

"POLITICAL THEOLOGY AND CATHOLICISM"

by John Pawlikowski

(Note: This is from a chapter in his study on Christology in light of the Christian-Jewish dialogue.)

Besides the European systematicians, the other group of theologians exercising an increasingly significant influence on the shape of contemporary Christology ^{ARE} the Latin American liberation theologians. While all of them have their own particular way of addressing the Christological question, they are united in several concerns, among them the need to make praxis the basis of theological construction, the significance of history for establishing authentic religious meaning in our time and the importance of the communal dimension of Christian living.

Few of the liberation theologians have grappled in any profound fashion with the Jewish question respective to Christology. This is certainly a crying weakness in their thought. Yet, because of their growing role in the Christian churches and the fact that some of them have made themes like the Exodus event central to their systematic theology, it is necessary for us to take a brief look at representative samples of their work. We shall focus on four current theologians in this group: Gustavo Gutierrez and Jose Miguez Bonino, two of the early liberation theologians in terms of international recognition and

Jon Sobrino and Leonardo Boff whose works are only beginning to have an impact outside of their own continent.

We begin with Gustavo Gutierrez whose *A THEOLOGY OF LIBERATION*³⁶ more than any other single work catapulted the Latin American perspective onto the worldwide theological scene. His specific treatment of Judaism occurs in the discussion of two questions central to his theology: (1) the significance of the Exodus event for human salvation and political liberation; and (2) Jesus' relationship to the revolutionary political movements of his day. In both areas Gutierrez shows some sophistication relative to the realities of Judaism, especially if compared to classic Christian theological portrayals. Nonetheless, there still remains a serious lack of acquaintance with aspects of Second Temple Judaism, in particular, which results in a continuing theological distortion of Judaism.

For Gutierrez, any authentic theology of liberation must link itself to the experience of Israel's emancipation from slavery in Egypt as described and interpreted in the Hebrew Scriptures. As he views it, Israel's liberation from Egypt is an integral part of God's creative activity. The Exodus Event is as fundamental and central to the salvific plan for humanity as the very divine act through which the world and its inhabitants came into existence. Gutierrez terms the liberation of the people Israel a political act which allowed them to break out of a situation in which exploitation and misery prevailed and gave them the opportunity to construct a just and fraternal social order. The Exodus Event suppressed the existing disorder and helped in the creation of a new order.

Yahweh helped prick the consciousness of Moses, enabling him to comprehend his vocation as the liberator of the Jewish people. Perceiving his call, Moses worked long and hard to bring Israel out of bondage. The process would take time for, as Gutierrez puts it,

A gradual pedagogy of successes and failures would be necessary for the Jewish people to become aware of the roots in their oppression, to struggle against it, and to perceive the profound sense of the liberation to which they were called. The Creator of the world is the Creator and Liberator of Israel, to whom he entrusts the mission of establishing justice... 37

The Exodus thus represents for Gutierrez a fact of history and a fact of salvation which fundamentally shaped the faith of the Jewish people. Through this act of political liberation Yahweh demonstrated his profound love for his people who in turn received the gift of total liberation.

Gutierrez also ties the Exodus directly to Israel's covenantal tradition. For him, the covenant and the liberation from Egypt constitute different dimensions of the same basic movement, a movement whose end result was a profound encounter with the creator-God. The Exodus event inaugurated Israel's salvific history made possible through the covenant. The meaning of this creative act of liberation, on the part of Yahweh, will be remembered throughout the history of Israel, a history in which the Jewish people experience continual recreation. The God who transformed the primitive chaos into the beautiful world of the cosmos is the very same God who delivers Israel from a situation of alienation to one marked by liberation.

It is against the background of the Exodus experience that Gutierrez begins to develop his Christology. He ties the work of

Christ directly to the movement of salvation/liberation that the Exodus launched. In fact, he claims that the redemptive activity of Christ brings the liberating process to its complete fulfillment. The activity of Christ constitutes a new creation. This creative activity is again linked to a liberation which, in Gutierrez's words,

fulfills in an unexpected way the promises of the prophets and creates a new chosen people, which this time includes all humanity. Creation and salvation therefore, have in the first place, a Christological sense: all things have been created in Christ, all things have been saved in him.³⁸

Because of the connection he establishes between the Exodus Event and the Christ Event, Gutierrez also interprets the Christian Eucharist in terms of the Jewish Passover tradition. He stresses the thorough Jewish background of the Eucharist as the meal which reveals the full meaning of the Jewish Passover tradition. The Eucharistic rite in its essential elements has a communitarian dimension. It is meant to develop a human brotherhood just as the Exodus experience and its continued remembrance in the Passover forged the Jews into a peoplehood.

