

It is only to be expected that Latin American theologians should turn their attention to Christology as a paradigm case of theology-in-need-of-restatement. Two books now available to the English-language reader are Leonardo Boff's *Jesus Christ Liberator*, and the work under review here. Boff's original was written earlier, though its English language edition has an epilogue which seems considerably indebted to Sobrino. But Sobrino's work became available in England in 1978, two years before Boff's (though this hasn't prevented the present reviewer from producing this review later than Fergus Kerr produced his review of Boff. Then, I always was a slow reader).

I spoke of theology-in-need-of-restatement. In fact many Latin American theologians would insist that we need, not just a restatement, but a completely new approach. One might paraphrase their challenge (and that of other Third World theologians) to their European counterparts in terms such as these: 'You are well versed in Scripture and languages, patristics and church history, scholastic theology and modern sciences and philosophy: thus equipped, you can give us an excellent exegesis of ancient texts, you can formulate and reformulate the perennial themes of theology with eminent precision; but you lack one thing: a critical engagement with your own social, economic and cultural situation, such that when you speak of the kingdom of God you speak from *within* your subject, as one who is personally involved in a present struggle against what is hostile to the kingdom'. It coheres with such an approach that Sobrino's book is dedicated: 'For Father Rutilio Grande S.J. and Father Alfonso Navarro, martyrs for the kingdom of God in El Salvador'.

Sobrino's book, which consists largely of articles previously appearing in Latin American periodicals in 1975 and 1976, starts twice, or three times if you count the Preface to the English Edition. Chapter I discusses the starting point for Christology, and insists that it must be the historical Jesus as opposed to any later credal

or dogmatic formulation. Chapter II is entitled 'The approach to Christology: preliminary remarks', and looks at the *context* - theological, cultural and social - of various modern European and Latin American Christologies. Moltmann is the European theologian whose approach Sobrino finds most congenial, and his influence is visible throughout the book.

It is not inappropriate that there should be two chapters on Starting-Point and Approach. The whole work might be described as Christology in search of a method. It is not a primer - whereas Boff's book might in fact serve as a very interesting textbook.

The particular aspect of the historical Jesus' history which Sobrino emphasizes, is a richly suggestive chapter entitled 'The Faith of Jesus', is the shift from Jesus' earlier ministry, in which he saw himself as heir of a Jewish faith 'in a God who is drawing near to establish universal fellowship'; through the 'Galilean crisis' when the tide seemed to be turning against him; to the later stage, leading up to the cross, when Jesus trusts the Father without any evidence on which to rest his trust. 'Letting God remain God now lacks any verification; it is done in the absence of any verification at all.' (p. 94). This 'theological poverty' which Jesus accepts is translated into a theological principle whereby the death of Jesus can be correctly apprehended: it is not that we previously know what God was like, and then, like Anselm, understand the cross within our already formulated theology; on the contrary, we 'should try to arrive at God on the basis of Jesus' cross. This is a radical challenge to all kinds of traditional theological principles (such as that God cannot suffer), and I hope that this will not cause European theologians to dismiss Sobrino. The author feels, too, that this approach to 'knowing' God enables us to make better sense of the negative elements which confront us in our attempts to understand life.

The same kind of principle operates in his discussion of the Resurrection: for him, we do not first know God, and then add

to our knowledge the fact of Christ's resurrection. No, 'resurrection is the event that reveals God' (p. 240). Nor, in discussing the 'historicity' of the resurrection, do we start from the presupposition that we know what history is and then assess the claim of the resurrection, as one event among many, to be considered historical; the Christian gospel itself challenges the dogma of historical positivism: if we are to grasp the meaning of resurrection we have to learn the nature of Christian hope (Moltmann is here laid heavily under contribution, we have to understand history as promise; and we have to accept that belief in the resurrection involves a new way of living; or, as we say in the trade, 'praxis (is) a hermeneutic principle for understanding the resurrection' (p. 253).

Sobrino's approach to theology in general and Christology in particular constitutes a challenge to many of the ways in which Christians have in fact 'practised their religion in the past. A chapter on the tension between faith and religion, and another on the Christological dogmas, discuss the relationship between living faith and institutional religious practice on the one hand, and living faith and dogmatic formulation on the other. The treatment manages to be radical without being iconoclastic, and in the chapter on dogmas, he has an interesting discussion on the nature of the language used by the church when pronouncing on her faith, suggesting that it would be best described as 'doxological'.

The book ends with a 50-page summary, 'Theses for a Historical Christology', and a chapter on the Christ of the Ignatian Exercises.

Sobrino himself is aware that at least one criticism should be levelled at the book as it stands: 'the scriptural texts introduced in this book stand in need of more solid exegetical grounding, for this particular Christology purports to be based on the historical Jesus' (p. xxvi).

Two other lacks which I would notice: an ecclesiological dimension (the absence of which is perhaps consonant with a determination to concentrate on the historical Jesus, and a sacramental dimension. I don't really think a book which is looking at what kind of a thing Christology *is* can be entirely excused on grounds of space or whatever, for neglecting those aspects. It would be a pity if 'Latin American Theology' were seen as something alien to the theological tradition of the Catholic Church, rather than as a new breath of life for the whole of that tradition. A book like this convinces me that Catholic theology would neglect Latin America at its peril.

The work is well-edited and indexed. The one complaint in that area is that many works which are available in English are referred to in the footnotes in their Spanish or South American editions, except for the very first time they are mentioned.

If the price is still £4.95 – it's a bargain.

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