hope that once inside the ongoing debate that is Augustinianism, Christians who, like myself, are committed to both a critique *and* a retrieval of St. Augustine’s thought may persuade others to join in this fresh interpretation.”¹⁶

Perhaps one of the more interesting recent developments in terms of rereading classical sources with new eyes is the approach of theologians drawing on postcolonialism such as Joerg Rieger and Kwok Pui-Lan and the scholars represented in their edited volume *Empire and the Christian Tradition: New Readings of Classical Theologians*.¹⁷ In one of the book’s introductory essays, Don Compier insists that liberal theology’s assumption that Christian tradition must be

¹⁵ Stark, “Introduction,” 39.

¹⁶ Gerald W. Schlabach, *For the Joy Set Before Us: Augustine and Self-Denying Love* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), xxiv.

¹⁷ Kwok Pui-Lan, Don. H Compier, and Joerg Rieger, eds., *Empire and the Christian Tradition: New Readings of Classical Theologians* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007).

critiqued and even discarded when necessary does not take seriously the fact that we simply cannot get away from the past. Even liberal theology itself, he says, could not do away with appeals to tradition.¹⁸ Not only can we not get away from tradition, Compier insists along with Rieger that neglecting classical theology misses an opportunity to recover “how radical appeals to tradition can be, in and of themselves.”¹⁹ He and Rieger believe that ancient Christian beliefs are not simply always co-opted in support of empire and violence and injustice, but that they have a tremendous “potential for resistance” embedded within them that cannot be controlled or muted by imperial powers.²⁰ One of the volume’s essays is dedicated to probing Augustine’s biography and theology for themes with that very sort of “potential.”²¹

Following this interpretive practice, this paper will probe a particular image from Augustine’s christology, that of the *totus Christus*, with the intent of subverting its imperialist tendencies and recovering its radical potential. This Pauline image of Christ, comprised as head and members, is a central theme of Augustine’s christology and has been echoed in the work of contemporary theologians. It is an image that has been invoked in various ways and for different

¹⁸ Don H. Compier, “The Christian Tradition and Empires: A Reader’s Guide,” in *Empire and the Christian Tradition: New Readings of Classical Theologians*, ed. Kwok Pui-Lan, Don. H Compier, and Joerg Rieger (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 33.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 34.

²⁰ Compier, “The Christian Tradition and Empires: A Reader’s Guide,” 34. Rieger calls this embedded radical potential the “theological surplus” of classical theology. See “Christian Theology and Empires,” in *Empire and the Christian Tradition: New Readings of Classical Theologians*, ed. Kwok Pui-Lan, Don. H Compier, and Joerg Rieger (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 1–2, and his expanded analysis of how this concept relates to christology in *Christ and Empire: From Paul to Postcolonial Times* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007).

²¹ Anthony J. Chvala-Smith, “Augustine of Hippo,” in *Empire and the Christian Tradition: New Readings of Classical Theologians*, ed. Kwok Pui-Lan, Don. H Compier, and Joerg Rieger (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 79–93.

theological purposes, often to explain and/or defend “conservative” ecclesiological stances and structures.²² Despite these “conservative” uses, I believe the image, as conceived by Augustine, contains a quite radical christological impulse, one that has been carried on in the history of christology in various forms whenever a christology has emphasized Christ’s humility, kenotic posture, and radical solidarity with humankind, such that Christ’s people are “taken up” into christology itself.

One such christology is that of Jesuit theologians Jon Sobrino and Ignacio Ellacuría of El Salvador who, though they do not use the precise term *totus Christus*, capture the radicality of Augustine’s christological impulse through their elaboration of the image of the “crucified people.”²³ Through a sort of “contrapuntal reading” of Augustine (a theologian often associated with imperialistic, hegemonic Christianity) and the Salvadoran Jesuits (who represent a view

²² The image finds particular resonance in churches with “thick” ecclesiologies centering on the sacraments and hierarchical structures. See, e.g., the work of Roman Catholic Joseph Ratzinger (*Introduction to Christianity*, rev. ed., trans. Michael J. Miller [San Francisco: CommunioBooks/Ignatius Press, 2004]; *Called to Communion: Understanding the Church Today* [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991]) and the Lutheran Robert Jenson (Robert W. Jenson, *Systematic Theology: Vol. 2: The Works of God* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1999], 173–5, 267, 298–9, 332–3). An excellent presentation of the origins and evolution of the image of the *totus Christus* in Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant ecclesiologies and a critique of the image’s tendency to justify juridical ecclesiologies, hierarchical thinking, and the totalizing erasure of difference is Michael S. Horton, “*Totus Christus: One and Many*,” in *People and Place: A Covenant Ecclesiology* (Louisville: WJK Press, 2008), 155–89.

²³ I am aware of the dangers of casually comparing theologies from radically different contexts, such as the theologians Augustine and Sobrino. Despite the dangers, I insist that my intention here is quite modest. I will not attempt to reduce either Augustine or Sobrino’s christology to the other’s, nor will I make the claim that Sobrino’s christology has been particularly influenced by Augustine’s in any direct way. The reflections here are merely an attempt to find echoes of one christology in the other, and vice versa, as a way of recovering the radical solidarity with humanity embedded in Augustine’s christology.

“from below”) in which the views of the “center” and the “margin” are brought into dialogue,²⁴ I will suggest that, rather than reifying “traditional,” “conservative,” “closed,” “totalizing,” “rigid,” and/or “exclusivistic” christological and ecclesiological stances, the image of *totus Christus* can be re-read as a fruitful, if ambiguous, image for contemporary political theologies, an image that remains christocentric yet open and unpredictable, open to the radical presence of Christ in those places and persons often considered to be “outside” of christological formulas and language.²⁵

²⁴ R. S. Sugirtharajah, “Textual Takeaways: Third World Texts in Western Metropolitan Centres,” in *Postcolonial Reconfigurations: An Alternative Way of Reading the Bible and Doing Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2003), 170.

²⁵ The use of Ellacuría and Sobrino in the development of unsettled/ing postcolonial and anti-imperial christologies might meet objection from some postcolonial theologians because they are not themselves explicitly “postcolonial” thinkers. In fact, there is much in Ellacuría and Sobrino’s work that could be criticized on postcolonial grounds, e.g. their tendency toward abstract and essentializing descriptions of “the poor.” But unlike many postcolonial thinkers who describe the relationship of liberationist and postcolonial theologies as a sort of supercessionism (see, e.g. R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical Interpretation* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002], chapter 4), I see the relationship between the two primarily as one of continuity and internal rupture and revision with a basically common sensibility. Following postcolonial theologians like Daniel Pilario and Catherine Keller, et al., many if not most Third World theologies can be considered and interpreted as “postcolonial” theologies as they arose in response to the experience of colonialism. As Keller, et al. point out, postcolonial theology would make no sense without liberation theology and the latter cannot simply be superceded or ignored. It is simply the case that as time passed liberation theologies of all kinds began to come up against their theoretical limitations, as do any and all theologies. Postcolonialism simply provides “additional interpretive frameworks” for understanding the complexities of oppression and identity (Daniel Franklin Pilario, “Mapping Postcolonial Theory: Appropriations in Contemporary Theology,” *Hapag* 3, no. 1–2 [2006]: 39; Catherine Keller, Michael Nausner, and Mayra Rivera, “Introduction: Alien/nation, Liberation, and the Postcolonial Underground,” in *Postcolonial Theologies: Divinity and Empire*, ed. Catherine Keller, Michael Nausner, and Mayra Rivera [St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2004], 5–6). Finally, this paper will not argue that Ellacuría and Sobrino’s christology/ies represent “the” most useful christology for postcolonial ecclesial and political praxis. Rather it is in the dialogue between Augustine and the Jesuits’ christologies that unpredictable insights might emerge.

An overview of Augustine's christology

Despite the prominence of the figure of Augustine in the political theologies of Christendom²⁶ and the recent resurgence of interest in him in postmodern political theologies such as Radical Orthodoxy,²⁷ Augustine's *christology* has been neglected overall in Augustinian studies, let alone within various political theologies. This is likely because the subject of Christ is not taken up as a focus in any of Augustine's major texts in the way, say, the Trinity or the theology of history are. But although Augustine did not engage in extended, deliberate theological work on the person of Christ, Hubertus Drobner insists that "Christ simply pervades all of Augustine's theology as a ubiquitous and familiar subject."²⁸ "It probably never entered Augustine's mind to make Christ an object of a sustained theological treatise, because he regarded him as the condition, the author and the method of all his thinking."²⁹

Although generally neglected, Augustine scholars have noted some basic features of Augustine's christology and some recurring christological themes. Most prominent among them are the humanity and humility of Christ as well as his role as mediator of salvation to humankind. The humanity of Christ is central to Augustine's christology, a quality taken on by

²⁶ See Donald X. Burt, *Friendship and Society: An Introduction to Augustine's Practical Philosophy* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1999); Jean Bethke Elshtain, "Augustine," in *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology*, ed. Peter Scott and William T. Cavanaugh (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), 35–47.

²⁷ The inaugural texts are the collection John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock, and Graham Ward, eds., *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology*, Radical Orthodoxy Series (London: Routledge, 1999) and Milbank's own influential work *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990). See also Michael Hanby, *Augustine and Modernity*, Radical Orthodoxy Series (London: Routledge, 2003).

