

*Another Possible World*, editors Marcella Althaus-Reid, Ivan Petrella and Luiz Carlos Susin. Serie—Reclaiming Liberation Theology. SCM Press, 2007. 195 pp. ISBN – 978 0 334 04094 1

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This book is one from the series on Reclaiming Liberation Theology. It is a collection of papers delivered to the first World Forum on Theology and Liberation held in Brazil in 2007, attended by the *most important theologians the world over in a forum of people who are involved in theology*. It is the opinion of the editors that Liberation Theologies are the most important theological movement of our time. This a collection of publicly expressed opinions and presents to a wider public a variety of views all of which were the subjects under discussion. There is however a common theme, since all the contributors share the underlying dogma of liberationism, and a visionary possibility of another and better world *where justice will reign*. At the heart of the liberationist's conviction is that a money-driven society is the problem and not the greedy heart of man. Globalization, capitalism, radicalism, fundamentalism and religious exclusivism are demons that need to be exorcised if economic equality and social justice are to change human society. This then is an attempt to reclaim liberationism by revitalizing and expanding its application, but it almost creates the impression that liberation theology has supplanted the spiritual dynamic of the Kingdom of God with liberationism as the social catalyst than can save the human race from ecological, economic and ethical disaster.

Susin, a Catholic academic from Brazil introduces the reader to the World Forum with an explanation of its format and function. It was centred upon the reality of an increasing globalization and its results for ecological sensitivity, religious pluralism and social movements. This is followed by Leonardo Boff, another Brazilian and well-known scholar, who really sets the agenda. He identifies the two *urgent utopias* facing theology in the crisis of civilization in twenty first century, that is the need to *safeguard our common home*—mother earth, and the need to *safeguard the unity of the human family*. The answer lies in a reformed theology, consisting of a mixture liberalism and liberationism with an evolutionist, postmodern, and utopian goal to counteract the ecological crisis. *The solution proposed is a socio-economic, global alliance that opens the way for pluralism in every aspect of human activity*. This comes with an appeal for that alliance to be focused on an economic ideology that still carries echoes of a Marxist type socialism.

Balasuriya, a Sri Lankan priest provides some important statistical data

on the demographic effects of global migration, but with special reference to the ravages of colonialism, distribution of land and wealth, and capitalism's damaging consequences for the human race. *He raises the possibility of another religion for that other world*, but the modernist hope for a future utopia still overshadows his approach. It is inferred that mankind's future destiny lies in its own hands, which borders on a Deism without any room for a biblically based, futurist eschatology.

Duchrow, a German theologian from Heidelberg discusses with the format of four theses the subject of *opportunities and difficulties in today's world*. He laments the demise of communism, critiques neo-liberalism and capitalism, and calls for a more socially centred theology and Church. His biblical references are refreshing, but his hermeneutics are markedly liberationist. *The Church and its theology have to be reformed as a socio-economic and political force for change, an enemy of capitalism and a weapon of God*.

Althaus-Read from Argentina reflects upon Class, Sex and Theology in the Latin American Liberation movements with a fervent appeal for the Church to endorse homosexuality. Employing a gendered metaphor *Evita* she provides a challenge to what she sees as the *limited inclusivity* of liberation theology, which excluded sexual deviants from the classification of the poor and marginalized. She accuses the earlier protagonists of liberation of a selective, militaristic and authoritarian treatment of those still socially excluded on a sexual basis, be it women, transvestites or homosexuals, and links sexual disorientation to poverty and oppression. Sin is not to be found in sexual preferences but in the society, which excludes them. Here she identifies a gap between uncontested ideologies and critical realities.

Gefrere, a French Dominican looks at the future of religion between fundamentalism and modernity. He questions whether religiosity in the supermarket can contribute to humanizing globalization. The pluralism that is the consequence of globalization brings with it syncretism, a challenge to be met by liberation theologians. He charges Christianity, with its insistence on sacralizing its texts, with a prejudice and an intolerance above that of pagan religions and diverse polytheisms, and *calls for a multi-faith accommodation of the gains from universal religiosity and an amalgam of universal truth*.

Manchala, an Indian Dalit and editor of a religious journal picks up on challenges and possibilities facing theology today. With a review of the Dalit's situation in a subjugating caste system as economically deprived and politically disempowered, socially disadvantaged and struggling for an identity, yet now divided strategically. He warns about the danger of the segregating possibilities of genetic technologies, but applauds the growth of people movements against oppression. *He calls for a public, syncretistic liberationist theology, which would decentralize the offending emphasis on the*

*Crucifixion and major on the Life and Teaching of Jesus, explore existing power models contrary to Jesus' teaching, and readdress the meaning for the Church in a fragmented world.*

There follow four chapters, which look at the developments of liberationism thinking in four of the world's continents. An Italian Catholic theologian and editor discusses, with a trajectory from Barthian transcendentalism to a socio-political Moltmannism, the European stance vis a vis liberation theology, and the reticence to embrace its tenets with a readiness to engage in further dialogue. A Korean by birth, now a Brazilian national makes a very insightful and virulent attack on consumerism and capitalism on the idolatrous market philosophy, and economic monetarism as a contradistinction to true religion, and calls for an undermining and opposing theology promoting true spiritual values. A Ghanaian Professor of Theology identifies the African Agenda for theology and liberation, followed by an American theologian who explores liberation theologies in the USA. This brief world review comes to a close with notes on God and Gender provided by a feminist professor from Latin America.

There are two other chapters, 13 and 15 which take us back to the concerns in Indian Theologies, a factor that tends to identify Asia in terms of that single sub-continent, and raises the question for the forum: where were the representations of the larger part of Asia? Leaving that aside we return to chapter 14 and Wanda Deifelt's paper on *The Social Context, Language and Images of God*. She has been an international theological contributor to the feminist cause in the church, its leadership and community. She picks up on the truth that language has a social context, and that it can never describe divinity in its totality, so we resort to metaphoric terms when talking about God. For example God as Father is a legitimate biblical metaphor used by Jesus. The problem is not in the metaphor but in its absolutization, and she accuses the Gospel authors from Mark through to John with doing this in their texts to perpetuate patriarchalism. Many metaphors are used in the biblical literature to identify God, which open the possibilities of human language to talk about God. In feminist theology the favoured metaphor is the parabolic use of the human body in its diversity of members, its interconnections and activities. Christian theology has failed in focusing too intently on the soul and not on the body image.

Petrella from Miami takes us back to the work of Juan Luis Segundo, with a critique of the modern and now respectable image of Liberation Theology. He looks to the writings of Juan Segundo for a path towards revitalizing its socio-economic and political relevance by linking faith and ideology, and provides a very useful analysis of the relationship of these two components of human existence in his writings. The tyrants of the modern world with

their idolization of globalization, the market and capitalism have crucified the highest God and enslaved the human race. *Petrella proposes that a liberation theology with the incorporation of the social sciences as a political construction is the means by which the concrete meaning of liberation will be able to make its degree of analytic vigour a relevant contribution to Another Possible World.*

Tamayo Acosta from Spain concludes that a theology for another world is possible. He provides some outlines for a new theological paradigm. Critically analyzing the division of theology in geo-cultural and social areas, he introduces some new socio-cultural climates that condition the way we do theology. Tracing new horizons that will conform the new theological paradigm, he sketches out new categories of that paradigm. There seems however in it all to be three essentials excluded from this new theologically liberationist paradigm for Another Possible Word, that is the Holy Spirit, authentic New Testament Christianity and an evangelical response.