THE HUMANIST CHRISTOLOGY OF PAUL by Juan Luis Segundo (Vol. III of JESUS OF NAZARETH, YESTERDAY AND TODAY), E.T. John Drury, *Sheed and Ward,* London, 1986. Pp. 244. £10.50.

'What about Jesus could interest pagans of Greek culture....? Some sort of transposition had to be invented and it had to be a faithful transposition'. These words in the opening pages set the scene for this third volume of Segundo's five volume Christology, in which his intellectual energy and originality are undiminished.

In the second volume he used the 'political key' to interpret the significance of Jesus as someone firmly rooted in the historical and political realities of his day, who sided with the poor and marginalized against the powerful. But if the same message was to be communicated in a different context to different audiences, a different key was needed. Segundo discerns in Paul a creative transposition from the political to the anthropological key. He makes his case by focussing narrowly but with rigorous intensity on Romans 1–8. His book is in fact an extended commentary in which he offers his own translation and follows what he perceives to be the units of meaning within the rhythm of the argument, rather than the traditional chapter and verse divisions.

Segundo claims that by the 'theatrical device' of personifying the forces that intervene significantly in every human life, Paul makes clear the unique place of Jesus, the Christ, and his importance not just for the poor or Israel, but for the human being universally, (hence, the 'humanist' of the title). His method in each chapter is first to show how Paul's argument discloses his anthropological key and makes sense in the light of it, and then to consider its faithfulness to Jesus' own work and message, or, in the later chapters, to the paschal events and experiences which Jesus could not himself have put into his political key.

The first of the personified forces to appear on the stage is Sin. It is impoossible here to do justice to the depth and detail of Segundo's analysis, but in brief he argues that Sin, for Paul, is not a conscious infringement of law, but a *mechanism* of deceit and alienation. This explains why its victims are those who on the surface are decent and well-intentioned. But Sin comes between intention and performance and deforms it. The enslaving power that subjects the human being to Sin is not impiety but injustice. In the idolatry depicted by Paul the real intention of human beings is to justify, on the basis of the divine, the dehumanized relations they want to have with other human beings. Truth, which cannot be completely hidden, is 'shackled' (Rom. 1:18) because it interferes with what human beings want to do. Yet because it is there, they cannot be completely free. Segundo argues that in shifting from Satan to Sin as the enslaver, Paul creatively deduces what Jesus would have said in a different situation confronting humanity rather than Jews alone. Paul's faithfulness can be seen in his critique of the ideological use of religion. It is this that leads him on to conclude that Jews with the Law are on the same footing as pagans before God. By turning the Law into privilege, using it to judge and disdain others, Israel enslaved itself to sin. 'Thus all are enslaved to that anthropological character called Sin' (p. 33).

Before turning to the way of escape for both Jew and pagan, Segundo must wrestle with Paul, and the reader with Segundo, over the interpretation of the difficult verses of Romans 3 and the question of the Law's place in God's plan. Segundo argues that the Law is positive. God lets his voice be heard through it, but it fails because it is inevitably placed in the service of Sin—turned into a contract and rendered calculable. The same would happen to any new Law from above. 'Humanity must pursue the trajectory of its mistake to the end to see that it is a mistake'. For Sin to be defeated something new is needed, Faith.

The appearance of Abraham as the exemplar of faith at once poses a problem, since he could not have had faith in Jesus; a difference has to be acknowledged. Yet Segundo draws significant conclusions from the case of Abraham. ''Who is a child of Abraham, 'the man of faith'? Every atheist, pagan, Jew or Christian, who refuses to have contractual

relationship with the Absolute, who trusts in the promise inscribed in human values offered by existence and fights for them as if death did not render that struggle futile." '*Faith* must be an attitude acessible to all human beings, *always,* just as enslavement to Sin is accessible to them... it is a way of being human, something that moves the human being from infantile timidity to maturity, from action 'based on petty calculation' to action 'performed in a gratuitous and creative manner'" (p. 68 f.)

It is in keeping with Segundo' wider concerns that he is anxious to show that Faith is not opposed to work but only to work *under the law,* in other words, enslaved to the mechanisms of Sin. Thus Faith is not to be regarded as passive, but as issuing in work, God's work. Here a major theme of Volume II recurs, that human beings are collaborators with God's creative purpose. Only faith makes possible a truly human way of working; it does not replace working but transforms it.

The particularity of faith in Jesus poses a problem in so far as it seems to reintroduce privilege. Segundo meets this by holding fast to Paul's contrast between Adam and Christ, and to the implication that each affects the whole of humanity, one inaugurating the reign of 'Sin', the other the reign of 'Grace'. Sin and Death are matched by Justice and Life. Segundo finds one of the most original thoughts in Paul's Christology to be his rejection of the idea that resurrection of the dead was a precondition for God's universal judgement. Rather, the resurrection of *all* human beings is due to the victory of Grace over Sin in each one.

