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Liberation through Reconciliation: Jon Sobrino's Christological Spirituality.

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Jon Sobrino remains one of the most influential and fruitful Latin American liberation theologians of the past forty years, and few interpreters have engaged him as richly and perceptively as Ernesto Valiente in *Liberation through Reconciliation*. Valiente's book manages to work successfully on two different levels: 1) as an important contribution to scholarly work on reconciliation and Sobrino; 2) as an excellent introduction to the work of Sobrino and, through Sobrino, to Latin American liberation theology more generally. For example, chapter three provides an account of the importance of theological method within liberation theology and the particular contours of Sobrino's theological approach. For those who are experts in the thought of Sobrino, most of this chapter will be quite familiar, though Valiente's emphasis on compassion and spirituality within Sobrino's theological method is a helpful scholarly contribution; for students or scholars with less familiarity, this chapter provides a wonderful introduction to liberation theology through the lens of Sobrino's thought.

The central argument of Valiente's book is that "liberation theology in general and Sobrino's work in particular offer the basis for a Christian spirituality and theology of reconciliation that effectively overcomes conflict by attending to the demands of truth, justice, and forgiveness" (5). Starting with an analysis of "reconciliation" in chapter one, the text demonstrates the deep biblical roots of the theme and engages contemporary theological and non-theological approaches while presenting a liberationist approach to reconciliation. Chapter two contextualizes Sobrino's thought in terms of the history of El Salvador and the figures that had the greatest influence on his work—Oscar Romero and Ignacio Ellacuría primarily, but also others such as Karl Rahner. Chapters three and four provide examinations of Sobrino's vision of theological methodology—particularly in terms of spirituality—and Christology. The fifth and final chapter then builds upon the foundations of Sobrino's Christological spirituality in order to present a Christian liberationist account of reconciliation which is grounded in core Christian commitments, responsive to the contemporary situation in Latin America, and avoids simplistic applications of theological ideas to complex historical situations.

There is much to commend in *Liberation through Reconciliation*. Valiente skillfully explores Sobrino's methodology, theological anthropology, Christology, martyrology, theology of sin, theology of the kingdom, and much else throughout the book. Of the many points that could be highlighted, three stand out in my mind. First, Valiente demonstrates the theological depth to Sobrino's

work and, accordingly, to a Christian spirituality of reconciliation. Part of this is a trust in the power of Christian revelation to guide the work of reconciliation (4, 182). But more foundational is the adoption of a theo-centric vision of history and reconciliation thought the book; similar to the work of Gustavo Gutiérrez, divine gratuity and grace are at the heart of Valiente's vision (see 17, 46, 77, 127, 149, 175 for particularly instructive examples). And divine gratuity is seen as an essential foundation for authentic liberation that is ultimately reconciliation. For example, God's gratuitous option for the poor and marginalized within God's universal gratuitous love demands that Christians adopt a "praxis of reconciliation, which first attends to the needs of suffering victims but never excludes or gives up on the oppressor" (30; cf. 177). Furthermore, Valiente offers a vision of the world as "both riddled with negativity and pregnant with promise" (152). The presence of the latter—God's gracious presence within a history marred by conflict—is affirmed and developed splendidly throughout the volume.

Second, Valiente convincingly establishes the centrality of "honesty towards reality" and "compassion" within Sobrino's spirituality and theology. These two virtues mark Jesus's own way of being (128–29) and accordingly must guide the appropriation of Jesus's life, death, and resurrection in our own context. For theologians—though it would apply analogously to others—this means approaching theology as *intellectus amoris* (the understanding of love), seeking "first to understand God's love and how we respond to that love. Particularly in a world characterized by conflict and massive suffering, compassionate love becomes the honest and primary reaction required of the theologian as a human being, believer, and theologian, and this compassion ought to inform and direct his theological task" (110; cf. 115–16, 164, 179).

My third point builds directly on the first two. At the heart of Valiente's vision of the demands for authentic reconciliation is the triad of truth, justice, and forgiveness (5, 32, 181–90). These three are essential to "a ministry of reconciliation aimed at the eradication of structural sin, the corresponding humanization of its victims, and the rehabilitation of the oppressor" (5). Truth is the first step towards reconciliation (37)—this is the "honesty towards reality" above. Valiente warns against false visions of reconciliation which seek to cover-up oppression and simply affirm the status quo in favor of the powerful (11, 25). Even if simple lines between victims and victimizers can be hard to draw (21), Valiente affirms Sobrino's account of history as marked by grace, but also by "the *mysterium iniquitatis* [the mystery of evil] with its idols, mediations, and mediators," by the presence of sin that alienates us from God, from one another, and that creates victims (158). Given this presence of sin, truth necessarily demands justice, but, given the goal of ultimate reconciliation, the

pursuit of justice must be done with a spirit of gratuity and willingness of forgive (168). There is a difficult balance to maintain here. Any call for forgiveness must clearly name injustice and seek the removal of the causes of that injustice (47); from the other side, seeking justice means naming oppressors, but one must maintain a love that seeks repentance and is open to forgiveness. This is a particularly challenging spirituality of reconciliation. One must side with and hope for the victims of history, but one must also hope for the oppressors (177). In this way one imitates God who confronts oppressors with the truth of their actions but also with the liberating offer of forgiveness. Drawing together his theocentric vision of reconciliation, Valiente writes, "Along with God's truth, the two converging modalities of God's compassion—justice and forgiveness—correspond to the two primary and complementary ways in which God reconciles the world. These two modalities of God's salvific activity also shed light on how a radically relational God stands simultaneously in continuity and discontinuity with a conflicted reality that calls for a liberating transformation" (190). The follower of Jesus, then, seeking the honest truth of reality and driven by compassion, must seek to build—even inchoately—the kingdom of God which is the liberating transformation of reality by means of justice and forgiveness.

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