²⁸ Hubertus R. Drobner, "Studying Augustine: An Overview of Recent Research," in *Augustine and His Critics: Essays in Honour of Gerald Bonner*, ed. Robert Dodaro and George Lawless (London: Routledge, 2000), 28.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 29.

the Word in humility.³⁰ The humility of the human Christ is not merely understood as a moral virtue (although it is that too, an attitude to be imitated by Christians³¹), but on a deeper level is also the hidden, “kenotic character” which the Word manifests in its becoming human.³² It is the theme of humility which “holds the key to understanding the Christology or more precisely the soteriology of Augustine.”³³ The purpose of the self-emptying or *kenosis* of Christ is for the salvation of humanity, expressed in terms of the “Christ of the exchange”: Christ becomes human so that humans might become “divine.”³⁴ In this respect, his christology and soteriology resemble the concept of divinization that took hold in the East. In taking on the poverty of humanity, and by emptying himself completely on the cross, the Word is humiliated but is raised in the Body of Christ.³⁵ “He who has risen again in the head will also rise again in all His members.”³⁶ This represents a “profound incorporation of Christ in his ecclesial body”³⁷ and the

³⁰ Frances Stefano, “Lordship Over Weakness: Christ’s Graced Humanity as Locus of Divine Power in Augustine’s *Tractates on the Gospel of John*,” *Augustinian Studies* 16 (1986): 2.

³¹ Eoin Cassidy, “*Per Christum Hominem Ad Christum Deum*: Augustine’s Homilies on John’s Gospel,” in *Studies in Patristic Christology*, ed. Thomas Finan and Vincent Twomey (Portland: Four Courts Press, 1998), 130–1.

³² Stefano, “Lordship Over Weakness,” 3.

³³ Cassidy, “*Per Christum Hominem Ad Christum Deum*,” 130.

³⁴ William Mallard, “Jesus Christ,” in *Augustine Through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1999), 469.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Augustine of Hippo, *St. Augustin: Homilies on the Gospel of John; Homilies on the First Epistle of John; Soliloquies*, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. John Gibb, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church (New York: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1886), 8.12, available at <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf107.html>.

³⁷ Mallard, “Jesus Christ,” 469.

person of Christ and the church together make up the *totus Christus*, the whole Christ, head and members such that Christ is identified with the church and vice versa.³⁸

But although Christ “pervades” all of Augustine’s theology, and although recurring christological themes can be traced in his writings, Joanne McWilliam is right to point out that, because his writings on Christ are occasional, there are, in fact, multiple “Christs” in the work of Augustine.³⁹ Because there is not one Christ in Augustine’s work and because he did not give a clear “systematic” statement of his christology, there are tensions among those scholars who have taken up the task of working through his christology/ies. It is, for example, difficult to categorize Augustine’s christology as having an “ascending” or “descending” character. In reflecting on the theme of the humble humanity of Christ, Frances Stefano says that Augustine’s view of the “humiliated God” bears similarities to moves made later in Edward Schillebeeckx’s and Jon Sobrino’s christologies “from below,” such as when Augustine says “By Christ the man to Christ God.”⁴⁰ While obviously not a “liberationist,” Stefano says, Augustine’s christology shows the “striking tenacity with which he clings to the significance of Christ’s humanity in spite of possible pulls in the opposite direction.”⁴¹ William Mallard, on the other hand, says that the themes of the humility and self-emptying of Christ imply an emphasis on the divine, not the human: “In the pastoral-liturgical setting the active uniting subject, the ‘I’ of Christ’s saving

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Joanne McWilliam, “The Study of Augustine’s Christology in the Twentieth Century,” in *Augustine from Rhetor to Theologian*, ed. Joanne McWilliam (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier Press, 1992), 183. On the neglect of Augustine’s christology, see also Drobner, “Studying Augustine,” 27 and Stefano, “Lordship Over Weakness,” 1.

⁴⁰ Stefano, “Lordship Over Weakness,” 3; Augustine of Hippo, *Homilies on the Gospel of John*, 13.4.

⁴¹ Stefano, “Lordship Over Weakness,” 3n16.

work and story, is the divine Word, not Jesus' human subjectivity."⁴² Although he truly identified with suffering humanity, he reminds us that, for Augustine, Christ's human weakness was a voluntary choice. Brian Daley agrees, noting that the christological union is not the "symmetrical joining of equal 'parts'" for Augustine.⁴³ The Word is in full possession of the human Jesus and is the root of the identity of the whole of Jesus.

Noting the different emphases present in Augustine's writings should lead us to agree with Mark Ellingsen that both christological movements are active in his thought, and that he emphasizes one or the other depending on the context and the purpose of his writing or preaching.⁴⁴ Augustine's contextual method of the reading of the gospels and of the emerging christological tradition can provide us with a hermeneutic for reading Augustine's own christological reflections: depending on the context and the needs of the moment, we might emphasize various themes within his christology, and we might also emphasize particular impulses within these themes. In the next section we will examine the particular theme of the *totus Christus*, emphasizing for our context the radical way Augustine identifies Christ and the church. Drawing out this emphasis in Augustine's writings and reading it in light of the christology of Sobrino and Ellacuría has the potential to generate a powerful christology for a contemporary political theology in resistance to empire.

⁴² Mallard, "Jesus Christ," 469.

⁴³ Brian E. Daley, "Christology," in *Augustine Through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1999), 167–8.

⁴⁴ Mark Ellingsen, *The Richness of Augustine: His Contextual and Pastoral Theology* (Louisville: WJK Press, 2005), 50–1.

Augustine's image of the *totus Christus*

The *totus Christus* is a prominent theme in Augustine's christology and McWilliam has noted the amount of attention the concept has received, particularly by those who are fascinated by the way its dynamic of divinization resembles the theologies of the Eastern Church.⁴⁵ The theme generally has received so much attention that, at first glance, the image of the "whole Christ," i.e. Christ as head and members, seems fairly unremarkable, an often casually invoked theological metaphor in some traditions for the relationship between Christ and the church. Though many churches and theological traditions use this Augustinian image all the time without much thought, there is also a sense in which the *totus Christus* image is a "forgotten idea" as Tarcisius van Bavel has suggested:⁴⁶ Augustine's understanding of the *totus Christus* has been forgotten in its radicality.

The Pauline image of Christ comprised of head and body and the radical identification of Christ and the church found, among other places, in the First Letter to the Corinthians, captured Augustine's christological imagination and became a central feature of his christology.⁴⁷ Paul, of course, was influenced by the Hebrew understanding of the sociality of human beings as well as its notion of corporate personhood. In Hebrew and Pauline anthropology, the individual and the collective aspects of the human person are not in competition, but rather "[b]oth are interwoven

⁴⁵ McWilliam, "The Study of Augustine's Christology in the Twentieth Century," 195.

⁴⁶ Tarcisius van Bavel, "The 'Christus Totus' Idea: A Forgotten Aspect of Augustine's Spirituality," in *Studies in Patristic Christology*, ed. Thomas Finan and Vincent Twomey (Portland: Four Courts Press, 1998), 84–94.

⁴⁷ On the realism of Paul's image of the Body of Christ, see John C. Haughey, "Eucharist at Corinth: You Are the Christ," in *Above Every Name: The Lordship of Christ and Social Systems*, vol. 5, ed. Thomas E. Clarke, S.J., Woodstock Studies (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), 112.

and reversible. For the human person is both individual and corporate.”⁴⁸ Not only are human beings intrinsically social beings, the collectivity of human communities and humanity as a whole were often spoken of as collective persons, for example when Israel itself as a whole was regarded as a corporate person in a relationship with God,⁴⁹ or when Adam is portrayed as representing humanity as a whole (particularly fallen humanity in the writings of Paul) and Christ as representing redeemed humanity.⁵⁰

Indeed, there are traces of these ideas not only in Hebrew and Christian scriptures, but in the Stoic philosophy of Paul’s time⁵¹ and in modern times in the phenomena of nationalisms.⁵² In Augustine, the Pauline image of the collective person of Christ, the whole Christ of head and members, is interpreted not as a mere comparison or simile, but as a deep reality.⁵³ Augustine repeatedly refers to Matt. 25:31-46 and Acts 9:4 for scriptural proof that Christ and the church are in some sense interchangeable. For example, he says in his Tractates on John’s Gospel: “Christ is not simply in the head and not in the body, but Christ whole is in the head and body. What, therefore, His members are, that He is; but what He is, it does not necessarily follow that His members are. For if His members were not Himself, He would not have said, ‘Saul, why

⁴⁸ van Bavel, “The ‘Christus Totus’ Idea,” 87.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 86.

⁵¹ Ratzinger, *Called to Communion*, 34–5.

⁵² Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s writings, sermons and speeches during the Nazi regime often focused on the relationship between “the Leader” as an embodiment of the collective person of the nation-state. See, for example, the radio speech he gave two days after Adolf Hitler became Chancellor of Germany, “The Leader and the Individual in the Younger Generation,” in *No Rusty Swords: Letters, Lectures and Notes 1928–1936*, ed. Edwin Robertson, Collected Works of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, vol. 1 (London: Collins, 1965), 190–204.

⁵³ van Bavel, “The ‘Christus Totus’ Idea,” 85.

persecutest thou me?’ For Saul was not persecuting Himself on earth, but His members, namely, His believers. He would not, however, say, my saints, my servants, or, in short, my brethren, which is more honorable; but, *me*, that is, my members, whose head I am.”⁵⁴ At times, Augustine expresses the reality of head and body in quite graphic terms, such as when he says “So we too are him, because we are his organs, because we are his body, because he is our head,”⁵⁵ or when he makes direct comparisons to the human body, observing the way in which it is the mouth which utters “You’re treading on me” when the feet are trampled by the movement of people in a crowded space.⁵⁶

But for Augustine, Christ’s identification with the human race is a freely willed act of solidarity and love, not merely a reflection or symbol of the sociality that is natural to human beings. Christ’s union with the human race is a “freely willed union” through love in which “‘He’ and ‘we’ become interchangeable: He is us, and we are him.”⁵⁷ Although human beings are inherently social and interconnected, the interconnectedness can become a distorted

⁵⁴ Augustine of Hippo, *Homilies on the Gospel of John*, 28.1.

