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# Jesus in Latin America

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## Jesus In Latin America

Jon Sobrino

Translated by Robert Barr et al

Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1987

The Christology of liberation has not developed without controversy. Jon Sobrino's seminal work *Christology at the Crossroads* (Orbis, 1978), generated much of that debate. Here, in *Jesus in Latin America*, Sobrino has gathered eight essays which reply to his critics, respond to charges of Christological reductionism and further the significance of liberation Christology for Christian doctrine and praxis.

With one exception the essays were previously published between 1978-1982. As with any such collection there is an unevenness of context and content among the essays chosen. They are grouped under three general parts: Basic Themes for Christology (3-77), Jesus, the Kingdom of God and the Life of the Poor (81-128), and Jesus and the Christian Life (131-165).

The first essay, "The Truth about Jesus Christ", is the most substantial in length (roughly one-third of the book) and content. In it Sobrino seeks to provide "a clarification of liberation Christology on the crucial point of whether it includes the whole of the 'truth about Jesus Christ' " (7). The author is careful in giving equal emphasis upon the divine transcendence and the human presence of Jesus. He contends that liberation Christology and its focus upon the "partisan pro-existence" of Jesus with the poor *universalizes* Jesus' divinity and humanity and thus Latin American liberation Christology is guilty neither of Christological reductionism nor horizontalism.

In a subsequent essay, "The Importance of the Historical Jesus", Sobrino argues that current Latin American Christological thought is not, as critics charged, a biased reflection upon the "idea" of Christ nor a mere "jesuology" (cf. esp. 73-77).

As conscientious as Sobrino is in seeking balance between liberation Christology and the more traditional Christology in which he trained (Hochschule Sankt Georgen, Frankfurt) there remains one significant difficulty with his methodology. Sobrino *begins* his Christology with the "christology of liberation" which must, he suggests, "be enriched by the formulation of the New Testament and the ecclesiastical magisterium" (8). If the New Testament witness only enriches and does not ground Christology, one wonders if the resultant thought is not in some measure a Christology *ex nihilo*.

Nevertheless there is much in these Christological reflections that is powerful, compelling and challenging. Sobrino is at his best when he writes from his conviction that Christology is most authentic when it proceeds from Christian discipleship, not philosophical speculation. Hence the final part of the book, "Jesus and the Christian Life" contains four brief essays

that powerfully reflect that Sobrino writes from the heart as eloquently as from the head.

A word must be said about the translation. The essays appeared previously in several journals and the translators/translations differ markedly in quality. Unfortunately the precision of Sobrino's thought in the first essay was made even more difficult to grasp by a translator given to coining new and awkward words such as "acceptation" and "essentialities". Other essays, particularly "The Epiphany of the God of Life", were more easily read.

"Who do you say that I am?" Jesus asked his disciples. That old, old question has been answered in many ways. *Jesus in Latin America* reveals how a significant Salvadoran theologian can answer that question today with eloquence, relevance and power.

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## Fragmented Gods: The Poverty and Potential of Religion in Canada

Reginald W. Bibby  
Toronto: Irwin Publishing, 1987  
xiii + 319 pp.

In my research on the French worker-priests I encountered a decisive historical book entitled *France, pays de mission?* in which two working-class chaplains concluded that France, the reputed "eldest daughter of the church", was instead a "territory for mission". The book scandalized many among the ecclesiastically comfortable, but its sociological data were unassailable. These two priests cared so much for their church that they dared to proclaim a painful truth, and it was that shock which helped the French church move out of its lethargy and embark on profound and creative missionary ventures in its own nation.

Reginald Bibby's classic *Fragmented Gods* is the Canadian equivalent of *France, pays de mission?* It is sociology with a purpose, a sociological analysis of religion in Canada prompted by the care and conviction of its author. To be sure, the book is not perfect, and this or that criticism may be warranted. After a while some of the rhetoric becomes repetitive and tedious. The use of commodity and marketing language is somewhat excessive and not always necessary. In his all too brief analysis of religion's potential, his description of historical religion's commitment to self-fulfillment is not spelled out in all its distinctiveness. However, all of these criticisms are