

## THE BIBLE AS A SOURCE FOR THEOLOGY

When your President-elect, John Boyle, first invited me to give an address on "The Bible as a Source for Theology," and then told me that it could last no longer than forty-five minutes, I asked him why he didn't include in the topic "God, the Universe, and Everything Else." A topic like "The Bible as a Source for Theology" naturally called for a sharp narrowing of focus.<sup>1</sup> I had to ask myself: What concrete example in the field of theology today best exemplifies the promises and pitfalls of using the Scriptures as a source for theological reflection?

Of all the possible candidates, the one that intrigues me the most is Latin American liberation theology,<sup>2</sup> with its fierce desire to ground its reflection and praxis in the message and praxis of the historical Jesus, as reflected in the canonical Gospels.

But why choose the use of the historical Jesus by Latin American liberation theologians? For one thing, liberation theologians have brought a breath of fresh air to theology in general and christology in particular. I say this without any disparagement of the fine work done in the area of christology by such first-world scholars as Hans Küng and Edward Schillebeeckx. Schillebeeckx's books, in particular, show an amazing command of a wide range of exegetical opinions, Catholic and Protestant alike. But, for all their newness, Küng and Schillebeeckx still reflect the context of christology as taught in European universities; even the ecumenical scholarship is part of that context.

We seem to breathe a different atmosphere when we turn to the use of "Jesus-research"<sup>3</sup> displayed by Latin American liberation theologians. In saying this, I do not mean to fall into the naive claim that liberation theology is free of academic influence from the first world. Many of the Latin American liberation theologians studied in Europe and/or the United States. To take as examples the the

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<sup>1</sup>For a more general consideration of the relation of Scripture to theology today, see J. D. G. Dunn and J. P. Mackey, *New Testament Theology in Dialogue. Christology and Ministry* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1987). But note that even in this work, the two authors thought it necessary to focus their wide-ranging thoughts on two specific topics: christology and ministry.

<sup>2</sup>Here too the pressures of time and space demand such a limitation of focus. One could easily cast the net farther afield to explore the christology of liberation theologians in other *Sitze im Leben*; see, e.g., in a South African context, Albert Nolan, *Jesus before Christianity* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1976; 9th printing, 1987).

<sup>3</sup>This is the phrase that James H. Charlesworth prefers to the loaded phrases, "the quest" or "the search for the historical Jesus" (implying that we have lost something that we may or may not find); see his *Jesus within Judaism* (Anchor Bible Reference Library; New York: Doubleday, 1988 [forthcoming]) 1-2.

two scholars I intend to study in detail: Jon Sobrino attended St. Louis University and then the Hochschule Sankt Georgen in Frankfurt, while Juan Luis Segundo studied at Louvain in Belgium and the Sorbonne in Paris. Interestingly, their footnotes and bibliographies reflect dependence largely on European rather than U.S. authors. Thus, one does not see the total break with continental scholarship that is sometimes assumed. Sobrino himself points this out in the English-language preface to his early book, *Christology at the Crossroads*.<sup>4</sup>

Yet there is a difference as we cross into the third world. The christologies of Sobrino and Segundo have been forged in the furnace of oppression, violence, and the need for a liberating praxis and theology in San Salvador and Uruguay respectively. They represent a fierce drive to make academic theology speak to and be responsible to the lived Christianity of a suffering people yearning for liberation from political, social, and economic enslavement. Within the Catholic Church, no group prior to the liberation theologians had spotlighted so intensely the past misuse of religion to prop up oppressive structures and the need to re-speak Catholic faith and theology to support instead the liberation of the oppressed.

This is a genuine achievement that cannot be gainsaid—least of all by me. If, this evening, I do subject some liberation theologians to the same sort of critique that I have applied elsewhere<sup>5</sup> to Küng and Schillebeeckx, I do so not out of any disdain for Latin America theology. It is all too easy for armchair exegetes in the safety of the United States or Canada to criticize Latin American authors who daily risk their lives by writing with a relevance that could be deadly to themselves. But theologians like Sobrino and Segundo have chosen to write not simply inspiring popular literature and stirring homilies. They have chosen to take up the discourse and trappings of academic scholarship, complete with learned footnotes and references to noted exegetes to bolster their positions and debate their confreres. If, to support one's argument, one chooses to play the academic game, then one has to be willing to be judged by the rules of that game. What I propose to do, therefore, is to take a brief look at how a few liberation theologians are incorporating the quest for the historical Jesus into their christologies.

I stress a few liberation theologians, since there is no one homogenized liberation theology—as even recent documents from the Vatican have recongized.<sup>6</sup> I do not presume to make judgments valid for all writers in the field. I rather propose to examine the two theologians already mentioned—Jon Sobrino and Juan Luis Segundo—because they are prominent liberation theologians who have recently written specifically on the question of the historical Jesus as the basis of

<sup>4</sup>*Christology at the Crossroads* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1976; ET 1978) xxix.

<sup>5</sup>Notably in a lecture delivered at the Hartford Seminary, Hartford, CT, on 18 March 1988.