In connection with his treatment of the Exodus experience, Gutierrez raises the question of the eschatological promises made by God throughout the course of human history. The first of these was the covenant which, as we have seen, he has already intimately linked with the Exodus liberation. Falling into very traditional Christian language regarding Judaism, Gutierrez says that since the

infidelities of the Jewish people made the Old Covenant invalid, the Promise was incarnated both in the proclamation of a New Covenant, which was awaited and sustained by the "remnant," as well as in the promises which prepared and accompanied its advent. The promise enters upon 'the last days' with the proclamation in the New Testament of the gift of the Kingdom of God.³⁹

Yet, in spite of his rather traditional approach to the question of fulfillment, there is a potential saving feature in Gutierrez's position. The ultimate ^{FUTURE} ~~promise~~ salvation, the Promise as he calls it, is announced but only partially fulfilled even in the Christ Event. There continues to exist what Gutierrez terms a dialectical relationship between the final Promise and its partial fulfillment. The resurrection has not totally completed the work of Christ. In some ways the resurrected Christ remains "future to himself." With the Incarnation, the self-communication of God with his people entered a decisive stage. But the fullness of that communication still lies ahead. For Gutierrez it is clear that the New Testament story is the realization of the Promise only incipiently, and the human community, through its self-generation within the historical process, continues to play a vital and direct part in the ultimate realization of this Promise.

This understanding of the still "unfulfilled" nature of the Promise leads Gutierrez into arguing for what he calls the "uncentering" of the church. For him, this means that "the Church must cease considering itself as the exclusive place of salvation and orient itself towards a new and radical service of people."⁴⁰ Too often, he feels that to be for or against Christ too easily becomes identified with a person's allegiance to the church. Christians lose their ability to discover fragments of the truth beyond the frontiers of the church. While Gutierrez, without doubt, emphasizes the universal dimensions in the Christ Event, his hesitation on the "fulfillment" question and his recognition of the presence of authentic religious

meaning outside the boundaries of the Christian church, seem to open up the possibility for some continuing post-Easter role for Judaism, along with other non-Christian religions despite his regrettable regression, on occasion, into classic Christian stereotypes of Judaism's role. But Gutierrez has unfortunately not developed this perspective in any explicit way relative to Judaism.

The second place where the discussion of Judaism enters rather significantly into Gutierrez's thought, is his treatment of Jesus' revolutionary outlook. He takes the position that Jesus was not a political revolutionary in the Zealot sense. The outlook of the Zealots was too restrictive^{ED.} It looked down upon such groups as the Samaritans and the pagans while Jesus' message was addressed to all men and women whatever their station in life. The justice he preached knew no natural boundaries. Jesus also taught a much more spiritual approach to the law while the Zealots were fierce defenders of its literal observance.

Yet Gutierrez insists that the question of Jesus and concrete political activity cannot stop with a denial of his Zealot associations. There is little doubt that Jesus confronted head-on the groups in power within the Judaism of the period. This included, according to Gutierrez, the publicans, the Sadducees, and the Pharisees. With respect to the last of these groups, the Pharisees, Jesus shared with them a distaste for the oppressive domination represented by the Roman imperial authority. But he could not go along with the complex world of religious precepts and norms of behavior they had constructed in

order to live on the margins of that domination in a spirit of co-existence. Jesus, says Gutierrez, lashed out against the very foundations of the Pharisaic machinations regarding the law. In unmasking the falsity of their stance he assumed the role of a dangerous traitor in their eyes. Gutierrez, however, does not fall into the traditional Christian assertion that the Jews were responsible for the death of Christ, even though he understands Jesus as fundamentally in opposition to all the major Jewish groups of his time.

Further discussing the relationship between the Zealot revolutionaries and Jesus, Gutierrez insists that the latter were not off-base in feeling that they stood in a paradoxical situation relative to Jesus.

They sensed he, too, stood for the liberation of the Jewish people. But, they also recognized that he spoke of a revolution more universal and permanent than they were prepared to acknowledge. Gutierrez understands Jesus' liberation of the Jewish people as only one facet of a much wider revolutionary struggle. It would be totally inaccurate in his view to claim that Jesus showed no interest in Israel's liberation. On the contrary, he exhibited keen interest in it while, at the same time, placing it "on a deeper level with far reaching consequences."⁴¹

The leaders of the other Jewish groups in Jesus' day and the Roman authorities who were responsible for his execution were likewise not mistaken in thinking that Jesus posed a threat to their hegemony. They were mistaken, as are their followers today in Gutierrez's eyes, only in the belief that the impact of Jesus' teaching and ministry would quickly fade after his death. They failed to understand the

true source of the gospel's political dimensions, the nucleus of its transforming power. If the message of Jesus has a subversive quality, says Gutierrez, it is due to its appropriation of Israel's life. The Gospel provided that life of Israel with its deepest meaning. The life and preaching of Jesus posit the unending search for a new kind of human person who will live in a qualitatively different social milieu in which justice predominates and the possibility of communion with God is opened up to all people.