⁵⁵ Augustine of Hippo, “Sermon 133,” in *Sermons III/4, The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Edmund Hill (Brooklyn: New City Press, 1992), no. 8.

⁵⁶ “It’s the same too with our own bodies; the heads up on top, the feet are on the ground; and yet in a crush of people jammed in a narrow space, when someone treads on your foot, doesn’t your head say, ‘You’re treading on me’? Neither your head nor your tongue is being trodden on by anybody; it’s up on top, it’s perfectly safe, nothing bad has happened to it. And yet because through the binding power of love there is a unity from the head right down to the feet, the tongue didn’t detach itself from that unity, but said, ‘You’re treading on me,’ though nobody had touched it. So just as the tongue which no one touched says, ‘You’re treading on me,’ in the same way Christ the head, which no one is treading on, says *I was hungry, and you did not give me anything to eat*” (Augustine of Hippo, “Sermon 137,” in *Essential Sermons: The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, ed. Boniface Ramsey, trans. Edmund Hill [Hyde Park: New City Press, 2007], no. 2).

⁵⁷ van Bavel, “The ‘Christus Totus’ Idea,” 88.

connectedness in various ways, such as when one social group exploits another. Even the disintegration of community through the individualism that arose in the modern period does not take away our connectedness, but distorts it and obscures it.⁵⁸ The “freely willed union” of Christ and his people, then, can be understood as a deliberate, intentional act of solidarity and realignment of social relationship rooted in mercy and compassion. Van Bavel says that we can understand this union if we reflect on the way we talk about human love, such as when we say husband and wife are one flesh or when parents identify with the suffering of their children such that they can say that their children’s suffering is their own. It is a similar “freely willed union” that has taken place in Christ’s kenotic identification with his people in solidarity. In solidarity, Christ suffers, hungers, thirsts, and dies in us:⁵⁹ “[O]bserve the loving affection of this head of ours. He is already in heaven, and he is struggling here as long as the Church is struggling here. Christ is hungry here, thirsty here, he’s naked, he’s a migrant, he’s sick, he’s in prison. You see, whatever his body suffers here, he said he suffers too . . . as though he had received it all personally himself.”⁶⁰ In the christology of Augustine, “[n]ot only is the humility of the divine Word active in taking up a human being, but the human being himself takes up the voice of the sinful fellow-humans with whom he identifies.”⁶¹

Augustine understands the mystical union of Christ and the church so radically and realistically that the church itself is explicitly “taken up” into his christology. For Augustine, the

⁵⁸ Rieger, *Christ and Empire*, 282–3.

⁵⁹ van Bavel, “The ‘Christus Totus’ Idea,” 88.

⁶⁰ Augustine of Hippo, “Sermon 137,” no. 2.

⁶¹ Michael Cameron, “*Totus Christus* and the Psychagogy of Augustine’s Sermons,” *Augustinian Studies* 36, no. 1 (2005): 63.

reality of Christ has three aspects, one more than the two aspects that feature prominently in modern christology, the divine and the human, and he discusses them in Sermon 341, “On the three ways of understanding Christ in scripture: against the Arians”:

Our Lord Jesus Christ, brothers and sisters, as far as I have been able to tune my mind to the sacred writings, can be understood and named in three ways The first way is: as God and according to the divine nature which is coequal and coeternal with the Father before he assumed flesh. The next way is: when, after assuming flesh, he is now understood from our reading to be God who is at the same time man, and man who is at the same time God, according to that pre-eminence which is peculiar to him and in which he is not to be equated with other human beings, but is the mediator and head of the Church. The third way is: in some manner or other as the whole Christ in the fullness of the Church, that is as head and body, according to the completeness of a certain *perfect man* (Eph 4:13), the man in whom we are each of us members.⁶²

So for Augustine, christology includes not only the humanity and the divinity of the person of Christ, but also the *ecclesial* existence of Christ. Christology and ecclesiology are not, finally, two completely separate movements in his theology, but are intrinsically linked. Today, the two have become separated and are often seen as two disciplines within theology, and christology has become focused only on the “problem” of the humanity and the divinity of Christ. Because we are so familiar with the first two aspects (the divine and the human) and have neglected the third (the ecclesial) we are sometimes taken aback by Augustine’s straightforward assertions that “we are made not only Christians, but Christ. Do ye understand, brethren, and apprehend the grace of God upon us? Marvel, be glad, we are made Christ.”⁶³

⁶² Augustine of Hippo, “Sermon 341,” in *Sermons III/10, The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Edmund Hill (Hyde Park: New City Press, 1995), no. 1, quoted in van Bavel, “The ‘Christus Totus’ Idea,” 85.

⁶³ van Bavel, “The ‘Christus Totus’ Idea,” 85–6; Augustine of Hippo, *Homilies on the Gospel of John*, 21.8.

Out of kenotic love, Christ wants to be one with us and wants us to be one with him. But this radical identification does not dissolve the distinction between Christ and us: Augustine insists that Christ is the savior and we are the ones who are saved.⁶⁴ In one of his homilies on the Gospel of John, for example, Augustine says, “For He who loveth the Only-begotten, certainly loveth also His members which, through His instrumentality, He engrafted into Him by adoption. But we are not on this account equal to the only-begotten Son, by whom we have been created and re-created”⁶⁵ This can also be seen in the way Augustine discusses the church’s martyrs. On the one hand, Augustine links the suffering of the persecuted church to the suffering of Christ. The persecution of the martyrs continues the suffering of Christ in his Body.⁶⁶ Yet there is a difference between Christ’s death and the death of martyrs and the martyrs are “far inferior to

⁶⁴ van Bavel, “The ‘Christus Totus’ Idea,” 89.

⁶⁵ Augustine of Hippo, *Homilies on the Gospel of John*, 110.

⁶⁶ In his commentary on Psalm 59:2, a prayer of deliverance from persecution, Augustine interprets the prayer as the prayer of the whole Christ, Head and Body: “But neither against His Body did men of bloods cease to rise up; for even after the Resurrection and Ascension of Christ, the Church suffered persecutions From there therefore, men of bloods, is delivered Christ, not only Head, but also Body. From men of bloods is delivered Christ, both from them that have been, and from them that are, and from them that are to be; there is delivered Christ, both He that hath gone before, and He that is, and He that is to come. For Christ is the whole Body of Christ; and whatsoever good Christians that now are, and that have been before us, and that after us are to be, are an whole Christ, who is delivered from men of bloods; nor is this voice void, ‘And from men of bloods save Thou me’” (Augustine of Hippo, *St. Augustin: Exposition on the Book of Psalms*, ed. Philip Schaff [New York: Christian Literature Publishing Co, 1886], 59.5, available at <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf108.html>). And again, in his commentary on Psalm 141, Augustine makes reference to Christ’s agony in the garden, writing, “So is it written in the Gospel: ‘Jesus prayed earnestly, and His sweat was as it were great drops of blood.’ What is this flowing of sweat from His whole Body, but the suffering of martyrs from the whole Church?” (Augustine of Hippo, *St. Augustin: Exposition on the Book of Psalms*, 141.2). See also Augustine of Hippo, “Sermon 341,” no. 12.

him”⁶⁷ because, Augustine says, only Christ is truly innocent, and only his death is truly redemptive. Martyrs truly demonstrate love, but “their blood is not shed for the remission of sins.”⁶⁸ Christ’s death has a cosmological effect, conquering death and redeeming humanity.⁶⁹ For Augustine, there is a “chasm” between Christ and the martyrs which contrasts with Eastern conceptions which often see martyrdom as a type of deification.⁷⁰ Augustine uses the image of vine and branches for a similar purpose, stressing the identification of Christ with his people, yet distinguishing between the two, not mistaking the branches for the vine: “For the relation to the vine is such that they contribute nothing to the vine, but from it derive their own means of life.”⁷¹

Even with these distinctions in mind, the notion of Christ’s radical identification with humanity through the church is a fundamentally radical christological claim that opens christology beyond the borders of the figure of Jesus Christ alone. Augustine’s use of the image of the *totus Christus* appears even more radical when seen in its socio-political context. Anthony Chvala-Smith describes the imperial context of Augustine’s writings, showing how theology, biography and social context are interwoven.⁷² Chvala-Smith insists that Augustine’s imperial context has not been taken seriously enough and that this has led to distortions in how we understand him today. “Failure to contextualize him has allowed his thought to be pressed into

⁶⁷ Carole Straw, “Martyrdom,” in *Augustine Through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1999), 541; Augustine of Hippo, *Homilies on the Gospel of John*, 84.2.

⁶⁸ Quoted in Straw, “Martyrdom,” 541.

⁶⁹ Straw, “Martyrdom,” 541.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ Augustine of Hippo, *Homilies on the Gospel of John*, 81.3.

⁷² Chvala-Smith, “Augustine of Hippo,” 79.

the service of ends for which it was not suited, judged by values he could not have considered.”⁷³ Because of his status in our minds today, we have trouble “seeing him for who he was: a North African pastor struggling to proclaim the drama of redemption amid the moral ambiguities and brutal realities of a disintegrating Roman Empire.”⁷⁴ Augustine’s context of the Roman empire and its ideology and imagery were inescapable and it is essential for understanding the significance of his theology and the images we find there. Empires often rely on notions of corporate personhood, of the individual as part of the totality of the unified political body, a social imaginary with its own mythology, imagery, ideologies, and even “divine pretensions.”⁷⁵ Recent attention to Augustine as a “contextual” theologian and pastor⁷⁶ in the midst of empire can shed new light on the image of the *totus Christus* as part of what Chvala-Smith calls a “counter-narrative to empire.” “Augustine’s primary weapon against the dehumanizing forces at play in the dissolving empire is the theo-logic of the Gospel, which alone secures the dignity of persons.”⁷⁷ The theo-logic of the Gospel, as expressed in Augustine’s *City of God*, provides a counter-narrative to the narrative of empire which “strips imperial rhetoric of its divine pretensions.”⁷⁸

That the *totus Christus* image appears so prominently in Augustine’s sermons is no mistake considering his imperial context. For Augustine, the saving work of Christ makes no

⁷³ Ibid., 84.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 91.