<sup>6</sup>So the "Instruction on Certain Aspects of the 'Theology of Liberation,'" issued by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and dated 6 August 1984 (*Origins* 14 [1984] 193, 195-204, esp. Section III par. 3 on p. 196: "As with all movements of ideas, the 'theologies of liberation' present diverse theological positions. Their doctrinal frontiers are badly defined." Though the popular press presented this instruction as highly critical of liberation theology, what is perhaps surprising is how much good the Congregation is willing to see in the movement.

liberation theology. Even in such a limited area, though, one cannot presume that an author's opinions have remained unchanged from book to book. Hence I will restrict myself to two recent publications: (1) *Jesus in Latin America*, by Sobrino,<sup>7</sup> with a glance back at his earlier *Christology at the Crossroads*; and (2) *The Historical Jesus of the Synoptics* by Segundo.<sup>8</sup>

## I

Sobrino himself, with admirable honesty, warns the reader in his preface to the English-language edition of *Christology at the Crossroads* that there are problems with his use of Scripture: ". . . 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." That is the key point for both of these authors: the historical Jesus does not enter in tangentially; he is basic to the whole project. Sobrino continues: ". . . I have tried to take due account of what exegesis has to say about the various passages used here. . . . But the exegetical analysis needs to be worked out in greater detail."<sup>9</sup>

In fact, very few important exegetes are cited at length in *Christology at the Crossroads*, and those who are cited are not the most recent authors. It is symptomatic of the book that Rudolf Bultmann is the most quoted exegete, and often he is referred to more for his general hermeneutics and theology. There are also scattered references to Schnackenburg, Thüsing, Jeremias, Käsemann, and Cullmann, with a few pointers to Bornkamm and Herbert Braun. Notice, by the way, that almost all of these authors are German. The wide range of recent exegetical literature used by Schillebeeckx in his *Jesus* book simply is not there.

But this is not the most serious flaw of *Christology at the Crossroads*. Sobrino's whole presentation of liberation theology claims to be based on the historical Jesus; and that is where it is most seriously lacking. Nowhere in the book is there any extended, critical discussion of what the phrase "the historical Jesus" means or what criteria we are to use to discern authentic material. One almost gets the impression that the historical Jesus equals the full reality of the pre-Easter Jesus, with no awareness of all the difficulties that simplistic equation involves. At times, the historical Jesus seems to be Jesus insofar as he fits into Sobrino's program of liberation theology. For all the talk of a new approach, we are not all that far from the proof-text use of Scripture in the old Catholic manuals of dogmatic theology.

Indeed, Sobrino's work is very much a product of dogmatic and systematic theology, so much so that even when he is speaking about the historical Jesus, most of the writers he cites are German systematicians, especially Rahner, Panenberg, and Moltmann.

In his more recent book, *Jesus in Latin America*, Sobrino seeks to reply to criticisms of *Christology at the Crossroads*. Unfortunately, the concept of the his-

<sup>7</sup>*Jesus in Latin America* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1987; Spanish original, 1982).

<sup>8</sup>*The Historical Jesus of the Synoptics* (Jesus of Nazareth Yesterday and Today, vol. 2; Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1985; Spanish original, 1982).

<sup>9</sup>Sobrino, *Christology at the Crossroads*, xxvi.

torical Jesus continues to remain fuzzy, at times being equated with a christology that emphasizes the humanity of Jesus or Jesus' earthly career.

Even within this fuzzy context there are problems. Sobrino constantly emphasizes Jesus' partisanship and favoritism toward the poor, the oppressed, and sinners. These various groups tend to be lumped together as the object of Jesus' favor, and solidarity with them is seen as the cause of opposition to Jesus and finally of his death. Yet E. P. Sanders, in his fine book *Jesus and Judaism*,<sup>10</sup> points out that it is illegitimate to treat all these groups as one. There is no proof that Jesus' concern for economically poor or uneducated people caused a major scandal or persecution, or was the major reason for his execution. Matters may have been different with his free offer of forgiveness to public sinners who were considered to have broken with Judaism. Here Jesus may have offended *many* sincere and zealous Jews, and not just the rich or powerful. Since such people as tax collectors were not necessarily the poorest members of the community, and indeed some like Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10)<sup>11</sup> may have been wealthy, Jesus' scandalous free-wheeling offer of forgiveness to these economic oppressors cannot be simply equated with his care for the economically deprived. (This is a key point, and I will come back to it when I look at Segundo.)

Thus, for all the socioeconomic trappings, Sobrino's treatment of the historical Jesus is socioeconomically naive. What brought Jesus to the cross may have been no one aspect of his ministry, but rather the fact that his ministry offended *so* many groups—including pious Jews—in *so* many different ways that he had few influential supporters when the final clash came between himself and the rulers in Jerusalem over his attacks on the temple. Like Sanders, Sobrino recognizes the importance of the temple question, though he fails to appreciate that such attacks probably alienated not just the Jerusalem priests but also a good many devout Jewish lay people. Just as it is too simplistic to say that all of Jesus' audience was economically poor, so it is too simplistic to say that Jesus offended only the rich and the powerful. Again, I will return to this point when I come to Segundo.

One corollary of these observations is that the precise reason or reasons *why* Jesus was arrested and finally crucified, and the precise grounds on which he was

<sup>10</sup>*Jesus and Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985).

