

THE OPTION FOR THE POOR IN CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY. Edited by Daniel G. Groody. Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame, 2007. Pp. x + 315. \$35.

Despite great attention given to the "preferential option for the poor" at all levels of the church since the Latin American bishops' conference at Puebla (1979), the notion has been misunderstood, parried, co-opted, or rejected in many quarters, including professional theological circles. Daniel Groody has thus rendered valuable service in gathering 15 essays that by turns explain, exhort, or explore. At stake is far more than Christians' commitment to charity or even social justice; Bernard Sesboüé rightly suggested over two decades ago that, with the option for the poor, liberation theologians have proposed a new *status confessionis*, a notion inseparable from the confession of faith in God (Gustavo Gutiérrez, *The Truth Shall Make You Free* [1985] 33). In the present volume, Brian Daley puts it succinctly: the poor pose "a challenge to faith in the transforming work of an incarnate, self-communicating God" (78). Thus we face a theological problem as well as one of practice.

Gustavo Gutiérrez's opening essay, "Memory and Prophecy," rewards careful, even meditative, reading. Of particular interest is his treatment of time. Here and elsewhere in the collection the authors offer helpful clarifications of the perennially contested meaning of the term "the poor." Many follow Gutiérrez in defining the poor as the "insignificant" or the "excluded" of the world. In Shawn Copeland's words, the poor are those who "have no options" (219). Other essays of a chiefly explanatory bent reflect on the option for the poor from various angles: Elsa Tamez (a biblical perspective), Hugh Page (Israel's early poetic tradition), Daley (the Cappadocian Fathers), Virgilio Elizondo (subjugated cultures), Patrick Kalilombe (small Christian communities in Africa), Casiano Floristán (the eucharistic assembly), Luis Maldonado (popular Catholicism), and Michael Signer (Judaism). Several essays assume a fundamentally exhortative stance as they examine the option in relation to feminism and globalization (María Pilar Aquino and Mary Catherine Hilkert) and to Christian praxis and theology (Copeland).

Highlights include several essays that demonstrate the *theological* (not simply pastoral) fertility and challenge of the option for the poor. In his customarily hard-hitting manner, Jon Sobrino considers the summons issued by Latin America's martyrs of the past 40 years to a church presently living through an "ecclesial winter" (92). With no less passion and insight, Aloysius Pieris argues that only solidarity with the poor will allow Christianity to recover its authentic Christian identity, lost shortly after the birth of the Christian community. Absent such solidarity, the imperial church that served "the empire of Mammon" through many centuries of colonization will continue to do the same today in the face of globalization (273).

For his part, David Tracy explores the “kind of Christology needed for a theological defense of the option for the poor” (120). With his usual creative intelligence and humility Tracy examines both the mystical-prophetic and apocalyptic paradigms and proposes that theologians pay greater attention to a fourth christological symbol (in addition to Incarnation, Cross, and Resurrection), namely, the Second Coming. God’s promise, after all, has not yet been fulfilled. Matthew Ashley then takes up Tracy’s challenge with his “turn to apocalyptic.” If incarnation, cross, and resurrection are allowed to modulate the symbol of the Second Coming, Christians may tap into the hope engendered by apocalypticism while avoiding the dangers of denigrating creation, demonizing the other, and ending in despair. (The reverse, it must be said, is less clear, namely, how the symbol of the Second Coming substantially modifies the other three.)

In the face of doubts about the continued fecundity of liberation theology, this volume demonstrates that its pioneers and their interlocutors around the world remain as creative and provocative as ever. Groody alludes to the presence of younger scholars at the 2002 Notre Dame conference where many of these essays were first presented. This collection, however, contains none of their reflections, an unfortunate gap waiting to be filled.

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