With respect to the question of Christology and Judaism, the position of Gustavo Gutierrez can only be assessed as a mixed blessing. It is encouraging to find some of the classic stereotypes of Judaism, such as those connected with responsibility for the death of Jesus, missing from his work. His attempt to link the Exodus and the Christ Event has definite possibilities for further development. And his emphasis on history as the unfulfilled side of the Promise will find a genuine resonance with the ongoing Jewish religious tradition. While he has far from an adequate understanding of the Torah tradition in Judaism, he at least avoids framing his understanding of the liberation to be found in the Christ Event around the notion of freedom from Jewish legalism in the way that Pannenberg, Moltmann and Kung do. Yet, enough of the traditional outlook in the church regarding the invalidity of Judaism after Christ has crept in the THEOLOGY OF LIBERATION to merit severe criticism of Gutierrez on this score. He has not really grappled seriously enough with the ongoing meaning of Jewish religious existence for Christological interpretation. He has, likewise, failed

to apply his principle about the fragments of truth to be found outside the church to the situation of post-Easter Judaism. He lacks any in-depth knowledge of the Pharisaic movement, a condition that leads him to depict this group and their relationship to Jesus in the usual derogatory manner, a depiction incidentally condemned by the 1975 Vatican Guidelines for Catholic-Jewish relations.

As a summary judgment, I would have to say that despite its severe limitations, Gutierrez's position has the possibility of being transformed into a Christology that could allow authentic theological space for Judaism. Admittedly, this would not be easy and would require some wholesale changes that Gutierrez himself might very well feel would constitute an abandonment of his basic thesis. Though he does not show the same concrete sensitivity to Judaism that Schillebeeckx does, Gutierrez's work approaches the same useableness as Schillebeeckx's for the construction of a contemporary Christology that would not invalidate Judaism. It appears that unlike many of the continental theologies we have considered, the stereotypes of Judaism that remain in Gutierrez's writings are not pivotal for his Christology. That is, they could be dropped without asking Gutierrez to totally alter his explanation of the meaning of the Christ Event in terms of liberation. Thus, in the world of contemporary Christologies, Gutierrez's provides us with at least a ray of hope for dealing with the Jewish question in a constructive fashion. It may not appear so at first glance, since some of the classic stereotypes leap out at the reader. But a more sober analysis will show that the identification of the Exodus Event, with the Christ

Event as fundamental moments in the liberation process leading to the single Promise, opens some new doors for constructive theology. The real question that remains unanswered with Gutierrez, and it is without doubt a crucial question, is whether the Exodus Event remains a liberating event for Jews in the post-Easter period in light of their unwillingness to accept the Christ Event as liberating. Gutierrez's sympathetic use of Jewish authors relative to the explanation of the Passover's meaning might hint that he would answer the question affirmatively. But clarification of this issue constitutes one of the first steps that would be needed in order to depict Gutierrez's Christology as truly groundbreaking in terms of the Christian-Jewish relationship, a Christology that could authentically serve as the foundation for further development.

In any reading of Gutierrez's Christology, it will also be necessary to take into account the comments of a Jewish commentator on liberation theology such as Rabbi Leon Klenicki. He feels that from a Jewish perspective, Gutierrez's understanding of Exodus is too one-sided. He writes that

Judaism recognizes that it (i.e. Exodus) was a movement of liberation, but sustains that the liberation from Egyptian bondage became meaningful only when Israel received the Law at Mount Sinai and the Promised Land. The process that starts with Moses taking out an enslaved community culminated with the spiritual liberation of Israel at Mount Sinai, and the possession of Eretz Israel. ⁴²

Klenicki adds that Gutierrez's volume leaves the reader with the distinct impression that the Jewish people disappeared after the destruction of the Temple. There is much truth in this statement. It is an impression that Gutierrez desperately needs to confront in future writings.

Jose Miguez Bonino's writings have never reached the comprehensiveness found in Gutierrez. In fact, he does not offer us a Christology per se. But as the principal Protestant exponent of the Latin American theology of liberation his views, even if not highly developed, bear scrutiny.

In his volume REVOLUTIONARY THEOLOGY COMES OF AGE⁴³ he gives some sketch of his approach to liberation theology. It centers around what he calls messianic humanism, a term meant to contrast with humanist messianism where the exclusive emphasis in politics falls on the activity of the human community. In Bonino's version of liberation theology there is as politics of God as well as human politics. It was first manifested in the Exodus Event in which the Scriptures make it clear that Israel conceived of its emancipation from Egypt as due to the activity of God and not merely its own effort. God's power broke through a "closed future" for the Jewish people brought on by Egypt's oppressive power which led to a "slave consciousness" among the Chosen People. This future was suddenly opened by the action of God who showed himself free from the determinism of history.