<sup>11</sup>I purposely use the phrase "some like Zacchaeus," since this is not the place to enter into a full discussion of the historicity of the Zacchaeus incident. Favorable to at least a historical core are J. Ernst, *Das Evangelium nach Lukas* (RNT; Regensburg: Pustet, 1976) 512-13; J. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke (X-XXIV)* (AB 28A; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983) 1218-19; W. Grundmann, *Das Evangelium nach Lukas* (THKNT 3; 7th ed.; Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1974) 358-59; I. H. Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978) 694-95; M.-J. Lagrange, *Evangile selon Saint Luc* (EB; 4th ed.; Paris: Gabalda, 1927) 487-90; A. Plummer, *The Gospel According to S. Luke* (ICC; Edinburgh: Clark, 1969) 432. Even M. Dibelius hesitates over the question of historicity (*Die Formgeschichte des Evangeliums* [6th ed.; Tübingen: Mohr (Siebeck), 1971] 114-15). R. Bultmann seems in a hopeless minority when he declares the story "an ideal scene, a variant developed out of Mark 2:14" (*Die Geschichte der synoptischen Tradition* [FRLANT 29; 8th ed.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1970] 34).

tried, are by no means clear, as Sobrino himself admits.<sup>12</sup> Yet Sobrino proceeds to reconstruct the scenario of Jesus' Jewish and Roman trials, complete with a trial before the Sanhedrin. In all this, Sobrino's theological theses seem to be the guiding rule for deciding what in the Gospel narratives is historical. Once again, we are proof-texting. Having recently spent three days at a colloquium between Christian and Jewish scholars discussing the historical events surrounding the trial of Jesus, I can only marvel at the simplistic treatment Sobrino gives this complex problem. Let me give one example.

While Sobrino, in good Germanic fashion, sometimes omits consideration of the Fourth Gospel from his treatment of the historical Jesus, he does bring in John's Gospel on this question of the persecution of Jesus unto death. Sobrino makes an initial acknowledgment of John's redactional tendencies, but then misses the very point of those tendencies by saying that John makes the whole Jewish people responsible for the persecution of Jesus, and not just their leaders. Actually, the phrase "the Jews" in John's Gospel, when used in a pejorative sense, does not usually mean the whole Jewish people, but rather the hostile authorities in Jerusalem. Worse still, Sobrino proceeds to cite the Johannine texts that refer to the Pharisees' deadly opposition to Jesus and their excommunication of those who acknowledge Jesus as Messiah. Nowhere in all this is there a glimmer of realization that the presentation of the Pharisees as *the* ultimate power in Judaism, before whom even the rulers must tremble, is a post-A.D. 70 picture and hardly reflects the historical Pharisees of Jesus' day. Contrary to Sobrino, the Pharisees probably had nothing to do as a group with Jesus' death. Faced with the horrors of 20th-century anti-Semitism, one should be more careful when dealing with the historical question of who actually was involved in the death of Jesus.

Sobrino's new book, *Jesus in Latin America*, does mark a step forward in his thought, in that he does attempt some definition of what he means by the historical Jesus. The attempt, though, is not auspicious. Sobrino states simply: "Latin American christology understands the historical Jesus as the totality of Jesus' history. . . ." <sup>13</sup> Of course, that is precisely what the historical Jesus cannot be. As

<sup>12</sup>It is surprising to see how little discussion there is on the complicated historical question of the trial(s) of Jesus in Sobrino and Segundo. For basic orientation and bibliography, see E. Bammel (ed.), *The Trial of Jesus* (SBT 2d series 13; London: SCM, 1970); O. Betz, "Probleme des Prozesses Jesu," *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt* (ed. W. Haase; Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 1982) II/25.1, 564-647; J. Blinzler, *Der Prozess Jesu* (4th ed.; Regensburg: Pustet, 1969); S. G. F. Brandon, *The Trial of Jesus of Nazareth* (Historical Trials Series; New York: Stein and Day, 1968); R. E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John (XIII-XXI)* (AB 29A; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1970) 791-802; D. Catchpole, *The Trial of Jesus* (SPB 18; Leiden: Brill, 1971); M. Hengel, *Crucifixion* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977); H. W. Kuhn, "Die Kreuzesstrafe," *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, II/25.1, 648-793; E. Rivkin, *What Crucified Jesus?* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1984); A. Sherwin-White, *Roman Society and Roman Law in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1963) 24-47; G. Sloyan, *Jesus on Trial* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1973); A. Strobel, *Die Stunde der Wahrheit* (WUNT 21; Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1980); P. Winter, *On the Trial of Jesus* (SJ 1; 2d ed. rev. by T. Burkill and G. Vermes; Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 1974).

<sup>13</sup>"The Importance of the Historical Jesus in Latin American Christology," *Jesus in Latin America*, 65.