⁷⁶ Ellingsen, *The Richness of Augustine*.

⁷⁷ Chvala-Smith, “Augustine of Hippo,” 88.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 91.

sense if it does not take root in the community of the church: “Christ incorporates believers into himself in such a church, and only in this incorporation is he ‘whole.’”⁷⁹ It is in his sermons, then, his pastoral instruction, that Augustine brings the saving work of Christ into contact with the community of the church.⁸⁰ The actualization of Christ in the church requires conduct befitting members of the Body of Christ, as parts of the whole Christ. At times, Augustine’s moral instruction appeals to the dignity of the individual members of Christ’s Body, such as when he exhorts the community to avoid sexual immorality:

Spare a thought for Christ in yourself, recognize Christ in yourself. *So shall I take the members of Christ, and make them the members of a harlot?* The harlot, you see, is the woman who agrees to commit adultery with you; and perhaps she is a Christian, and is also taking the members of Christ and making them the members of an adulterer. Together you are despising Christ in yourselves, and not recognizing your Lord, or giving a thought to your price, your true value.⁸¹

Elsewhere, he stresses the communal nature of life in Christ, as in one of the Tractates on John’s Gospel: “Believers know the body of Christ, if they neglect not to be the body of Christ. Let them become the body of Christ, if they wish to live by the Spirit of Christ. None lives by the Spirit of Christ but the body of Christ.”⁸² Finally, there are times in which Augustine stresses that membership in the Body of Christ requires solidarity with the crucified one: “*To present himself, it says, with a glorious Church, not having stain or wrinkle, or any such thing* (Eph 5:27). This is the bride of Christ, without stain or wrinkle. Do you wish to have no stain? Do what is written:

⁷⁹ Mallard, “Jesus Christ,” 468.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Augustine of Hippo, “Sermon 161,” in *Essential Sermons: The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, ed. Boniface Ramsey, trans. Edmund Hill (Hyde Park: New City Press, 2007), no. 1.

⁸² Augustine of Hippo, *Homilies on the Gospel of John*, 26.13.

Wash yourselves, be clean, remove the wicked schemes from your hearts (Is 1:16). Do you wish to have no wrinkle? Stretch yourself on the cross.”⁸³ In his pastoral instruction, then, Augustine outlines for his community a subversive narrative about the corporate nature of the church, a counter-narrative to the narrative of empire, through which they may understand the relationship between Christ and themselves and the ultimate destiny of all humanity.

For Augustine, it is in the Eucharistic gathering that Christians intentionally say yes to another social imaginary, another corporate personhood:

[I]f it's you that are the body of Christ and its members, it's the mystery meaning you that has been placed on the Lord's table; what you receive is the mystery that means you. It is to what you are that you reply *Amen*, and by so replying you express your assent. What you hear, you see, is *The body of Christ*, and you answer, *Amen*. So be a member of the body of Christ, in order to make that *Amen* true.⁸⁴

In affirming their identity as the Body of Christ, the gathered church affirms an alternative soteriological reality apart from their citizenship in the empire. Salvation means not imperial citizenship, but to be incorporated into Christ through the church, the Christ who first radically identified with them in kenotic love. We see, then, that the notion that there is no salvation outside the church, also so prominent in Augustine's writing, is connected to the image of the *totus Christus* within the context of imperial soteriology. Salvation requires having Christ as their head, which means being “in Christ,” that is, in the church.⁸⁵ There is “no salvation outside the

⁸³ Augustine of Hippo, “Sermon 341,” no. 13.

⁸⁴ Augustine of Hippo, “Sermon 272,” in *Essential Sermons: The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, ed. Boniface Ramsey, trans. Edmund Hill (Hyde Park: New City Press, 2007), quoted in van Bavel, “The ‘Christus Totus’ Idea,” 92.

⁸⁵ Philip L. Barclift, “Uniting in Christ at the Lord's Table,” *Encounter* 65, no. 2 (2004): 177.

church” because there is no salvation outside of Christ, the eternal Word, who has identified in a real way with his people, the church. Seen in its connection to the image of *totus Christus* in the context of empire, this ecclesiological statement can also be understood as a relativization of all other political-soteriological claims and a subversive statement about the reality of salvation. At the heart of this ecclesial counter-narrative is the self-emptying, kenotic Christ who moves beyond himself in love and solidarity, drawing his people into his very self.

The “crucified people” in the christology of the Salvadoran Jesuits

Surely there is much in the preceding section on Augustine’s christology that could be critiqued from a liberationist or postcolonial perspective. I do not intend to pursue that critique at length here. Again, I am attempting to focus attention on the radical potential of the image of the *totus Christus* in particular. This claim that the image contains “radical potential” goes against the grain of the ways in which the image is used in dominant streams of ecclesiology whether ancient, medieval, modern, or postmodern. For example, the image of the *totus Christus* tends to be invoked in support of particular ecclesial structures and their capacity (perhaps exclusive capacity) to mediate salvation, such as in the work of Joseph Ratzinger and in much of the “official” ecclesiology of the Roman Catholic Church. Michael Horton has recently outlined a variety of uses of the *totus Christus* image in a number of ecclesial and theological traditions, noting the image’s almost inevitable tendency to justify and promote a kind of ecclesial imperialism that erases difference in its pursuit of ecclesial “oneness.”⁸⁶ In dominant versions of

⁸⁶ Horton, “*Totus Christus*.”

Roman Catholic ecclesiology, for example, Horton notes that “the *totus Christus* is hierarchically constituted according to Rome, descending from the pope as its visible head”: the “oneness” of the church comes from above while particularity is assimilated into an ecclesial uniformity.⁸⁷ Even less juridical and more “organic” ecclesiologies, such as post-Vatican II expressions of Roman Catholic ecclesiology and many Protestant ecclesiologies, can demonstrate this tendency toward the “logic of the One.”⁸⁸

But use of the *totus Christus* image need not require a rigid understanding of the “Body” as being defined by institutional membership in the church according to strict boundaries and sameness of identity.⁸⁹ In fact, the Augustinian christological image has the potential to resist the exclusivist interpretation of a theologian like Ratzinger when read “from below,” that is, with attention to the experience of the oppressed, marginalized, and excluded peoples of the world. The christology of Jon Sobrino, for example, accomplishes this type of christological reflection through a focus on what he calls the “crucified peoples” of the world, an image that he borrowed from his fellow Jesuit and friend Ignacio Ellacuría. Reflection on the “crucified peoples” enabled Sobrino to generate a radical christology from below in which those with whom Jesus identifies are “taken up” into christology itself, in a way analogous to the three-fold christology of Augustine. It is my claim that Sobrino and Ellacuría’s christology/ies can provide a starting point

⁸⁷ Ibid., 157–8.

⁸⁸ Horton, “*Totus Christus*,” 158. The phrase “logic of the One” is taken from the introduction of Catherine Keller and Laurel C. Schneider, eds., *Polydoxy: Theology of Multiplicity and Relation* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 6.

⁸⁹ See Yung Suk Kim, *Christ’s Body in Corinth: The Politics of a Metaphor*, Paul in Critical Contexts Series (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008) for a postcolonial reading of Paul’s image of the “Body of Christ” against the grain of standard readings that emphasize boundary making.

for rethinking *totus Christus* ecclesiologies so that their ecclesiocentric and hierarchical obsessions might be decolonized.

First, a few words on Sobrino and Ellacuría's context. Sobrino and Ellacuría are both Spanish Jesuits who left Spain for El Salvador as part of their ministries as members of the Society of Jesus. Both Jesuits cite the influence of the "progressive" theology of Rahner and of the Second Vatican Council, but at different moments came to experience a further depth of conversion through their encounter with poverty, injustice and violence in Latin America.⁹⁰ Ellacuría was a particularly powerful influence for Sobrino. Through his encounter with Ellacuría⁹¹ as well as San Salvador's archbishop Oscar Romero, Sobrino says he was able to come "face-to-face with the truly poor."⁹² Through Ellacuría, he came to discover that the majority of people in the world—about two-thirds—are victims of institutionalized violence and that for them life is "one gigantic cross." Thus, in his context, he came to see a type of sin

⁹⁰ On the theological influences of Ellacuría, see Kevin F. Burke, *The Ground Beneath the Cross: The Theology of Ignacio Ellacuría*, Moral Traditions Series (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2000); the various essays in Kevin F. Burke and Robert Lassalle-Klein, eds., *Love That Produces Hope: The Thought of Ignacio Ellacuría* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2006); and the recent dissertation of Michael E. Lee "Transforming Realities: Christian Discipleship in the Soteriology of Ignacio Ellacuría" (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 2005), available at <http://etd.nd.edu/ETD-db/theses/available/etd-11042005-130703/unrestricted/LeeME112005.pdf> which has been published as *Bearing the Weight of Salvation: The Soteriology of Ignacio Ellacuría* (New York: Crossroad, 2009). For Sobrino's self-description of his theological influences, see Sobrino, "Introduction: Awakening from the Sleep of Inhumanity," in *The Principle of Mercy: Taking the Crucified People from the Cross* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1994), 1–11. See also the various essays in Stephen Pope, ed., *Hope and Solidarity: Jon Sobrino's Challenge to Christian Theology* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2008).