Much in the same manner as Gutierrez, Bonino establishes a link between the liberating action unlocked in the Exodus Event and the freedom offered by the Christ Event. He writes that

Christian hope, far from taking the place of political action, invites and demands that action in the present, in favor of the oppressed, in the light and direction of the promised future. This is the language of the Gospel. The community which enters this action, requires this consciousness, and uses this language is God's People, in continuity with the experience of Israel and the New Testament--whether they stay within or more outside the visible ecclesiastical institutions. For an engagement with man's liberation and a pressing for God's future are the true marks of the church.⁴⁴

Insofar as Bonino's outlook parallels that of Gutierrez, it merits the same positive and negative assessment applied to the latter. But since his thought is nowhere near as developed, all judgments must remain somewhat tentative.

Speaking about the nature of the church towards the end of REVOLUTIONARY THEOLOGY COMES OF AGE Bonino introduces some ideas which appear to bear upon the Christian-Jewish relationship. He feels that in constructing a theology of liberation it might prove beneficial for theologians to pick up on the distinction between the "covenant of creation" and the "covenant of redemption" found in the Reformed tradition of Protestantism. As Bonino would interpret this tradition, humankind finds itself situated in a realm of responsibility which embraces a threefold free relationship. This relationship includes the human family, the world of nature and Yahweh, the God of the covenant. "The Christian dispensation," says Bonino,

will then be understood in relation to such a covenant, as God's active will to restore man's relationships and responsibility, to reinstate him in his position as partner in the covenant of creation, to put him back again on the road of his self-realization.⁴⁵

The distinct advantage that Bonino sees in the above approach is that it makes room for the soteriological without downgrading the creational dimension of Christianity. Christ becomes something more than a mere step in the progressive evolution of history. Bonino insists that any authentic Christology that stresses the soteriological function of Jesus' coming must be carefully placed within the dynamic perspective so characteristic of the Hebrew Scriptures. If the world of creation,

both human and sub-human, come to be viewed as static, unchangeable realities, then the Christian myth of salvation of necessity takes on a purely restorational significance (the two-story view) or becomes wedded to a supra-historical realm (the two kingdoms notions) that reduces the world to the status of a salvific roadblock. But Bonino insists that if the church would

take seriously the dynamic dimension inherent in the covenant-prophetic theology, the picture is altogether different. Creation is the installation of a movement; it is an invitation and a command to man to create his own history and culture, creatively to transform the world and make it into his own house and to explore the configuration of human relationships available to him.⁴⁶

Jesus' role in the Christological sketch offered by Bonino is not to superimpose a different, transcendent, or heavenly reality upon nature and history. Rather, he reopens for the human community the will and the power to fulfill its vocational destiny. Bonino admits that such a vocational outlook involves granting the Christian dispensation a certain provisionality and temporariness:

Jesus' freedom before God, his love for men, his power over nature are not an end in themselves, nor a merely substitutionary activity on our behalf but a truly representational function, in order that and until we ourselves may assume such relationships.⁴⁷

Faith in Christ for Bonino does not mean taking a step beyond humanity but rather towards its full realization. People are Christian in order to be truly human, not vice-versa. In the order of salvation, the institutional church bears a distinctive but clearly provisional and subordinate role. The church gives authentic witness to the saving activity of God in Jesus Christ when it makes clear the renewed authorization, command and liberation given to men and women to become

truly human, to shape their own history and culture, to live and to transform the world, to claim and to exercise the glorious freedom of the children of God. The distinctiveness to be found in the church lies in its contention that the fullness of humanity is present in the explicit, faithful, and grateful acknowledgement of Jesus Christ.

As a result of this perspective, Bonino says that the response of Christians to those outside the institutional church who give examples of selflessness, generosity and faithfulness in the historical process must be humility and praise. In a sense all of us still live in pre-history. While the church has the responsibility of proclaiming what the period after pre-history will look like, this proclamation is in one sense secondary to the actual doing of salvific liberation. Proclamation without performance becomes not only useless but vain in the extreme. Therefore, the non-Christian who embraces the same liberating historical praxis that is central to any genuine interpretation of the Christ Event, is on equal footing with Christians even though he/she might not be able to proclaim the ultimate shape of the kingdom in the same way as believers.