Schillebeeckx points out so well in his *Jesus* book, the historical Jesus is that which the methods of historical criticism enable us to retrieve of Jesus of Nazareth.<sup>14</sup> Unlike the positivistic historicism of the 19th century, we must appreciate that what can be reconstructed historically (i.e., the historical Jesus) does not coincide with the full reality of the Jesus who lived in the first century. What really occurs in history is broader than the history recoverable by a historian. As a result, unlike Küng and certainly unlike Sobrino, Schillebeeckx resolutely refuses to identify any or all historical reconstructions with the *real* Jesus—and in this he is methodologically superior. The Gospels hardly give us the totality of Jesus' history, and a quest for the historical Jesus must be highly selective amid the data the Gospels do provide. Hence the *real* Jesus, i.e., the total reality of Jesus of Nazareth as he lived in the first century, is no longer accessible to us by scholarly means. It is this basic insight which touches off a quest for the historical Jesus, and it is this basic insight that is lacking in Sobrino's approach.

Sobrino himself readily acknowledges that Latin American christology has not reflected at length on the methodological problems involved in appealing to the historical Jesus. In the last few pages of his essay on "The Importance of the Historical Jesus in Latin American Christology," he attempts such a reflection. While recognizing that the factual data concerning Jesus are not directly accessible from the Gospels, Sobrino observes that Latin American christology is not especially interested systematically in determining data about Jesus with exactitude. It does not make a christology based on the historical Jesus depend on the *ipsissima verba* or *ipsissima facta* of Jesus. "Its interest rather consists in discovering and historically insuring the basic structure of Jesus' practice and preaching, an end through which the basic structure of his internal historicity and his person are likewise discernible."<sup>15</sup>

Sobrino notes that Latin American christology does not share the radical skepticism of some; rather, it shares "the common heritage of other current christologies (including the European)."<sup>16</sup> Sobrino then proceeds to give a thumb-nail sketch of such a common heritage—and the problem of appealing to such a supposed common heritage becomes evident. The picture is basically that of the Synoptic Jesus: e.g., there is simply one journey to Jerusalem toward the end of Jesus' life. Yet this is mixed up with a strange borrowing from John, namely the idea of a crisis toward the middle or end of Jesus' public life—one element from John that is historically dubious. A good deal of this common heritage is distressingly vague: e.g., Jesus shared "some kind of meal with those close to him" before he was arrested; Jesus showed "certain attitudes toward the Jewish Law and the Temple."<sup>17</sup> Sobrino is no doubt aware that if he gets any more specific than this, his presumed common heritage may evaporate; but without more specificity, these vague snippets are useless.

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<sup>14</sup>Edward Schillebeeckx, *Jesus. An Experiment in Christology* (New York: Seabury, 1979) 67-71.

<sup>15</sup>"The Importance of the Historical Jesus," 73-74.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.* 74.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*

In this recent essay, Sobrino does at least examine a few criteria of historicity. Like Harvey McArthur,<sup>18</sup> and unlike Norman Perrin,<sup>19</sup> he finds the criterion of multiple attestation to be the best. Two other criteria, discontinuity with the NT church and the consistency of Jesus' death with what is narrated of his life, are considered indirect verifications of the first criterion.

Yet Sobrino never bothers to use these criteria in any detail. In this there appears a real tension between his awareness of the historical-critical problem and his desire to get on with his project of liberation theology. He states that it is more than likely that the Gospels are in part the fruit of the imagination of the NT communities. But he thinks that it is "rather unlikely" that the Gospels are such in their totality. Then, with a rhetorical wave of the hand, he continues: "At all events, Latin American christology holds a presupposition in favor of the basic historicity of the gospel narratives. . . . To anyone living and suffering history on the South American continent it seems altogether probable that 'Jesus was like that.'"<sup>20</sup> In short, if it enjoys verisimilitude in the eyes of Latin Americans, it is judged historical.

It is telling that Sobrino admits that his position is a problem from the standpoint of historical criticism, but an advantage from the standpoint of systematic reflection. And that, it appears, is all Sobrino is really interested in. In a sense, Sobrino feels justified in proceeding this way because he is convinced that Latin American communities replicate in their experience the first Christian communities that produced the Gospels. This is simply naiveté once removed. The first Christian communities were by no means all the same in their experience or christology, and to recapture their historical situations is hardly less taxing than recapturing the historical Jesus.<sup>21</sup> In the end, Sobrino substitutes unsubstantiated generalizations for the hard work of Jesus-research. The basic problem is never really engaged, and one is left wondering how, if at all, the Bible has really been a source of theology for Sobrino—or for liberation theology in general.

## II

The problem of the historical Jesus certainly *is* engaged—and at great length—by Juan Luis Segundo, who has written a sizable treatise on liberation theology and the historical Jesus. In its English translation, it takes up a whole volume, en-

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<sup>18</sup>Harvey McArthur, "A Survey of Recent Gospel Research," *Interpretation* 18 (1964) 39-55, esp. 48; idem, "The Burden of Proof in Historical Jesus Research," *Expository Times* 82 (1970-71) 116-19, esp. 118.

<sup>19</sup>Norman Perrin, *Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus* (London: SCM, 1967) 39-43.

<sup>20</sup>"The Importance of the Historical Jesus," 74-75.