Paul's use of the cultic legal key in his account of Jesus' dying for us poses another problem for Segundo. It implies a cause acting from outside *upon* history, rather than from *within*. This, as he recognises, threatens his whole case, but he argues that the cultic legal key must be treated as a subordinate to the pervasive anthropological key. In terms of this, Paul 'sees God's project as a battle co-extensive with humanity', to free all from infantilism and bad faith into human maturity and freedom and 'unreserved creative activity out of love for their brother and sister humans'.

But the goal is not completely realized. In the remaining chapters and the Appendices, Segundo grapples not only with Paul's thought but with its challenging implications for Christians in Latin America, not least for those exponents of Liberation Theology who, in their enthusiasm for the political key, have tended to discount Paul. For a start, Segundo insists that in Romans 7:14 Paul refers to himself and every other human being in the world, Christian or not. The mechanism of Sin is still at work in Christians in the flesh, creating 'a gap between human intention and human performance'. It works through 'our members' which can be taken to mean both physical and sociocultural instrumentality. What is new according to Paul is a correlate of baptism and what it signifies, viz. *the possibility of snatching human instrumentality from the service of injustice and putting it in the service of truth,* of the *just* intentions of the human being' (Rom 6:13—19). Here the gap between the free 'I' and the work performed is closed.

As a solution to the apparent conflict between defeat and victory of Romans 7 and 8, Segundo argues that they can be viewed together but on two different levels. On one there is verifiable defeat, on the other unverifiable but experienced and real victory.

The laws of the easy way in an already created world will always be at work against the kingdom, and, despite the signs of its power planted in history, will defeat it in so far as any attempt at verification can tell. For Segundo, such a conclusion is not defeatist. For a start, can believers in Jesus expect to achieve more than Jesus? If he had achieved more, human beings would be mere spectators, not collaborators, with him. If they in their turn achieved more, they would deny succeeding generations the challenge to display the full creativity of their love. The realistic task for God's co-workers is to be as effective as they can be. The victory of Life and Faith is not triumph at the end of history, but the manifestation of '*the freedom of the glory* of God's children in history.' 'Being "heir" does not mean inheriting something already acquired, but something immensely worthwhile *to do*', which, in the

concluding words of Segundo's commentary is 'nothing less than the humanization of humanity in history.'

This book is not easy reading, and one's suspicions might be aroused by the discovery of so much grist to liberationists' mill in the treatment of Paul. Yet the arguments deserve to be examined with the same vigour as they are presented. Furthermore, even though Segundo insists that all theology is contextualised, what is striking is the extent to which he and his study group have clearly felt the impact and challenge of Paul on their contextual assumptions. They came to see that Paul's anthropological key and *ideology* (the means to flesh out values) might have more to offer them within the power structures of Latin America than had Jesus' political key and ideology. To say this, Segundo argues, is not irreverent; the underlying values of Jesus are not questioned, whereas to absolutize the means he adopted to flesh them out is to deny them historical substance.

The universalization of the conflict with Sin in terms of the anthropological key also discloses that the mechanisms of Sin are at work in the poor and the believer as well as in the powerful and the enemies of God, while the final victory of Christ is not to be sought in the verifiable political domain. Such conclusions in no way lessen Segundo's conviction, supported by his reading of Paul, that the world is the setting for God's work to be undertaken in freedom and faith, but they stand firmly in the way of political or social utopianism.

The richness of thought and critical insight in this book make it well worth the effort to absorb. The anthropological key seems able to open many if not all doors into Paul's thought and hence into what faith might mean to any who try to live in faith.

TREVOR WILLIAMS

LIVING WATER: AN ANTHOLOGY OF LETTERS OF DIRECTION edited by Robin Baird-Smith. *Collins,* **London 1987. 204pp. £2.95.**

One of the prices we have paid for the telephone and modern transport and a lot of post-Conciliar spirituality has been the virtual disappearance of the letter of spiritual direction. Yet, from St Paul onwards, much of the weightiest teaching on the Christian life has started in the form of such letters.

Robin Baird-Smith's anthology is striking for the variety of correspondents in it, ranging from St Paul to Carlo Carretto, and the widely different situations that made them write (the anxieties of nuns, friends facing death and blindness, and Lady Georgiana Morpeth's low spirits, as well as the concerns all sorts of people have had about their prayer-life). Even so, an anthology like this is bound to reflect the personal predilections of the editor. Of the eighty extracts here, about one-fifth come from Antiquity and the middle ages, a third from the 19th and 20th centuries (the 19th-century French sociologist, the Abbé de Tourville, is generously represented), and the remainder from the classical age of the spiritual letter, the two centuries after Trent. St Francis de Sales, Fénelon, and Caussade fill a third of the book.

Has too much space been given to letters written to men and women of a distant culture and age? The editor believes, surely rightly, that because of their wisdom and subject-matter these letters have a certain universal and timeless quality. He has divided them up thematically; some of us will wish that a little more information had been supplied to help us put the letters into context.

Unlike a lot of the spirituality that floods from the presses, nearly all these letters were written to meet concrete human needs, and for this reason this anthology is likely to appeal to many readers who normally steer clear of spirituality.

JOHN ORME MILLS OP