From the standpoint of the Christian-Jewish dialogue, there are several questions one would like to pose to Bonino. What, for example, is the force of the term "renewed" when applied to the liberating effect of the Christ Event? Does it, or does it not, imply that the power originally given in the Exodus covenant has grown cold? Or does Bonino mean to imply that it represents a new burst of power without maintaining the end or death of the liberating power inherent in Exodus. On this issue, Bonino is less clear than Gutierrez who more directly

ties himself to the traditional Christian stereotype that Second Temple Judaism had lost the liberating spirit of the earlier covenantal/^A prophetic tradition. Only in one place does he even seem to hint at this old stereotype, in the quotation cited above in which he speaks of the Christian dispensation in terms of "God's active will to restore man's relationships and responsibility." The frequent use of the term "renew" relative to the Christ Event may be highly significant. For "renew" need not imply the end of the covenantal tradition of Judaism. In fact, it would be quite in keeping with the Jewish vision. The fact that Bonino nowhere describes the meaning of Christ in terms of opposition to the Torah is another significant achievement, especially from a person representing the Protestant tradition where this motif has been so central. There are definite similarities between Bonino's Christological sketch and the position developed by E.P. Sanders described in the previous chapter. Bonino's stress on pre-history, on the role of those outside the church in the salvation process, and on the covenantal responsibility for creation would also make his thought more amenable to the ethos of Judaism than most classical Protestant Christologies.

Yet the fact that Bonino never explicitly relates the significance of Jesus to the Jewish tradition is a definite drawback. Several of his statements, read by a person with traditional stereotypes regarding Judaism, would likely reinforce many of those stereotypes. It may be that such a person would in fact be misrepresenting Bonino's thought. But only a direct discussion of the question by Bonino would allow us to know for certain where he would situate post-Easter Judaism in his

conception of the role of non-believers in the salvific process.

Turning to a third representative of the liberation theology school, we encounter the writings of Jon Sobrino, S.J. His volume, CHRISTOLOGY AT THE CROSSROADS⁴⁸ has brought him to the attention of people outside of the Latin American continent where his earlier writings have been known for some time. Reading through his extended discussion of Christology from the perspective of the Christian-Jewish dialogue leaves one in a state of total discomfort. It is as though nothing has happened in the Christian theology of Judaism since the II Vatican Council. Sobrino almost builds his entire understanding of the freedom and liberation inherent in the Christ Event on its contrast with the degraded form of Judaism present in Jesus' day. No better example could be found of Dr. Charlotte Klein's thesis about the anti-Judaism so prevalent in Christian theology. It is truly amazing that a Christology so unaware of developments during the Second Temple period in Judaism and their influence on setting the context for early Christianity could still be produced in our day. Without doubt, from the standpoint of an appreciation of Judaism, Sobrino's Christology is one of the worst contemporary examples.

Over and over again throughout the volume Sobrino's remarks depict Judaism in Jesus' day as totally inadequate. And nowhere does he attempt to relate the saving experience of the Christ Event in a positive fashion to the saving experience of Exodus as Gutierrez and Bonino try to do. Typical of his outlook are the following comments. He insists that the poor "must believe that God is infinitely greater than the God

preached by priests and rabbis."⁴⁹ Those with whom Jesus debated, says Sobrino, had all imagined "that they had God neatly boxed in their tradition."⁵⁰

While Sobrino does claim that Jesus was a religious reformer who preached the best traditions of Israel, the clear implication is given that Jesus' teachings alone represented this tradition in his own time. Sobrino claims that the exile experience of Israel gave rise to the idea that the faith it had known thus far was without value. He writes:

This series of negative experiences, pondered in the light of Israel's faith in Yahweh, gave rise to the conviction that it could not be the last word about Israel. There had to be some other possibility because it certainly was not the ultimate that Yahweh could do. There arose the eschatological hope of a complete change in Israel's situation. The Hebrew People began to look forward to some authentic liberation and to a Messiah who would fulfill their hopes.⁵¹

This interpretation of Israel's exilic experience is never put into the positive context of the Exodus covenant. What Sobrino seems to be saying is that this whole covenantal tradition can only be assessed as negative by the Christian believer. The Christ Event really destroyed any value or purpose it might have had previously.

Sobrino accepts without qualification the various anathemas that Jesus hurls against "the Pharisees" in the gospels. He shows absolutely no awareness of the new scholarship in this regard. This is really difficult to understand in light of his call for beginning Christianity with the historical Jesus. His "historical Jesus" unfortunately must be judged very unhistorical in light of the new scholarship at hand regarding the Pharisees.

Throughout the volume the Pharisees are viewed as the prototypes

of the legalistic tradition. They are committed to the strict fulfillment of the law to which Jesus' message of grace and the in-breaking of the kingdom is totally opposed. Sobrino shows no appreciation whatsoever of the Torah tradition in Jesus' day and the opening up of this tradition which the Pharisaic revolution represented. We shall look at this Pharisaic revolution in greater detail in chapter four.