<sup>21</sup>See, e.g., Raymond Brown and John Meier, *Antioch and Rome* (New York/Ramsey, NJ: Paulist, 1983); Raymond Brown, *The Churches the Apostles Left Behind* (New York/Ramsey, NJ: Paulist, 1984).

titled *The Historical Jesus of the Synoptics*.<sup>22</sup> To my knowledge, Segundo is the only Latin American liberation theologian who has dedicated an entire book to the question of the historical Jesus.

But precisely because his treatment of the historical Jesus is so much more extensive than that of Sobrino's, the problems of the whole approach become more glaring. At least Sobrino was aware of the deficiencies of his use of Scripture; Segundo seems unaware of the same problem in his own work.

This may sound like a harsh judgment, but time after time throughout *The Historical Jesus of the Synoptics*, Segundo proves to be haphazard and eclectic, as he meshes together and selects from the Synoptics, John, and Paul to construct his portrait of Jesus the political agitator. The more unusual his judgments become, the less he tries to ground them with data and arguments. For example, in justifying Paul's creativity in formulating the gospel message, Segundo says: "Like the authors of the fourth Gospel, the Letter to the Hebrews, and the Book of Revelation, Paul clearly perceives the distance between the historical Jesus and the interpretations of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. So he feels free to create his own gospel . . ." (p. 21). The astounding claim that Paul, writing in the 50's both knew the three Synoptics and perceived their distance from the historical Jesus remains unsubstantiated—as indeed it must.<sup>23</sup> To take another example: although most exegetes point out that John's Gospel lacks any detailed interest in ecclesiology, Segundo declares John the most ecclesial of the Gospels.<sup>24</sup> At times Segundo seems to have an unerring sense for the wrong text to prove his point. To show that Jesus demonstrated partiality toward the poor, Segundo cites the parable of the Pharisee and the publican praying in the temple. The publican, not the Pharisee, goes home justified—fine! But the publican, the tool of the government in extracting tolls or excise taxes, was hardly the economically poorest person in

<sup>22</sup>Juan Luis Segundo, *The Historical Jesus of the Synoptics* (Jesus of Nazareth Yesterday and Today, vol. 2; Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1985; ET of the first part [pp. 1-284] of *El hombre de hoy ante Jesús de Nazareth. Vol III/1, Historia y actualidad: Sinópticos y Pablo* [Madrid: Cristiandad, 1982]). While I quote in this article from the English translation, I have compared the English with the Spanish original. Such a comparison reveals some flaws in the translation, but the sentences I consider in detail are present in the same form in the Spanish.

<sup>23</sup>The claim implicit in Segundo's statement goes far beyond the revisionist views proposed by J. A. T. Robinson in his *Redating the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976) and *The Priority of John* (Oak Park, IL: Meyer-Stone, 1985); and at least Robinson spent hundreds of pages trying to prove his idiosyncratic theories.—Segundo's attitude toward the historicity of the Fourth Gospel oscillates between general rejection and occasional acceptance when it suits his purposes. The same sort of hesitant attitude can be seen in his more recent *Teología Abierta. III. Reflexiones Críticas* (Madrid: Cristiandad, 1984) 35-128, esp. pp. 46-47 and n. 8 on p. 47.

<sup>24</sup>See, e.g., the remarks of Raymond Brown in his *The Community of the Beloved Disciple* (New York/Ramsey/Toronto: Paulist, 1979) 155-62. In my opinion, Brown's mature reflections modify somewhat his views on ecclesiology in the Gospel of John as presented in the first volume of his commentary on the Gospel (*The Gospel According to John* [AB 29; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966] CV-CXI).



Israel, and he belonged on the side of the oppressors rather than the oppressed. If anything, the parable overturns Segundo's, as well as the Pharisee's, theology.<sup>25</sup>

Amid all the confusion, one is relieved when Segundo attempts to articulate a detailed method in treating the historical Jesus—something Sobrino does not do. Segundo enunciates three criteria of historicity: (1) one must distinguish pre-Easter from post-Easter statements;<sup>26</sup> (2) one must distinguish pre-ecclesial from post-ecclesial statements (the criterion of discontinuity); and (3) historicity is supported by multiple attestation. Sad to say, the criteria are not often used in practice. Sayings are often accepted without much reasoning if they fit Segundo's political program; often texts that exegetes would assign to the creative redaction of the evangelists are attributed to the historical Jesus (e.g., Matt 17:12-13, the descent from the mount of transfiguration). The most blatant example of this occurs when Segundo reads Mark's redactional theme of the messianic secret back into Jesus' life. William Wrede must be turning over in his grave.

There is also uncritical meshing of disparate texts. Like some other liberation theologians, Segundo is fond of referring to a Galilean crisis, which seems to result from conflating Peter's confession of faith at Caesarea Philippi in Mark and Matthew with a different profession of faith by Peter at Capernaum in John 6. Indeed, one is left wondering whether Segundo understands his own criteria. He misses the point of the criterion of multiple attestation when he appeals to the fact that a given narrative (e.g., Peter's confession at Caesarea Philippi) appears in much the same way in Mark, Matthew, and Luke. He conveniently overlooks the obvious reason for this agreement, namely, that Mark is *the* source which both Matthew and Luke copied. Hence there is no attestation by multiple *sources*, and no argument for historicity simply from agreement among the three Synoptics.