⁹¹ Sobrino describes the influence of Ellacuría on his life and theology in many of his writings, especially in "Ignacio Ellacuría, the Human Being and the Christian: 'Taking the Crucified People Down from the Cross'," in *Love That Produces Hope: The Thought of Ignacio Ellacuría*, ed. Kevin F. Burke and Robert Lassalle-Klein (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2006), 1–67.

⁹² Sobrino, "Awakening," 3.

“which deals death,” a type of sin that most people from the First World never truly encounter and do not want to encounter because of what it might tell them about their responsibility for it: “It isn’t that we simply do not know; we do not want to know because, at least subconsciously, we sense that we have all had something to do with bringing about such a crucified world.”⁹³ It is important to see that Sobrino's and Ellacuría's theologies were not developed through reflection on abstract ideas of “poverty,” “injustice,” “violence” and “crucifixion,” but through firsthand experience of these realities within the context of the extreme violence of the Salvadoran civil war.⁹⁴ In particular, the Jesuits knew personally the reality of violent persecution, not only through their friendship with Romero who became a martyr in 1980, but by having their own lives threatened by the Salvadoran government and paramilitary groups as suspected “Marxists.” Ellacuría and five other members of the Jesuit community in San Salvador, their housekeeper and her daughter were killed in November of 1989. Sobrino was among the intended targets, but was out of the country at the time and, thus, escaped martyrdom.

Sobrino and Ellacuría's Latin American context led them to a way of doing theology that was very different from their “Eurocentric” theological training, and both have stressed the

⁹³ Ibid., 4–5.

⁹⁴ For more on the details of this period of the history of El Salvador, see Clara Nieto, *Masters of War: Latin America and United States Aggression from the Cuban Revolution Through the Clinton Years*, trans. Chris Brandt (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2003) and William Blum, *Killing Hope: U.S. Military and CIA Interventions Since World War II*, updated ed. (Monroe: Common Courage Press, 2004), 352–69. For more in depth discussion of the church and the development of liberationist Christianity in this context, see Penny Lernoux, *Cry of the People: The Struggle for Human Rights in Latin America - the Catholic Church in Conflict with U.S. Policy* (New York: Penguin Books, 1982); Penny Lernoux, *People of God: The Struggle for World Catholicism* (New York: Viking, 1989); Alfred T. Hennelly, ed., *Liberation Theology: A Documentary History* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1990); and David Tombs, *Latin American Liberation Theology* (Boston: Brill, 2002).

importance of the “place” of theology as well as self-conscious reflection on theology’s purposes or tasks. Noting that all theology has a “place” or a situatedness in the world, Sobrino says that liberation theology, for example, differs from European theology in its opting to take its place in the reality of the suffering world,⁹⁵ because this is seen as the “most real world.”⁹⁶ Choosing this place is a deliberate option, a choice “whether to look at the truth of things or not.”⁹⁷ In terms of theology’s purpose or task, Sobrino describes the difference between European theology and Latin American theology as a difference between being concerned with concepts in the mind or with concrete reality.⁹⁸ European theology, for example, often seeks to explain the meaning of reality where Latin American theology attempts to change the sinfulness of reality. For example, rather than simply reflecting on the meaning of suffering, the liberationist theology of Sobrino and Ellacuría is “an intellectual exercise whose primary purpose is to eliminate this kind of suffering.”⁹⁹

This methodological shift is relevant for the way in which christology is done, particularly in the way it takes into account the *present* reality of Christ in the world today: “In dealing with its object, Jesus Christ, christology has to take account of two fundamental things.

⁹⁵ Jon Sobrino, “Theology in a Suffering World: Theology as *Intellectus Amoris*,” in *The Principle of Mercy: Taking the Crucified People from the Cross* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1994), 31.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁹⁷ Sobrino, “Theology in a Suffering World,” 33. An example of similar attention to “place” in Ellacuría’s theology is “The True Social Place of the Church,” in *Towards a Society That Serves Its People: The Intellectual Contribution of El Salvador’s Murdered Jesuits*, ed. John Hassett and Hugh Lacey (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1991), 283–92.

⁹⁸ Jon Sobrino, *The True Church and the Poor*, trans. Matthew J. O’Connell (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1984), 9.

⁹⁹ Sobrino, “Theology in a Suffering World,” 29.

The first and more obvious is the data the *past* has given us about Christ, that is, *texts* in which revelation has been expressed. The second, which receives less attention, is the *reality* of Christ in the *present*, that is, his presence now in history, which is the correlative of real faith in Christ.”¹⁰⁰ In a dialectical manner, attention to the *setting* of christology then reveals new insights about the *sources* of christology and about the traditional images that christology invokes. Certain images can be recovered or understood in fresh ways that resonate with present contexts. “[T]here are ‘settings’ in which important elements in the ‘sources’ of revelation, which had been buried, are rediscovered.”¹⁰¹ One such element or image that Ellacuría and Sobrino recovered in a powerful way is the Pauline image of the Body of Christ. Their radical attention to their context of war-torn El Salvador allowed them to historicize the image of the Body of Christ and to see where Christ’s body is present in the world today.

Ellacuría and Sobrino both insist, as did Karl Rahner, on the radical historicity of the Christian faith.¹⁰² Thus, the image of the Body of Christ does not refer to some ideal church apart from its historical presence in the world. Sobrino insists that we must take a further step and ask where the Body of Christ exists, precisely, in history.

[I]t is a fundamental truth for *faith* that Christ is Lord of history and, more specifically, that he makes himself present in it through a body. This, a fundamental truth for faith, ought to be fundamental also, in principle, for

¹⁰⁰ Jon Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator: A Historical-Theological Reading of Jesus of Nazareth*, trans. Paul Burns and Francis McDonagh (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1993), 23.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 24.

¹⁰² Ignacio Ellacuría, “The Historicity of Christian Salvation,” in *Mysterium Liberationis: Fundamental Concepts of Liberation Theology*, ed. Ignacio Ellacuría and Jon Sobrino (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1993), 251–89; Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, trans. William D. Dych (New York: Crossroad, 1978), 138–75.

christology, although I do not think it has been. The result is that christology has to repeat, in accordance with its sources, *that* Christ is present in history today, but does not feel obligated to ask *what element* of Christ is present and *in what*, or to incorporate this present Christ into its procedure.¹⁰³

And again, “[I]t would be idle to say that Christ crucified has a body in history and not identify it in some way. [...] From the viewpoint of christology we must ask what this body is.”¹⁰⁴ To neglect the specificity of the presence of Christ in history and in different contexts is to fall into what Sobrino calls “christological deism.”¹⁰⁵

Answering this essential christological question is only possible through a methodological option for the poor and not only through attention to scriptural or theological texts. A complete christology, then, cannot be constructed merely through reflection on the gospels, the Pauline texts or abstract theological imagery (such as the Augustinian notion of the *totus Christus*), but through the confrontation with the reality of suffering persons in history. “In the church of the poor, finally, Christ becomes present, and this church is his body in history [...] Christology isolates his central fact, not arbitrarily or through pure textual analysis, or Paul or Matthew 25, but because theologians find themselves confronted, like Bartolomé de las Casas, with an atrocious suffering that forces them back to Matthew 25 and, at a more abstract level, to the Pauline texts.”¹⁰⁶

The result of this theological attention to the “place” of suffering is seen in Ellacuría and Sobrino’s reflections on the “crucified people,” an image that Ellacuría explored and developed

¹⁰³ Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, 25.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 264.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 25.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 30.

first. When Ellacuría read the scriptures and searched for the historical Body of Christ in the context of radical suffering and injustice, he found it present in what he provocatively called the “crucified people.” Ellacuría used this image often and devoted a long essay to the task of describing it. In his later theology, particularly after the martyrdom of Ellacuría, Sobrino took up the image and has developed it in deeper ways.¹⁰⁷

Who are the “crucified people” of the world? Ellacuría describes the crucified people as “that collective body, which as the majority of humankind owes its situation of crucifixion to the way society is organized and maintained by a minority that exercises its dominion through a series of factors, which taken together and given their concrete impact within history, must be regarded as sin.”¹⁰⁸ The choice to describe the victims of societal violence as “crucified” was a radical one, says Sobrino: “Ellacuría did not choose this language at random, or merely for its Christian resonance, because in his time it was not customary to apply to the ‘people’ what we say of ‘Christ.’”¹⁰⁹

The image of the crucified people invokes the Pauline image of the Body of Christ, combining it with the image of the Suffering Servant. The earliest followers of Jesus understood the death of Jesus through the lens of the image of the Suffering Servant of Second Isaiah.¹¹⁰ Today, Christians usually understand the image of the Suffering Servant in light of the death of

¹⁰⁷ Sobrino describes the influence of Ellacuría on his life and thought in “Ignacio Ellacuría.”

¹⁰⁸ Ignacio Ellacuría, “The Crucified People,” in *Mysterium Liberationis: Fundamental Concepts of Liberation Theology*, ed. Ignacio Ellacuría and Jon Sobrino (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1993), 590.

¹⁰⁹ Jon Sobrino, “The Crucified People and the Civilization of Poverty: Ignacio Ellacuría’s ‘Taking Hold of Reality,’” in *No Salvation Outside the Poor: Prophetic-Utopian Essays* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2008), 3.

¹¹⁰ Ellacuría, “The Crucified People,” 592.