Sobrino contrasts the teaching of Jesus and his disciples with that of Jewish orthodoxy which must of necessity be called into question. Authentic discipleship in his perspective is the very antithesis of what Second Temple Judaism represented. While perhaps not quite as explicit on the matter as Pannenberg, Sobrino's freedom Christology bears some of the same scars. The freedom Jesus provides in the knowledge of God and in action for justice stands in direct opposition to Torah. This, the meaning of the Christ Event, is predicated on the abolition of the religious system that the Law represented.

In a chapter devoted to the prayer of Jesus Sobrino further reveals the deep anti-Judaism inherent in his theology. While acknowledging that Jesus knew and used the traditional prayers of his own people, he centers his whole discussion of the theme around the parable of the Pharisees and the publican in the version found in the gospel of Luke. The gospel story of one Pharisee is extended by Sobrino to exemplify the prayer of all Pharisees and by implications the prayer of all Jews of the period.

And in the discussion of the prayer of Jesus, Sobrino never mentions Jesus' best known prayer--the Our Father. This prayer is profoundly

Jewish in its content and would counter the stereotype of Jewish prayer Sobrino builds out of the parable of the praying Pharisee and the publican. Sobrino's neglect of it is rather mystifying. Its emphasis on the transcendence of God and its petition that God's kingdom come on earth would seem to be in perfect harmony with the liberationist perspective. "What prayer," asks Dr. Clark Williamson of the Christian Theological Seminary in commenting on Sobrino, "could be more authentic from the criterion of liberating praxis? Yet what prayer is more Jewish? Perhaps that is the problem--it doesn't fit Sobrino's anti-Jewish gestalt."⁵²

Another disturbing aspect of Sobrino's Christology is his handling of the death of Jesus. He seems to come very close to the traditional accusation that the Jews were responsible for the death of Jesus, a view which the II Vatican Council and many national and international Protestant documents have clearly repudiated. His seventh thesis on the death of Jesus maintains that Jesus was condemned to death for blasphemy. Though Sobrino admits the imperial authorities were directly responsible for his actual execution, the real reason for his death was his opposition to all the Jewish leadership of the period. Sobrino uncritically accepts Mark's account as straightforward history. At the bottom of Jesus' ongoing conflict with the Jewish religious authorities that brought him the death sentence was "his particular conception of God... In the last analysis Jesus is hostile to the religious leaders of his day and is eventually condemned because of his conception of God."⁵³

The Pharisees, whom Sobrino on many occasions erroneously equates with the Jewish authorities, have a notion of God that is too confined to the Temple. The God of Jesus is distinct from, and greater than the God of the Pharisees. "In Jesus' eyes," he says, "the privileged locale of access to God is people themselves." Sobrino is unaware that the emphasis on the indwelling of God in people, in fact, constituted one of the principal themes of the Pharisaic revolution. It only goes to show how ignorance of Second Temple Judaism on the part of Christian theologians can falsely set Christianity against Judaism in areas where they in reality share a genuine commonality.

All in all, the usefulness of Sobrino's Christology for the dialogue will be minimal. While his thought shares some of the positive features of liberation theology vis-a-vis the dialogue such as the incompleteness of history, the working out of the salvific process within history, and the constructive role of those outside the institutional church in this process, he has so developed his understanding of Christian liberation in opposition to the Judaism of Jesus' day that only a fundamental reworking could alter this evaluation. His thought must be placed in the same camp as that of Pannenberg's: totally unacceptable in its present form because the positive meaning of each Christology is inextricably tied to the devaluation of Judaism. Despite the soundness of some of their major theses, both need to remold their Christology on the basis of a much more thorough and real understanding of the Judaism of Jesus' day and how he related to it.

While Sobrino's emphasis on Jesus' Abba experience and some of his other points relative to the meaning of Jesus' message about God

could well prove useful for contemporary Christological construction, they remain problematical so long as they remain mired in his theological anti-Judaism. Dr. Willianson's concluding remarks about Sobrino summarize the situation very well:

...Sobrino's whole project of a Christology for liberation theology is jeopardized critically by his way of approaching the historical Jesus. A liberation Christology ^{THAT} cuts itself off from the liberating event of the Bible, the Exodus of a people from oppression, from real slavery to real freedom is self-defeating. ~~A liberation Christology not based on Easter rather than the life of Jesus fails to note what Easter and the Exodus have in common.~~ ...What was proclaimed in the days of Moses has been also said to us Gentiles: namely, that evil, oppression, torture and death are real, all too real, but that they are not the last reality. The last reality is always God's new beginning, God's new initiative, the freedom, life, liberation, and righteousness that come from the gentle workings of a good not our own, a good redemptive of all people; even of those who resist God's new beginnings. Christianity will become a force for liberation when it rediscovers the connection between Easter and Exodus.⁵⁴

The most recent major Christology work from the Latin American perspective to appear on the international scene is Leonardo Boff's JESUS CHRIST LIBERATOR.⁵⁵ Boff's approach parallels that of Sobrino's in many respects relative to the Jewish question. While he acknowledges some positive aspects in the tradition of the Hebrew Scriptures which he says brought God into history, and he admires the eternal optimism of the Jewish apocalyptic vision, his interpretation of Jesus' liberating spirit rests almost entirely on a rejection of the Judaism of Jesus' day. Like Sobrino, he totally ignores the liberating dimensions of the Exodus covenantal tradition. Christ's preaching differed entirely from the messianic expectations common to Judaism. Christ never fed the nationalism of the Jews nor did he strike out in rebellion against the Roman

authorities. He likewise never alluded to the restoration of the Davidic king.