As one goes through this book, it is not just the portrait of the historical Jesus that becomes increasingly problematic, but also the portrait of historical Judaism in the first century A.D. Instead of a carefully differentiated picture of a highly diverse religion, we get oversimplifications and even caricatures. In practice, for Segundo, the Judaism presented by the four Gospels is the historical Judaism of the time of Jesus, period. The recent work of scholars who have investigated the history of first-century Judaism is simply not considered. For example, Segundo claims that among the groups Jesus addressed were the Zealots—ignoring the claims of some historians that the Zealots as a distinct group with that precise name

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<sup>25</sup>It is true, as Segundo points out in *Teología Abierta. III.*, 90, that publicans could be poor too. Yet it is interesting to notice how, while various people and groups in the New Testament are portrayed as poor (noticeably widows and orphans), no tax collector is every portrayed as poor (cf. Levi throwing a party for Jesus and inviting a large crowd in Mark 2:15). More to the point, nothing in the Lucan parable indicates that the publican is any poorer than the Pharisee; at any rate, the point of the parable hardly rests on such an unsubstantiated assumption.

<sup>26</sup>Actually, this is more of a general principle than an exact criterion that enables one to distinguish authentic from unauthentic material in particular cases. Given the general principle, one must still ask: And how do we know in particular cases what is prepaschal? The individual criteria (e.g., discontinuity, multiple attestation) seek to answer that question. On this point, see also his *Teología Abierta. III.*, 45-46.

emerged only during the First Jewish War, or at least that they were dormant during the time of Jesus.<sup>27</sup>

Leaning on John's redactional tendencies (esp. chaps. 11 and 18 of the Gospel), Segundo presents the Pharisees and Sadducees plotting together in Jerusalem to arrest and condemn Jesus. Actually, an investigation of the earliest Passion traditions shows that the Pharisees as a group were probably not involved in Jesus' death. The Pharisees are inserted into a few episodes of the Passion by the redactional activity of Matthew and John. Especially disturbing is Segundo's acceptance of Matthew's polemic against the Pharisees in a post-A.D. 70 situation as historically reliable for the time of Jesus. Segundo affirms that the Pharisees are Jesus' enemies par excellence; or better, "they are the enemies par excellence of the God that Jesus reveals. . . . Everything we know about the Pharisees from the Gospels and the extrabiblical sources shows them to be a sincere and fanatically religious group. (Sincerity and fanaticism very often accompany the ultimate stages of bad faith.) Theirs is a terrible legalism. And if they are guilty of hypocrisy . . . , it ultimately stems from hardness of heart . . . , which is translated into an insensitivity to the evident needs of their neighbor. . . ." <sup>28</sup> All one can say is that Segundo is woefully ignorant of all the work done in the last decade or two by both Jewish and Christian scholars to recover a more accurate religious and social description of the Pharisees.

The same criticism can be made of his treatment of the Sadducees. Segundo describes them as follows: ". . . rather than being a sincerely religious sect in opposition to the Pharisees, the Sadducean party seemed to be much more concerned about their own power . . . than about the purity or profundity of their religious opinions."<sup>29</sup> At this point Segundo should have remembered his own hermeneutic of suspicion. Almost everything we know about the Sadducees at the time of Jesus we know from their enemies: the Pharisees, the Essenes, and the Christians. History gets written by the survivors.

In all of this, I am not claiming that Segundo is intentionally anti-Semitic. Rather, I think he lets his reconstruction of first-century history be dictated by his desire to draw parallels between the political oppression of Jesus' day and political oppression in Latin America today. Historical parallels over the chasm of twenty centuries are seldom so simple. Indeed, although Segundo berates exegetes for their lack of concern with the social, political, and economic dimension of the Gospels, he seems unaware of all the work done by North American scholars on the sociology of the NT. This is part of a larger problem; as his notes and bibliographies show, Segundo leans heavily on European exegetes of the 50s and 60s; strictly exegetical works from the 1970s are few and far between—and very few

<sup>27</sup>See, e.g., Shaye Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah* (Library of Early Christianity 7; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1987) 164-66; Richard Horsley and John Hanson, *Bandits, Prophets, and Messiahs* (Minneapolis: Winston, 1985) 216-43; cf. the earlier article of Morton Smith, "Zealots and Sicarii: Their Origins and Relations," *HTR* 64 (1971) 1-19.

<sup>28</sup>*The Historical Jesus of the Synoptics*, 99.

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.* 101.

come from North America. Again, the contrast with Schillebeeckx's wide knowledge of various exegetes is striking.