Christ, but the image can also be understood as a collective person, such as the figure of Israel itself, in keeping with the collectivity of humanity and of salvation which is the “primordial thrust” of scripture.¹¹¹ Thus, the image has both individual and collective dimensions. In the words of Sobrino, the Suffering Servant of Yahweh is a “mysterious figure—real or imaginary, individual or collective—destroyed by the sins of the world and bringing salvation.”¹¹² Ellacuría insists that, in addition to these meanings, “it is impossible to ignore the applicability of the description in the text to what is occurring today among the crucified people.”¹¹³ Linking the Suffering Servant image, in its collective and individual dimensions, to the Pauline image of the Body of Christ, head and members, Ellacuría can state that “the Suffering Servant of Yahweh will be anyone unjustly crucified for the sins of human beings, because all of the crucified form a single unit, one sole reality, even though this reality has a head and members with different functions in the unity of expiation.”¹¹⁴

Like Augustine, Ellacuría is describing Christ’s radical identification with his people, invoking scriptural images of the Body of Christ, and adding the image of the Suffering Servant. This identification of the crucified people with the Suffering Servant is suitable not only because of observable similarities between them, but also because of the deliberate choice of Jesus: the early Christians understood Jesus as one who radically chose to identify with those who suffer. Says Sobrino, “If we can see common basic features in both, there is the fact that Jesus identified

¹¹¹ Ibid., 590.

¹¹² Sobrino, “The Crucified People and the Civilization of Poverty,” 4.

¹¹³ Ellacuría, “The Crucified People,” 597.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 598.

himself with those who suffer—or that was the view of the early Christian community.”¹¹⁵

Because of this radical option to identify with suffering humanity, Sobrino is able to say that the suffering Son of Man is “incarnate in the crucified people.”¹¹⁶

Sobrino insists that this radical identification of Christ and his people in his Body means that the Body, the crucified people in history, must be “taken up” into christology itself. He might, then, say along with Augustine that christology must include the following three aspects: Christ’s divinity, Christ’s humanity, and Christ’s continued presence in history in his Body. “This crucifixion [of people in Latin America] . . . forces christology to recognize that a body of Christ really exists in history, and to take it into account in its own activity.”¹¹⁷ Christology must attempt to “incorporate this *present* Christ into its procedure,”¹¹⁸ such that “christology is also the christology of the ‘body’ of Christ.”¹¹⁹ In this way, christology can speak of and “penetrate better the *totality of Christ*, and let us remember that christological thinking as such is also obliged to do this by virtue of its specific subject.”¹²⁰ This is perhaps the closest we get to *totus Christus* language in the theologies of Ellacuría and Sobrino. Just as for Augustine we cannot speak of the “whole Christ” without speaking of both head and members, for these Salvadoran Jesuit theologians we cannot speak of Christ in his totality without speaking of the continued crucifixion of his Body in history.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 602.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 603.

¹¹⁷ Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, 31.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 25 (emphasis added).

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 26.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 33 (emphasis added).

As we saw in Augustine's theology, when the Body is "taken up" into christology, there is a soteriological implication. For Augustine, taking up the Body into christology meant that the church, Christ's Body, has soteriological significance as the mediator of salvation. For the Salvadoran Jesuits, the move which brings the crucified of history into christology gives the world's victims soteriological significance: the crucified people are bearers of salvation in history.¹²¹ The crucified people's role as mediators of salvation is not only seen through theological reflection on images and their systematic relationship, but in the very dynamics of the judgment that the crucified bring to the world's social situations, unveiling the sinfulness of oppressive human relationships: "The Son of Man is he who suffers with the little ones; and it is this Son of Man, precisely as incarnate in the crucified people, who will become judge. In its very existence the crucified people is already judge, although it does not formulate any theological judgment, and this judgment is salvation, insofar as it unveils the sin of the world by standing up to it; insofar as it makes possible redoing what has been done badly; insofar as it proposes a new demand as the unavoidable route for reaching salvation."¹²² The crucified people, then, like the Suffering Servant and indeed like Jesus himself, have a twofold dimension: "it is the victim of the sin of the world, and it is also bearer of the world's salvation" from that sin.¹²³

¹²¹ Latin American liberation theology, in general, has been described as a theology of salvation. For a more general description of Ellacuría's understanding of "salvation in history," see Ellacuría, "The Historicity of Christian Salvation"; as well as Kevin F. Burke, "Christian Salvation and the Disposition of Transcendence: Ignacio Ellacuría's Historical Soteriology," in *Love That Produces Hope: The Thought of Ignacio Ellacuría*, ed. Kevin F. Burke and Robert Lassalle-Klein (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2006), 169–86; and chapters 5 and 6 of Burke, *The Ground Beneath the Cross*.

¹²² Ellacuría, "The Crucified People," 603.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

In the words of Ellacuría, “The stone that the builders rejected became the cornerstone, stumbling-block, and rock of scandal. That rock was Jesus, but it is also the people that is his people, because it suffers the same fate in history.”¹²⁴

Sobrino has focused on this soteriological dimension of the image of the crucified people in his more recent writing, and has expanded it, bringing it to bear on contexts more recent than that of Salvadoran civil war in which it emerged in Ellacuría’s thought. Describing the new manifestations of what Ellacuría called the “civilization of wealth,” Sobrino insists that a “new logic” is needed to understand salvation, a logic which places the poor, the victims of the world’s economic and political structures, at the center.¹²⁵ Specifically, he proposes going beyond Latin American liberation theology’s emphasis on the “option for the poor” by insisting rather on the “option to let salvation come from the poor.”¹²⁶ The “new logic” of salvation, for Sobrino, necessarily means asking *what kind of salvation* people are seeking in history. If we “take hold of reality,” as Ellacuría often insisted is the vocation of Christians, we see a reality of intense dehumanization brought on through a civilization of wealth that creates victims (the crucified people). Salvation, then, historically understood, must include a movement toward a “more human humanity.”¹²⁷ Salvation in history which includes authentic humanization is not found among the “societies of abundance” or in the contemporary narratives of globalization and democracy, but is found “where we least expect it”¹²⁸ in the world of the poor: “[I]n the world of

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Sobrino, “*Extra Pauperes Nulla Salus*,” 48–9.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 50–1.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 52.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

the poor a logic is generated that allows reality to be seen in a different way. Such a logic makes it plain that salvation cannot be identified simply with progress and development—an insight we consider significant. Such a logic makes it plain that salvation comes from the poor.”¹²⁹

The poor bring a “this-worldly” dimension of salvation in three observable, if not always recognized, ways. First, the poor bring “light” to the world, showing the non-poor the truth about themselves and about society.¹³⁰ “[T]he Third World offers light to enable the First World to see itself as it truly is, which is an important element of salvation.”¹³¹ Second, out of their own suffering and struggle emerges a profound hope for a new world,¹³² inspiring solidarity among the human family.¹³³ Finally, “[t]he poor mark out the direction and the basic contents of our practice” that orient our work toward a new society, including both prophetic condemnation of the dehumanizing civilization of wealth as well as the creation of new “economic, political and cultural models to overcome it.”¹³⁴

Just as in Augustine’s christology Christ’s people are “taken up” into christology through his understanding of the “whole Christ” or *totus Christus*, and just as this move meant also taking the church up into soteriology such that there is “no salvation outside the Church,” a similar pattern can be detected in the christology of Sobrino and Ellacuría. The crucified people

¹²⁹ Ibid., 53.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 60–1.

¹³¹ Sobrino, “The Crucified People and the Civilization of Poverty,” 5.

¹³² Sobrino, “The Crucified People and the Civilization of Poverty,” 5–6; Sobrino, “*Extra Pauperes Nulla Salus*,” 61.

¹³³ Sobrino, “*Extra Pauperes Nulla Salus*,” 63–4.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 62–3.

are taken up into christology as the historical presence of the crucified Body of Christ, and therefore are taken up into soteriology such that “there is no salvation outside the poor.”

Sobrino describes how the image of the crucified peoples functions as an image within the “language battles” raging in our own day over truth: “People may say that, after all, ‘the crucified people’ is only a way of speaking, but we must remember that we are engaged in a ‘language battle’ in which enormous resources are invested. It is not the same to speak of ‘underdevelopment,’ let alone ‘developing countries,’ as to speak of ‘crucifixion’ Perhaps the language of ‘crucified peoples’ will help to win the language battle, and thus the struggle for truth.”¹³⁵ This attention to the theological categories through which we describe reality parallels Augustine’s own “language battles” in his imperial context and the way he gave radical new images to his people with which to think about and describe reality. Just as Augustine challenged the imperial theology of his day with an ecclesial narrative of solidarity with Christ’s Body, Sobrino challenges the soteriological claims of the “world of wealth” through his insistence that true salvation comes from solidarity with the victims of empire.¹³⁶

Toward a decolonized christo-ecclesiology of solidarity with the “hidden Christ(s)”

The christologies of Augustine and the Salvadoran Jesuits are certainly not identical, neither in their various features nor in their methodological commitments. Their theologies remain too distant from one another in time and in context to resemble one another in a complete way. And there is no sign in the work of Ellacuría or Sobrino that they are particularly

¹³⁵ Sobrino, “The Crucified People and the Civilization of Poverty,” 7.

¹³⁶ Sobrino, “*Extra Pauperes Nulla Salus*,” 71.