Boff plays down the historical discussions about the various titles attributed to Jesus (i.e., Son of God, Son of Man, Lord, etc.). They are not important in themselves. They all point in an incomplete way to a deeper and more pervasive reality--the liberation of the human community experience through the preaching and ministry of Jesus. This ministry and preaching postulated a new image of God and a new approach to God. Here Boff is on the same path as Sobrino. "God is no longer the old God of the Torah," he insists, but rather "a God of infinite Goodness, even to the ungrateful and the wicked. He draws near in grace; going far beyond anything prescribed or ordained by the law."⁵⁶

For Boff, God is to be viewed primarily in terms of the future, in terms of the kingdom that is being established. This kingdom will mark a complete liberation from the evil mechanisms of past history and provide a fullness of life without parallel. Liberative praxis, rather than cultic worship, prayers and strict religious observance constitute the surest path to the God revealed in Jesus Christ. This Christology for Boff is in many ways primarily a statement about the nature of God and his relationship to the human community. Motivated by the new vision of God, Jesus broke down all previous barriers among people. He spoke in behalf of a new solidarity above and beyond class differences. As Boff sees it, Jesus altered the center of gravity regarding the criteria for salvation. He subjected the Torah and the dogmatism of the Old Testament to the criterion of love, thus "liberating human practice from necrophilic structures."⁵⁷

Boff repeats Sobrino's contention that Jesus was condemned as a blasphemer, for he presented a God who was different from the God of the status quo. Though executed by the imperial authorities as a guerilla fighter, his real crime was his opposition to the entrenched religious leadership of the time. In imitation of Sobrino, Boff seems to equate the leadership fundamentally with the Pharisees though he does not spend as much time denouncing them as the former.

Boff stresses that the Christological vision inherent in the New Testament provides us with an understanding of what is meant by the full humanization of people. While he does not highlight Jesus' Abba experience quite as much as Sobrino, his thesis about the ultimate implications of the Christ Event is much the same. He also joins Sobrino in maintaining that all religions have salvific elements, with the implication that Christic structures are not the exclusive preserve of the institutional church. If anything, he comes out more strongly and decisively on this matter than Sobrino.

There is not much by way of evaluation of Boff's Christology that has not been said with regard to Sobrino. Perhaps the tone of Boff's work overall is a little less severe towards the supposed shallowness of the Judaism of Jesus' day. But Boff joins Sobrino in trying to articulate the liberating experience of Jesus' message over against Judaism instead of linking it to the Exodus event as Gutierrez and Bonino do. Thus much of the criticism directed above at Sobrino applies with equal vigor to Boff's Christology. While it contains many notions that could be utilized in a reformulated Christology in the dialogue, the basis

for its outlook would need to undergo a major shift of focus before it would deserve to be imported into a dialogue setting.

This cursory look at how several key figures in contemporary systematic theology relate their Christological ideas to Judaism clearly shows that many of the long-standing stereotypes remain in force. A few of the continental writers have begun to seriously question these stereotypes, particularly as a result of the Holocaust experience. But their attempts are still far behind the type of thorough re-thinking found among the scholars whose views we examined in the previous chapter. This is to admit that the theological reflection that has taken place within the dialogue has yet to penetrate the Christian theological mainstream in any significant way. Among the Latin American liberationists there has been even less impact than among the Europeans. Several of these writers have in fact only re-invigorated the long-standing stereotypes of Judaism by trying to define the freedom message of the gospels in direct opposition to the imagined oppression of the Jewish Torah system.

So while there have been some breakthroughs among major Christian systematicians on the Jewish question the general conclusion ~~is~~, for the moment, must still be that Christology continues to suffer from a deep anti-Judaic malady. Yet it would be wrong to assume an entirely pessimistic posture. There remains the hope that theologians like Moltmann and Kung, with their evident general sensitivity on the Jewish question, will finally begin to integrate this sensitivity more profoundly into their Christological construction. Also the universal emphasis

among the theologians we have examined on the fact that the kingdom of God must be seen as a future rather than a present reality breaks down one of the most pervasive distortions of Judaism in the Christological area even among those theologians who have not specifically alluded to this point in their own writings. History has not yet come to an end as a result of the Christ Event as much of traditional Christian theology had claimed for so long a time. This assertion, gradually becoming a cardinal principle of contemporary Christology, will of necessity force Christian theologians to re-think the meaning of Judaism when formulating their Christological positions.