There is one area in which Segundo's failure to appreciate the Jewish context at the time of Jesus calls his whole political approach into question. This is his treatment of "the poor."<sup>30</sup> One would never guess from Segundo's presentation that "the poor" had long since become more than a mere socioeconomic designation in Palestinian Judaism. Through the spirituality of the Psalms and the prophets, *'ānāwīm*, "the poor ones," along with similar Hebrew adjectives, had become a description of those who had seen through the illusory security of this world and had learned to trust in God alone for their salvation. At times no particular socioeconomic connotation is attached to *'ānāwīm*; a prime example of this can be found in the Book of Ben Sira. In 3:17-18 (for which we have Hebrew fragments), Ben Sira exhorts his audience—presumably the sons of well-to-do in Jerusalem—to walk in *'ānāwā*, for God reveals his mystery to the *'ānāwīm*.<sup>31</sup> Here the poverty- vocabulary is coming to mean humility, meekness, almost Matthew's "poor in spirit." Indeed, according to some scholars, Matthew's very phrase has now been found in the documents of Qumran (ironically, in the War Scroll!).<sup>32</sup> As the quintessentially pious group, the Essenes called themselves "the poor of God." They provide the prime example of the theology of poverty applied to a whole Jewish sect at the time of Jesus. It may be that the same type of group-designation was applied to the Jerusalem church.<sup>33</sup> I am not arguing here that the vo-

<sup>30</sup>For his treatment of the poor, Segundo relies, among others, on A. Myre, "Heureux les pauvres," *histoire passée et future d'une parole*, in P.-A. Giguère, J. Martucci, and A. Myre, *Cri de Dieu. Espoir des pauvres* (Montreal: Editions Paulines & Apostolat des Editions, 1977) 67-134; it should be noted that the title of this article is incorrectly given in the bibliography of the English translation, p. 223. Although I admire Myre's work, I would construct the tradition history of the beatitudes in a different way.

<sup>31</sup>For the Hebrew text, with Greek, Latin, and Syriac versions, see *Ecclesiastico* (Pubblicazioni del Seminario di Semitistica, Testi I; Naples: Istituto Orientale di Napoli, 1968) 17; indeed, manuscript A from the Cairo Geniza reads: "My son, in your wealth walk in *'ānāwā*!" The use of *'ānāwā* for humility can also be found in many Qumran texts, notably the Manual of Discipline (Rule of the Community); see 1QS 2:23-35; 3:8-9; 4:3; 5:3; 5:24-25; 9:22-23; 11:1.

<sup>32</sup>See 1QM 14:7, where E. Lohse (*Die Texte aus Qumran* [2d ed.; Munich: Kösel, 1971] 212) vocalizes the Hebrew text (unfortunately incomplete) to read *ûbē'anwê rūah* ("and by the humble [or poor] of spirit. . . ." This was the reading preferred by J. Dupont in his earlier article, "Les pauvres en esprit," *A la rencontre de Dieu: Mémorial Albert Gelin* (Le Puy: Mappus, 1961) 265-72. Later, however, Dupont changed his view: the Hebrew should rather be vocalized as *'anāwî rūah*; see his "Le *ptochoi* to *pneumati* de Matthieu 5,3 et les *'anāwî rūah* de Qumran," *Neutestamentliche Aufsätze* (J. Schmid Festschrift; ed. J. Blinzler, O. Kuss, and F. Mussner; Regensburg: Pustet, 1963) 53-64.

<sup>33</sup>So possibly in Rom 15:26: *eis tous ptōchous tōn hagiōn en Ierousalēm*, though exegetes still fight over whether the genitive is partitive ("the poor members of the Christian community in Jerusalem," so Bultmann, Munck, Georgi, Käsemann) or epexegetical ("the whole Christian community in Jerusalem that constitutes 'The Poor,'" so Lietzmann, Dahl, Bammell, Hahn, Cerfaux).—Granted his own emphasis on the poor, Segundo makes an intriguing point in *Teología Abierta. III.*, p. 122, when he suggests that, speaking anachronistically, Jesus and his disciples came from the lower middle class and were not among the desperately poor of Palestine.

cabulary of poverty had totally left its socioeconomic moorings; many of these people *were* economically poor. I am simply pointing out that the theological use of terms for the poor makes an analysis of the NT data more complex than Segundo claims.

More troubling is Segundo's affirmation, taken over from Joachim Jeremias, that the economically poor and ignorant in Israel (the '*ammê hâ-âreš*') were viewed as sinners.<sup>34</sup> Jewish scholars rejected such an equation decades ago, and now E. P. Sanders has clearly shown its falsehood in his *Jesus and Judaism*.<sup>35</sup> "Sinners" were the wicked who sinned willfully and heinously and who did not repent; they renounced the covenant. Sinners included people in disreputable professions, such as tax collectors. The scandalous point of Jesus' mission was that he directed himself notably to sinners, i.e., to the wicked. Jesus also was concerned with the poor. But, in Jewish eyes, the damaging charge against him was not that he associated with the poor, but that he associated with the wicked. It is a mistake to think that the Pharisees were upset because Jesus ministered to the ordinarily pious common people and the economically impoverished. There is no passage in the whole of rabbinic literature that states that the super-pious in Israel considered ordinary people to be *ipso facto* wicked. As Sean Freyne has pointed out in his book *Galilee from Alexander the Great to Hadrian*,<sup>36</sup> Galilean peasants were basically loyal Jews, loyal to the Jerusalem temple and to basic tenets and practices of Judaism, though not attracted to the special rules of the Pharisees. In short, Segundo's picture of Jesus' Galilean audience is simplistic and outdated. Not only is he weak in his exegesis, he is weak precisely in his analysis of the religious and socioeconomic situation in Galilee at the time of Jesus.

