

Review

Reviewed Work(s): *Jesus the Liberator: A Historical-Theological Reading of Jesus of Nazareth* by Jon Sobrino, Paul Burns and Francis McDonagh

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Source: *The Furrow*, Vol. 46, No. 9 (Sep., 1995), pp. 538-539

Published by: The Furrow

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27663007>

Accessed: 14-12-2018 12:17 UTC

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repetition was to be found, I felt, in the treatment of his personal relationships with his sister, Margaret, and Eliza Goddard, the unfulfilled love of his life. His journals are cited to show his occasional addiction to drink and his predilection for prostitutes, but they also depict a man with a belief in a revealed religion and an acute sense of morality. Indeed, it may be argued that a religious faith was the major motivating factor of his complex personality. A religious sense of social justice, exemplified in his strong opposition to slavery, led him to condemn the payment of tithes, taxes and dues to landlords. He was also influenced by a form of millenarianism, almost expecting the return of a messianic figure to restore justice to the suffering people. In Russell's own words, 'the course of divinely ordained history assured victory to the opponents of the administration'. Such sentiments were clearly inspirational but not such as to organise a successful rebellion. To initiate a rising, knowing that French assistance was not expected and not knowing if there was adequate popular support on the ground, was an act of folly. Russell, however, lived by different criteria declaring that 'whether I fall or succeed is in the hand of God, but the cause I will never relinquish'. The cause, the ideal of a united Ireland for those of diverse creeds and classes, still remains on the agenda of the present peace process, and Denis Carroll is to be complimented for recalling the life of Thomas Russell to the pages of history at this time.

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Jesus the Liberator: A Historical-Theological Reading of Jesus of Nazareth. Jon Sobrino. Translated from the Spanish by Paul Burns and Francis McDonagh. Tunbridge Wells: Burns & Oates/Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books. Pp. 308. Price £12.95.

In the first part of this book Sobrino establishes the importance of the setting in which Christology is done. He draws attention to the historical situation of poverty, suffering, dispossession and oppression in Latin America and argues, convincingly, that these realities provide important settings for the rediscovery of elements in the sources of revelation which have remained buried for too long. One comes to know Christ better from the standpoint of the poor and knowing them better one will seek out the poor wherever they are. This helps to underscore the point that knowing Christ is, in the last resort, following Christ. Having established the importance of the historical situation in which Christology is done today, he inevitably has to begin his own work by attending to the historical Jesus before he draws any conclusions about the Christ of faith. There he finds that 'in the world of poverty the poor and Jesus of Nazareth converge and point to each other' (35).

The second section of the book deals with 'The Mission and Faith of Jesus' – how Jesus acts in the service of God's Kingdom. Although the significance of God's Kingdom as the central concern of Jesus is a relatively recent discovery in European theology, Sobrino finds that this European theology is too abstract and therefore unhelpful in con-

fronting the enormous suffering of people in Latin America. He says: 'In a word, the poor are not usually present in these christologies as an essential determinant of what the Kingdom is. So, although their statements are formally true and even important, they suffer from a lack of evangelical and historical perspective on the present' (115). He argues that if one loses sight of the addresses of the Kingdom – the poor – one's Christology is seriously deficient.

The final section, 'The Cross of Jesus', addresses the death of Jesus from historical and theological perspectives. Once again suffering and death, so much part of the world in which he lives, provide a key *locus theologicus* for understanding the death of Jesus. Indeed as one reads these pages they come alive with their reference to the contemporary martyrs, Archbishop Romero and Sobrino's own murdered Jesuit confreres, especially Ignacio Ellacuria. The cross then, poses essential questions for our idea of God and our commitment to the downtrodden. 'There is no recipe for recognising God on the cross, and initially there is nothing on the cross but silence and scandal. If in faith, however, we accept that God is there, then we have to be ready for the great surprise that God is not as we think. We have to be ready to find God not only in the positive, but also through the negative. . . . And we have to be ready, above all, for incarnation at the foot of the cross and to bring the crucified down from their crosses' (252). Unlike Europeans who can speak of a theology after Auschwitz Latin Americans must, he says, in the words of Pedro Casadáliga, 'talk about God inside Auschwitz'.

While this is both a stimulating and convincing book it remains as one perspective on the Christ event, albeit a very important one. He does succeed rather well in drawing the close parallels between the world of Jesus and his own situation and consequently points to the gap which can separate us in this part of the world from both. However, there are other important issues with which the student of Christology today must deal, issues which do not feature in this type of liberation theology. In Europe and North America feminist theology has raised important questions for the Christ event. What has it to say to the pervasive sexism in its many forms existing on a global scale? What are the implications for women in their discipleship of Jesus in terms of ministry in the contemporary Church? There is the problem for Christology of discerning and interpreting correctly the continuity and discontinuity that exists between the mind of the historical Jesus and the Church in its various phases of development. One could also point to the issues raised by the interfaith dialogues of the present time, whether with the Jewish faith or the other great world religions, which are growing faster than Christianity. What has the Christologist to say to those in whom God has been waiting and searching without their having ever heard of Jesus Christ? These questions are becoming more urgent all the time, and while Sobrino did not set out to address them, we need to keep them in mind. They also enable us to evaluate more soberly the scope of a Latin American theology in world of increasing complexities.

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