The continental theologians have also more or less agreed upon the fact that Jesus can no longer be explained simply as the one who fulfilled the messianic prophecies of the Hebrew Scriptures. This represents another breakthrough with positive ramifications for the discussion of Christology in a dialogue setting.

One inescapable conclusion from the study of the continental and liberation theologians is that they all seriously lack a proper understanding of the Second Temple period in Judaism. If the scholarship on this period being undertaken increasingly by Christian and Jewish scholars begins to filter into the realm of systematics then we may see how some of the Christological interpretations put forth by the contemporary authors are in fact but a reflection of the more progressive trends in the Judaism of Jesus' day. Thus, there would no longer be the temptation to articulate the meaning of the Christ experience in terms of Jewish rejection. Coupled with the heightened

appreciation of the Exodus event introduced into Christology by Gutierrez and Bonino, the way would finally be opened for the development of a Christology that would positively incorporate Jewish values into its expression. But that day still lies ahead. Thus far, the major systematicians have only touched the outer fringes in dealing with the Jewish question in Christology. A genuine breakthrough continues to allude us. The subsequent chapter will try to show a path towards eventually breaking this impasse.

FOOTNOTES

1. JUDAISM IN GERMAN CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY SINCE 1945: CHRISTIANITY AND ISRAEL CONSIDERED IN TERMS OF MISSION. Metuchen, N.J.: The Scarecrow Press, 1975.
2. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1968.
3. Ibid., pp. 253-254.
4. Ibid., p. 255.
5. Ibid., p. 269.
6. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969, pp. 35-36.
7. "Anti-Semitism and the Christologies of Barth, Berkouwer and Pannenberg," DIALOGUE, Vol. 16 (Winter 1977), p. 40.
8. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1963.
9. cf. Pannenberg, THEOLOGY AND THE KINGDOM, p. 36.
10. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1972.
11. Ibid., p. viii.
12. As an example of this, Rabbi Borowitz reports that at a discussion of Pannenberg and Judaism at the 1974 American Theological Society convention no one seemed aware of the change of perspective found in his later writings. cf. "Anti-Semitism and the Christologies," p. 41.
13. New York: Harper & Row, 1974, p. 132.
14. Ibid., p. 134.
15. Ibid., p. 178.
16. New York: Harper & Row, 1977.
17. "Jurgen Moltmann, the Jewish People, and the Holocaust," JOURNAL OF THE AMERICAN ACADEMY OF RELIGION, Vol. 44 (December 1976), p. 682.
18. Ibid., p. 689.
19. Ibid., p. 686.
20. Garden City, N.J.: Doubleday & Co., 1976.

21. Ibid., p. 167.
22. Ibid., p. 174.
23. cf. "Is Jesus a Bond or Barrier? A Jewish-Christian Dialogue," JOURNAL OF ECUMENICAL STUDIES, Vol. 14 (Summer 1977), pp. 466-483. This dialogue also appears in Kung's volume SIGNPOSTS FOR THE FUTURE. New York: Doubleday, 1977.
24. ON BECOMING, p. 408.
25. Ibid., p. 544.
26. Ibid., p. 545.
27. "Kung and Kasper on Christ," THE ECUMENIST, Vol. 14 (January/February 1977), p. 20.
28. New York: Seabury, 1979.
29. Ibid., p. 237.
30. Ibid., p. 241.
31. Ibid., p. 514.
32. Ibid., p. 266.
33. Ibid., p. 268.
34. Ibid.
35. "Christology," p. 701.
36. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1973.
37. Ibid., p. 156.
38. Ibid., p. 158.
39. Ibid., p. 161.
40. Ibid., p. 256.
41. Ibid., p. 231.
42. "A Report on the Puebla Meeting of the Latin American Bishops' Conference (CELAM), January 27-February 13, 1979," ADL Memorandum. New York: Anti-Defamation League, March 14, 1979, p. 7.

43. London: SPCK, 1975. The American edition is entitled DOING THEOLOGY IN A REVOLUTIONARY SITUATION. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975.
44. Ibid., p. 77.
45. Ibid., p. 165.
46. Ibid., p. 166.
47. Ibid., pp. 166-167.
48. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1978.
49. Ibid., p. 57.
50. Ibid., p. 165.
51. Ibid., p. 43
52. "Christ against the Jews: Jon Sobrino's Christology," Unpublished manuscript, 1979, p. 13.
53. CHRISTOLOGY, pp. 205-206.
54. "Christ against the Jews," p. 16.
55. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1978.
56. Ibid., p. 284.
57. Ibid.