Church is *koinonia,* a community of believers who support one another in faith and love and so become a model of hope to others. Church is *diakonia,* service to the world in preparation for the coming of God's reign. Church entails *kerygma,* proclamation of the Good News of God's love and acceptance and of our new life in Jesus Christ. And Church is *eucharistia,* thanksgiving and praise to God in the name of all creation.

As obvious centres of Christian *koinonia, diakonia, kerygma,* and *eucharistia,* Dignity chapters qualify as genuine local churches. They offer an otherwise neglected group of Catholics an alternative experience of Christ's on-going saving work in the world. They provide thousands of lesbian and gay people a rich experience of church. Some may still question whether all this sufficient for qualification also as a *Catholic* experience of church. If the answer is No, anyone with extensive pastoral experience might well wonder how any real parish could qualify.

Reviews

THE HISTORICAL JESUS OF THE SYNOPTICS by Juan Luis Segundo (Vol. II of JESUS OF NAZARETH YESTERDAY AND TODAY, E.T. John Drury, *Sheed and Ward,* **London, 1985). 230 pp. £11.50.**

Why should Jesus of Nazareth be of any interest to anyone today? To reply, 'Because he is of God,' is for Segundo no answer to those who have no interest in God or God language. So even Pannenberg with his Christology 'from below' must be criticized for insisting that the first question about the historical Jesus 'has to be that about his unity with God' (p. 30).

The need is rather to leave the Christian world and two thousand years of Christocentrism, with its universalizing categories and mixture of Christology and soteriology, and to return to Jesus himself in his own day. Segundo admits that such an undertaking could as well be called 'antichristology', but in so far as Jesus' words and actions and the questions he addressed are seen to bear on the issues of anthropological faith (the subject of extended analysis in vol. I), he will again be of interest today.

In pursuit of this goal, Segundo is embroiled in conflicts on many fronts, with the conservative defenders of Biblical or ecclesiastical authority, with those who believe religion is a personal matter and has nothing to do with politics, and not least, with the contemporary theologians and Biblical scholars with whom he takes issue in his exegesis. But as he himself writes of Jesus, 'In our limited world it is hard to imagine any profound interest or passionate enthusiasm that does not somehow entail conflict' (p. 71).

The book opens somewhat unexpectedly with an extended quotation from Leonardo Boff's *Pasión de Cristo* (1981). By calling this a gospel, Segundo makes the point that gospels are not only to be found in the New Testament canon. The very fact that it includes four shows that new formulations of Jesus message were needed for new listeners, as they still are. But Boff's gospel does not offer a fully worked out interpretation of Jesus—a Christology. This is what this five volume work aims to provide.

Segundo is well aware that there is no uninterpreted Jesus. But it is important to his

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purposes to insist on the space between Jesus and interpretations of him. Their very diversity counts against any kind of doctrinal absolutism and at the same time is the clue to what made Jesus interesting in the first place. To do justice to the exegetical task, Segundo leaves Paul to another volume and concentrates here on the Synoptics.

His own reconstruction and interpretation of the pre-paschal and pre-ecclesial Jesus will not be uncontroversial. Some readers may take offence over the assumed existence of 'Q' as a written source. Greater offence may be taken over the assumption that the Pharisees were Jesus' main opponents (following an uncritical reading of Jeremias), and a remark such as 'Theirs is a terrible legalism' (p. 99). No awareness is shown of the work of E.P. Sanders among others.

But the great interest and challenge of this book does not lie in a revival of the supposedly religious conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees, but in the use of the 'political key' to interpret the conflict in which Jesus was engaged. The Pharisees emerge as one of the dominant ruling authorities who sink their differences to unite against and destroy the person who threatened their power and status (though when things came to a head, the Pharisees themselves may have been little more than the ideological tool of the real authorities who were happy to use the religion of Yahweh as an instrument of oppression).

The threat came from a Jesus who, far from transcending all conflicts (*pace* Küng), sided with the poor and marginalized. The coming of the kingdom was good news for them, not for everyone, 'because of the inhuman nature of their situation' and 'because God is humane'. Jesus demands nothing of them (certainly not repentance of sin,) other than conversion from the dominant ideology that accounts them sinners and prevents them receiving the news as *good* news. By contrast, radical conversion is required of Jesus' opponents 'from the oppressive security of the letter of the law to the liberating insecurity of having to opt for the poor, even in the face of God's very word'. (Jesus' parables served only to heighten the conflict, not to win converts). In further distinction, the prophetic qualities of clear-sighted heroism and commitment are demanded not of all, but of disciples, not as a condition but as a consequence of entering the kingdom and siding with the poor.

The view that Jesus expected the imminent arrival of the kingdom through the direct intervention of God, and was simply mistaken, would, as Segundo recognizes, invalidate the political key and undermine the importance he attaches to Jesus' historical political involvement. But he argues vigorously that such ahistorical apocalyptic expectations were more typical of John the Baptist than of Jesus, and if anyone was mistaken, it was more likely to have been the disciples than Jesus himself. The question why the political key of Jesus was displaced in the early Church is examined in one of the two appendices (—the other dealing with the historicality of the resurrection).

Segundo does not exclude the use of other keys; still less does he deny the religious dimension, but his deep conviction is that '*everything* said and done by Jesus had inherently political dimensions, not merely hypothetical applications, that he expressed his religious message in a political key and in that way manifested God' (p. 104).

There is no denying that Segundo's own 'ideological interests' (and Liberation Theology) are well served by his reconstruction of Jesus and his situation, as when he insists that Jesus sought to place historical causality in the service of the kingdom, and that 'it is *from within* historical causality that human beings collaborate with the kingdom' (159). But he makes no bones about this himself, simply maintaining that to imagine one can be neutral is the biggest danger of all. His case deserves to be judged on its merits. It is often persuasive and and certainly interesting. It should evoke renewed interest in Jesus not only in Latin America but wherever there is real concern for human beings, without which Christological debate would indeed be hollow.

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