“Augustinian” in the sense of having been directly influenced by Augustine’s theology in a discernible manner. Nevertheless, I have tried to show that the christologies of these theologians contain a similar christological impulse, or set of impulses, centering around their radical understanding of the “whole Christ,” Christ and his people. Both christologies are rooted in an understanding of the inherent sociality of human beings, but also a sense that human beings have an ability to decide what the relationships we have with other human beings will be like, the communities in which we place ourselves, and which forms of solidarity (whether ecclesial or socio-political or both) we will attempt to live out. Both christologies draw on the scriptural portrayal of a humble, kenotic Christ who radically identified with his people in self-emptying love such that they became part of himself. In particular, both christologies contain a radical understanding of the Pauline image of the Body of Christ such that Christ’s people (whether conceived as the church or as the “crucified people”) are “taken up” into christology itself as part of the “whole Christ,” expanding christology beyond the figure of Christ alone. The theological move of drawing ecclesiology and/or anthropology into christology has soteriological implications for both christologies: salvation requires solidarity with Christ through solidarity with his Body. And finally, within their own political contexts, these christologies both represent “language battles” over the description of social realities and the kinds of relationships and communities to which human beings are called. As we noted about Augustine in his imperial context, Sobrino understands himself to be engaged in a “language battle,” although within a different imperial context.

Although Sobrino and Ellacuría's christology contains a christological impulse analogous to Augustine's there are important differences to note. While Augustine expanded christology beyond the person of Christ himself by "taking up" ecclesiology into christology, the Salvadoran Jesuits expand the historical Body of Christ beyond even "the church" to include the "crucified peoples," problematizing a too easy identification between the Body of Christ and the church. For Ellacuría and Sobrino, the boundary between the church and the world is less discernible. By problematizing the boundary between the church and world, the boundaries of christology also shift, as do the soteriological implications. For Augustine, the church is the Body of Christ in the world and becomes for the world a/the mediator of salvation, but for the Jesuits, it is the crucified peoples who mediate salvation, and the borders of the Body of Christ, i.e. the crucified peoples, do not necessarily correspond exactly with the boundaries of the church.

The implications of these shifts are important for how the church conceives of its mission in the world. In an Augustinian understanding, the church is the presence of Christ in and for the world after Christ's death and resurrection. Thus, van Bavel says, "Since the moment Jesus left this world, He needs our hands to reach out to the destitute, He needs our eyes to see the needs of the world, He needs our ears to listen to the misery of others, He needs our feet to go to persons to whom nobody goes."¹³⁷ The church, then, simply takes on a posture of service *for others* as Christ's presence in the world. And van Bavel is right to point out the importance of a radical identification with others in global solidarity as part of the church's mission, especially in societies dominated by a focus on the individual.¹³⁸ Yet Sobrino and Ellacuría go further in their

¹³⁷ van Bavel, "The 'Christus Totus' Idea," 86.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 93.

expansion of the idea of the “totality of Christ.” It is not only that the church is to move beyond itself in service in order to be Christ for those who are victims of crucifixions today. The poor and victimized peoples of the world themselves, even those outside the church, are also Christ. Christ has identified with *them*, and *they* are Christ *for the church* and mediators of salvation. Not only is the church the Body of Christ for others, the crucified peoples are the Body of Christ for the church, and the church is only truly “church” insofar as it is open to the presence of Christ among the crucified. So an expanded notion of the *totus Christus* challenges the church not only to do this or that for the poor, but shows the church what the poor can do for the church,¹³⁹ and, indeed, for the world as mediators of salvation. As Sobrino says, “The option for the poor is not just a matter of *giving to* them, but of *receiving from* them.”¹⁴⁰ This is not to say that the Body of Christ is something other than the church, or that the two are opposed, but only that the boundaries of the Body/church are not fixed and that Christ is found among those with whom he has chosen to identify. And this means encountering the hidden Christ in unexpected places that challenge our christological, ecclesiological, and moral categories.

This problematization of the boundaries of the church and of the Body of Christ is precisely the reason for much of the criticism of Sobrino in the theological academy as well as

¹³⁹ Jon Sobrino, “Depth and Urgency of the Option for the Poor,” in *No Salvation Outside the Poor: Prophetic-Utopian Essays* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2008), 19.

¹⁴⁰ Sobrino, “*Extra Pauperes Nulla Salus*,” 53.

from the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.¹⁴¹ In a recent collection of essays dedicated to evaluating Sobrino's work, Jorge Costadoat states that Sobrino's theology of the Body of Christ is problematic for ecclesiological as well as christological reasons. First, he questions Sobrino's lack of a distinction between the crucified peoples and the church's sacramental function as "Body of Christ." Although he notes that Sobrino refers to the church as the Body of Christ, he says that when he also applies it directly to the victimized peoples of the Two-Thirds world, "the church's sacramental function as Christ's Body becomes blurred, and even, to some extent, superfluous."¹⁴² Costadoat believes that when speaking of the crucified peoples as the "Body of Christ," Sobrino should be more careful to make clear *both* a distinction and a connection between the church and the crucified peoples.¹⁴³ Secondly, Costadoat says that

¹⁴¹ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "Notification on the Works of Father Jon Sobrino, SJ" (2006), available at http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20061126_notification-sobrino_en.html. The role of the official magisterium of the Roman Catholic Church is a much-debated topic, especially in post-Vatican II theology, and the literature is too vast to summarize here. A few examples of revisionist views on magisterial teaching include Francis A. Sullivan, *Magisterium: Teaching Authority in the Catholic Church*, Reprint (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2002); Richard R. Gaillardetz, *Teaching with Authority: A Theology of the Magisterium in the Church*, Theology and Life Series (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1997); Richard R. Gaillardetz, *By What Authority?: A Primer on Scripture, the Magisterium, and the Sense of the Faithful* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2003); Richard R. Gaillardetz, *Ecclesiology for a Global Church: A People Called and Sent*, Theology in Global Perspective Series (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2008), chapter 7. A number of theologians contributed essays in support of Sobrino regarding his investigation by the Vatican and these have been published as International Theological Commission of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians, *Getting the Poor Down from the Cross: Christology of Liberation*, Second digital ed. (2007), available at <http://internationaltheologicalcommission.org/Books/GettingThePoorDown.html>.

¹⁴² Jorge Costadoat, S.J., "Central Themes in Sobrino's Christology," in *Hope and Solidarity: Jon Sobrino's Challenge to Christian Theology*, ed. Stephen J. Pope (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2008), 128.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

when talking about how the crucified peoples are like Christ, he should also be sure to show “how they are unlike him.”¹⁴⁴

But it is clear that Sobrino does, in fact make the distinctions between Christ and the crucified people, specifically through his use of Pauline head/body language and his description of the relationship between the two: “[T]he crucified people are Christ’s crucified body in history. But the opposite is also true: the present-day crucified people allow us to know the crucified Christ better. He is the head of the body and in him we can see Yahweh’s Suffering Servant and understand his mystery of light and salvation.”¹⁴⁵ Ellacuría, too, makes sure to use head/body language and sees the identities of Jesus and the crucified people as distinct, yet informing one another or referring to one another: “The crucifixion of the people avoids the danger of mystifying the death of Jesus, and the death of Jesus avoids the danger of extolling salvifically the mere fact of the crucifixion of the people, as though the brute fact of being crucified of itself were to bring about resurrection and life.”¹⁴⁶

Costadoat likely sees the distinctions Sobrino makes, but does not think the distinction is strong enough. But in light of scripture and Augustinian *totus Christus* theology, it seems unclear as to why there needs to be an absolutely clear distinction between the church and the crucified peoples or an absolutely clear articulation of how the crucified peoples both resemble and differ from Jesus of Nazareth. Both the witness of scripture and the theology of Augustine, for example, include a creative ambiguity and fluidity between the boundaries between Christ and

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, 264.

¹⁴⁶ Ellacuría, “The Crucified People,” 592.

his Body, and between the “City of God” and the “City of Man” (*sic*), for example. And the radical identification of Christ with the church (the *totus Christus*), as we have seen, certainly includes a distinction between the two (head/body), but the boundary between the two remains ambiguous even in Augustine’s theology. Sobrino’s “blurry” boundaries and definitions seem not to be a sign of weakness or sloppiness but an acknowledgment of the mystery of Christ’s identification with those outside the boundaries of our christological and ecclesiological border-drawing. Ultimately, the ambiguity and fluidity between the two is a necessary one. Says Ellacuría, “[W]e cannot say once and for all who constitutes the collective subject that most fully carries forward Jesus’ redeeming work. It can be said that it will always be the crucified people of God, but as corrected as it is, that statement leaves undefined who that people of God is, and it cannot be understood simply as the official church even as the persecuted church. Not everything called church is simply the crucified people or the Suffering Servant of Yahweh, although correctly understood this crucified people may be regarded as the most vital part of the church, precisely because it continues the passion and death of Jesus.”¹⁴⁷

Can the *totus Christus* function as a fruitful christo-ecclesiological image for resisting empire in our own day? We have seen how the image was part of Augustine’s subversive counter-imperial theology and how Ellacuría and Sobrino invoked images with a similar impulse during the nightmare of the context of economic and military oppression in El Salvador. The fact that the reality of empire has not vanished from our world but has merely taken different forms¹⁴⁸ suggests that the *totus Christus* image could indeed continue to provide a radical christological

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 601.

¹⁴⁸ Rieger, *Christ and Empire*, 1–4, 313–5.

impulse for anti-imperial political theologies today. For example, the notion of corporate personhood embedded in *totus Christus* christology remains subversive today insofar as it challenges other claims of destructive corporate personhood, such as those contained in the totalizing and nationalistic tendencies of the modern nation-state. The social imaginary of U.S. American civil religion, for example, with its various symbols of national unity, its implicit mythology of the president as the incarnation of national ideals,¹⁴⁹ and mottoes such as “out of many one,” contain many of the features of corporate personhood, despite the tension that exists with the ideal of American individualism. In the face of the “divine pretensions” of U.S. American imperial “theology,” theologians such as William T. Cavanaugh have written on the power of the transnational Body of Christ to be an alternative social imaginary to the hegemonic imaginaries of the state and market.¹⁵⁰

The ambiguities of the *totus Christus* image need to be noted and taken seriously, however. On the one hand, *totus Christus* christology can be a source for greater solidarity within the social body of the church as well as a symbol for the relationship between the church and oppressed humanity, but a careless identification of Christ and the church can also lead to forms of ecclesial triumphalism, as was noted at the beginning of this essay. In modern and postmodern contexts, we have learned to become cautious in our identification of Christ and the church, and rightly so. Liberation theologians and others have been quick to challenge triumphalistic notions

¹⁴⁹ Carolyn Marvin and David W. Ingle, *Blood Sacrifice and the Nation: Totem Rituals and the American Flag* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 279–82.