Segundo's desire to interpret Jesus in a this-worldly political key also leads him to play down or reinterpret those sayings of Jesus which look to a transcendent eschatological future, sayings that imply some divinely caused break with the history of this present world. The rejection of transcendent future eschatology in favor of a restructuring of society in this world is curiously reminiscent of the very founder of the quest for the historical Jesus, Hermann Reimarus.<sup>37</sup> This political interpretation of Jesus has had a long history down to our own day, including notably the books of S. G. F. Brandon, such as *Jesus and the Zealots*<sup>38</sup> and *The Trial of Jesus*.<sup>39</sup> Brandon, like Segundo, denied that Jesus was a Zealot, yet Brandon

<sup>34</sup>Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology. Part One. The Proclamation of Jesus* (London: SCM, 1971) 108-13.

<sup>35</sup>*Jesus and Judaism*, 176-79. Segundo repeats the equation of poor and sinners in *Teología Abierta. III.*; see, e.g., p. 78.

<sup>36</sup>*Galilee from Alexander the Great to Hadrian 323 B.C.E. to 135 C.E.* (Wilmington, DE: Glazier, 1980) 208-97. In *Teología Abierta. III.*, 61-62, Segundo makes the startling statement that because Jesus was a Galilean and an artisan, he was looked upon from the start by the religious authorities as a heretic. In general, Segundo too easily retrojects the Judaism of the Mishnah and the Talmud back into early 1st-century Palestine.

<sup>37</sup>Hermann Reimarus, *Reimarus: Fragments* (ed. Charles Talbert; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970).

<sup>38</sup>*Jesus and the Zealots* (New York: Scribner's, 1967).

<sup>39</sup>*The Trial of Jesus* (Historical Trials Series; New York: Stein and Day, 1968).

thought that Jesus sympathized with the aims of the Zealots. Ernst Bammel shrewdly notes how a number of liberation theologians have become intrigued by Brandon's theory. The whole book in which Bammel's essay appears (*Jesus and the Politics of His Day*)<sup>40</sup> exposes the many difficulties under which Brandon's theory labors; academically, being intrigued by Brandon may prove a fatal attraction. In all this there is a strange irony: While out of touch with the best of recent work on the historical Jesus, especially that of Protestant exegetes, Segundo and his confreres, in a limited sense, have unwittingly reached back to the father of the quest, that great skeptic of the Enlightenment, Reimarus, a Protestant progenitor the Latin American theologians might not care to own. One is reminded of George Santayana's quip that those who are ignorant of history are condemned to relive it.<sup>41</sup>

I fear that my view of the use of Scripture by Sobrino and Segundo may lead some to think that I am simply opposed to liberation theology. That is certainly not the impression I want to leave. I have picked these two liberation theologians for consideration precisely because I admire their personal dedication and scholarly production. I see liberation theology as holding great promise for the renewal of both theology and church life, and I would like to aid it by fraternal correction, not hostile criticism. There is surely room for the former. After all, by the measuring rod of patristic and scholastic theology, liberation theology is still in its infancy and needs to grow in a sophisticated use of the sources of theological reflection—especially the Bible, and most especially that scholarly will-o'-the-wisp, the historical Jesus.

Along with criteria of historicity that must be more carefully defined and employed, I think liberation theologians must rethink a larger christological question: Is it wise, when doing Christian theology, and more specifically christology, to focus so intensely, almost exclusively, on a protean Jesus of history? What is wrong with using, yea, reveling in, the full christology of each of the Gospel writers, whom we affirm in faith to be writing under divine inspiration? Just because I happen to think that Jesus' inaugural homily at Nazareth in Luke 4:16-30 is largely Luke's creative redaction of Mark, or just because I think that the great scene of Jesus judging the sheep and the goats in Matt 25:31-46 owes a great deal to Matthew's creativity, do these inspired texts lack revelatory power as a source for present-day christology and Christian praxis—whether or not the historical Jesus ever spoke them?

Perhaps the liberation theologians are all too quickly going down the primrose path Hans Küng took, the path that naively equates the historical (*geschichtlich*) Jesus with the real (*wirklich*) Christ and then elevates *that* Jesus to the canon within

<sup>40</sup>Ernst Bammel, "The revolution theory from Reimarus to Brandon," *Jesus and the Politics of His Day* (ed. Ernst Bammel and C. F. D. Moule; Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1984) 11-68.

<sup>41</sup>Among the more sophisticated approaches to the social and political framework of Jesus' ministry, see R. Horsley and J. Hanson, *Bandits, Prophets, and Messiahs. Popular Movements at the Time of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Winston, 1985); and R. Horsley, *Jesus and the Spiral of Violence. Popular Jewish Resistance in Roman Palestine* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987).

the canon. The nuanced, differentiated, many-tiered approach of Schillebeeckx is more faithful to the complexity of the biblical witness and the Catholic tradition. It is by embracing, celebrating, and appropriating that complexity that I hope that liberation theologians will make the whole Bible—and the whole Bible's witness to the whole Christ—a true source for their theology.

JOHN P. MEIER

*The Catholic University of America*