¹⁵⁰ See his *Torture and Eucharist: Theology, Politics, and the Body of Christ* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998) and *Theopolitical Imagination: Discovering the Liturgy as a Political Act in an Age of Global Consumerism* (London: T. & T. Clark, 2002).

of church that divinize what is an obviously human and sinful reality. So while Augustine zeroes in on the Pauline image that insists the church is Christ, modern and liberation theologians have been right to point out that the church is also *not* Christ. In order to be a liberative symbol, *totus Christus* language will need to keep visible the distinctions between Christ and the church that are present in Augustine's christology, as well as the stress on the kenotic and humble character of the Lordship of Christ present both in the writings of Augustine and Sobrino.¹⁵¹

Another ambiguity is related to the first term, the "*totus*," of the image. Both Augustine and the Salvadoran Jesuits present radical christologies within their own contexts, challenging us to consider the surprising places where Christ is met, and the peoples with whom Christ chooses to identify. And while Augustine's christology meant to expand the church's understanding of Christ, it remained, generally, a closed christology, a description of the *whole* or *total* Christ with only little room for openness. A retrieval of *totus Christus* language might suggest a closed christology, and applying that language to Salvadoran christology might be in danger of closing off whatever openness exists in the christology of Ellacuría and Sobrino, claiming to have finally found the "whole" Christ. Indeed, it is precisely the "totalizing" ring of the term *totus Christus* that can facilitate its support of rigid, hierarchical, finalized, and possibly abusive ecclesiologies. But the Augustinian understanding of the *totus Christus*, though tempted by such closed-off interpretations, does represent a christological movement or impulse toward openness, intentionally expanding christology beyond the person of Christ alone. That very possibility, once opened, provides an impulse (and a very "traditional" one at that) to consider christology

¹⁵¹ Jon Sobrino, *Christ the Liberator: A View from the Victims*, trans. Paul Burns (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2001), 152–69.

“according to the whole.” On the other hand, even though christology should seek greater “catholicity” in this sense, the “*totus*” term of the image must always be questioned, as the boundaries of the “whole Christ” are never stable or fixed. Although Augustine pushed the boundaries of the “whole Christ,” he nevertheless tended to re-fix those boundaries at the boundaries of the church. Utilizing the image of the Suffering Servant, as we have seen, Ellacuría and Sobrino again question the boundaries of christology, finding Christ in places Augustine did not. Although sharing Augustine’s kenotic christological impulse such that their christology could be called a *totus Christus* christology, the Salvadoran Jesuits seem to recognize an inherent fluidity that must exist in christology. As long as the “*totus*” of the *totus Christus* is not understood in a “totalizing” sense, it remains a helpful christological image, encouraging us to understand Christ “according to the whole” without containing Christ or thinking we have finally found the “whole” Christ.

At the same time, while the Augustinian and Salvadoran impulse of finding Christ in ever-new places might seem to lead naturally into discussion of images such as the “cosmic Christ” (as in the theology of Matthew Fox and the variety of creation-centered and eco-theologies), Joerg Rieger warns that such christologies can be so “expansive” that they end up reinforcing imperial dynamics.¹⁵² Both Augustine and the Jesuits’ christologies are helpful in their internal dynamic of seeing Christ in surprising places beyond his own person, but resist a Christ who, in being “everywhere,” seems either to disappear or at least cease to be a Christ whose location among the victims of this world brings judgment upon death-dealing imperial

¹⁵² Rieger, *Christ and Empire*, ch. 7.

realities. In particular, it is the Salvadoran Jesuits' "taking hold of reality" which provides a controlling feature in their dynamic christology: the dynamism of their christology leads them to find Christ present among the crucified ones whose suffering resembles the Crucified One.¹⁵³ Thus, in order for a *totus Christus* christology to contribute to human liberation, it must be a flexible, dynamic christology but with a controlling limit provided by attention to what Sobrino would call the "Jesuanic"¹⁵⁴ suffering of the crucified people.

A politically liberating *totus Christus* christology will also mean breaking out of individualistic views of Jesus and his relationship with the church and with the world. Some liberation theologians and biblical scholars have begun this sort of work, drawing on the insights that come from attention to social movements. The church, of course, began as a social movement,¹⁵⁵ and some theologians are stressing that Jesus cannot be understood apart from his role within that movement, not only as a leader who stands over and above the movement, but as

¹⁵³ For a helpful discussion of the relationship between postmodern and liberationist sensibilities and commitments, see Mark Lewis Taylor, "Subalternity and Advocacy as *Kairos* for Theology," in *Opting for the Margins: Postmodernity and Liberation in Christian Theology*, ed. Joerg Rieger (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 23–44.

¹⁵⁴ Sobrino, "Depth and Urgency of the Option for the Poor," 29.

¹⁵⁵ Richard Horsley and Neil Asher Silberman, *The Message and the Kingdom: How Jesus and Paul Ignited a Revolution and Transformed the Ancient World* (New York: Putnam, 1997); Richard Horsley, *Jesus and Empire: The Kingdom of God and the New World Disorder* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002); Ekkehard Stegemann and Wolfgang Stegemann, *The Jesus Movement: A Social History of Its First Century* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999); Wes Howard-Brook, *The Church Before Christianity* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2001).

a figure who emerges from within the movement as a collectivity.¹⁵⁶ This insight means a recovery of another dimension of the *totus Christus* as he existed in first-century Palestine, but also encourages the church of today to discern the ways in which social movements of today can be “primary sites of encounter with the Divine.”¹⁵⁷ Such moves which open christology beyond the boundaries of the solitary figure of Christ alone may certainly trouble overly christocentric sensibilities, but as we have seen, these theological tendencies are not foreign to the christological tradition but are rather new expressions of the impulse at the heart of Augustinian *totus Christus* christology.

The need to keep our christologies open and “on the lookout” for the presence of Christ in history means that for any *totus Christus* christology to be liberating, it must include the notion of the “hidden Christ(s),” another radical but also very “traditional” christological image.¹⁵⁸ Stefan Silber, drawing on Michel Foucault’s notion of “heterotopias” or “other places,” urges the formation of non-exclusive christologies that seek out the real presence of Christ in places that

¹⁵⁶ See, e.g., Taylor, *Remembering Esperanza*; Lee Cormie, “Another History is Possible: Christologies from Below,” *Toronto Journal of Theology* Supplement 1 (2008): 80–1. Womanist theologians have also engaged in this kind of approach to christology. See, e.g., Jacquelyn Grant, *White Woman's Christ, Black Woman's Jesus* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989); Kelly Brown Douglas, *The Black Christ* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1994).

¹⁵⁷ Cormie, “Another History is Possible,” 80. See also Lee Cormie, “Movements of the Spirit in History,” in *Talitha Cum! the Grace of Solidarity in a Globalized World*, ed. Mario DeGiglio-Bellemare and Gabriella Miranda Garcia (Geneva: World Student Christian Federation Publications, 2004), 238–60.

¹⁵⁸ The notion of the “hidden Christ” is present, of course, in Matthew 25 and has been an image invoked by “traditional” sources, such as the Rule of St. Benedict. A similar project, seeing the “hidden Christ” image as a “radical-traditional” image for political christology could be explored in another essay (St. Benedict, Abbot of Monte Cassino, *The Rule of St. Benedict*, trans. Anthony C. Meisel and M. L. del Mastro [New York: Doubleday, 1975]).

are nonexistent from the point of view of the world's dominant narratives and, indeed, of the church's official theologies:

The experiences of Christ that are being made in these places are non-existing experiences for the official theology. We can say that they are Hidden Christs, because they are corporeal experiences of the Risen One renounced and denied by a theology pretending to know already everything of Jesus Christ that we can and must know. They are hidden Christs that appear in hidden places to excluded and apparently nonexistent people. Nevertheless they are revelations of the only and true God that through the Holy Spirit, who is free to blow wherever he/she wants, wishes that we know his/her Son made flesh in the flesh of every one of us, even of the excluded ones in the 'other' places.¹⁵⁹

This impulse to seek out the presence of Christ in the excluded places of our world has its roots in the realism of the Pauline image of the Body of Christ. That impulse's movement of christological kenosis was formulated in an equally radical way in the christology of Augustine who insisted that Christ's people be "taken up" into christology and soteriology, and this christological impulse continues in the theologies of Ignacio Ellacuría and Jon Sobrino, who locate Christ's Body among the masses of people crucified by the world's oppressive systems of domination. Today's churches and emancipatory movements continue to be in need of christologies that inspire relationships of solidarity with and among the excluded and alternative narratives of salvation that subvert the narratives of the powerful. The *totus Christus*, far from inherently inspiring closed, exclusivist, and rigid ecclesial structures, can continue to be a rich

¹⁵⁹ Stefan Silber, "The Hidden Christs: Christology(-ies) from the Excluded Ones," *Voices from the Third World* 30, no. 1 (June 2007): 54–5.

symbol as part of a political christology of resistance in our times as well, during the last throes of an empire that continues to crucify entire peoples, other Christs, across the globe.¹⁶⁰

¹⁶⁰ The author would like to thank Dr. Peter Slater and an anonymous reviewer for their helpful comments on earlier versions of this essay.