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BOOK REVIEW

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Sobrino, J. (2008). *No Salvation Outside the Poor: Prophetic-Utopian Essays*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis. Pp. xii +147; ISBN: 978-1-57075-752-5; Price US\$ 22; Paperback.

Elia Shabani Mligo

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Teofilo Kisanji University, P.O. Box 1104, Mbeya, United Republic of Tanzania.

Correspondence: eshamm2015@gmail.com

Jon Sobrino is a Jesuit Spanish-born renowned theologian. His above-mentioned book deals with the notion of the option for the poor as a locus of salvation and what the Church should do to them. The reason provided by the book for this option is that the mystery of God has broken through in the poor, a thing which churches have in most cases trivialized. Through this mystery, “God is God of the poor” and “God is known through the poor” with their various categories (pp. 23–24). Hence, as God knew and rescued Lazarus from his situation, God is also known as an object of poverty (p.25).

In this book, an important question is posed: “who will deliver us from this cruel and inhuman world?” (p.48) and proposes an answer in that line: “by understanding salvation in relation to the poor and seeing it in the poor as a locus and a potential for salvation.” (p.49) The book uses the Latin words *extra pauperes nulla salus* (no salvation outside the poor) to emphasize on the proposed solution for the posed question (p.49). This is the *Utopia*, the hope which the book offers as a solution for overcoming the cruelty and dehumanizing world of capital. The book further asserts: “outside the poor there is no salvation, outside the poor there is no church, outside the poor there is no gospel.” (p.51) In other words, outside the poor there is no faith in God.

After discussing the central question, it turns to the central message of Jesus in his ministry—the kingdom of God—and its content and characteristics. It concentrates on the values and functions of the Kingdom in relation to the anti-kingdom which produces victims. The Kingdom of God, as proclaimed by Jesus, is centered upon the poor and their emancipation from dehumanizing forces. The dehumanizing forces are idols of death of the Empire—the United States and its globalization process. In the midst of the dehumanizing forces of the Empire, the poor stay at the centre of Christianity. The book asserts this more blatantly: “To speak of the ‘Kingdom’ without focusing on the ‘poor’ is impossible, which in turn means that no Jesuanic Christianity is possible, if the poor are not its centre.” (p.88). It poses the difficult notion of “letting ourselves be saved by the poor” (p.90) Letting ourselves be saved by the poor entails following Jesus, and following Jesus entails assuming responsibility for the Kingdom and its ethics, bearing the weight of the anti-Kingdom and letting oneself be born to God. In doing all these, following Jesus is costly and requires endurance.

The book further cements the previous issues by discussing the hope for resurrection of the crucified ones, people who belong to the civilization of poverty. It purports that there is hope beyond the death caused by dehumanizing forces of globalization. “In the Christian tradition,” it writes, “the fate of human being is understood in the light of the fate of Jesus.” (p.100) This hope paves a way for the resurrected ones to live as human beings.

The book ends by turning to the role of resurrected people in churches—to promote the legacy of Jesus and his message. This role entails being fearless witnesses of Jesus’ life, destiny, and works. Witnessing about Jesus means making him present and live within churches. For Jesus to be live and present in Churches, the “People” or the “people of God” and their dignity, the transcendence of God, the actual following of Jesus and the dependence on God’s grace must be taken seriously. The book ends with an urge “to uncover an evangelical church, the Church of the poor” and to perpetuate the fruitful legacy of Jesus within churches (p.128).

This book is one of the most exciting and interesting contextual theology books I have ever read. One of the strengths of this book is that apart from proposing the *extra pauperes nulla salus* formula as the centre of human salvation, it also recognizes the existence of *mysterium iniquitatis*. It recognizes the existence of inequalities among the poor themselves which makes the demarcation between the world of poverty and the world of wealth difficult to discern.

However, the book’s weakness is clear: it romanticizes the poor and makes God as their own possession. Since God is Almighty who sustains the rich and the poor, this book could be well balanced if it discussed, even in a nut shell, about the other side of the coin: the possibility of salvation from the side of the world of wealth and its conditions. There is possibly nothing on earth which is absolutely negative. As the content of the book appears, it suggests that there is nothing positive, nothing of God, comes from the world of wealth, a thing which can hardly be true.

Despite the above reservation, this book is still valuable and potential. The content of the book and its proposition in regard to the locus of salvation pose an interesting subject of

scholarly discussion in line with the existing historical and exclusivist notion of *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* (no salvation outside the church) of Origen and Cyprian; which was further re-phrased by Schillebeeckx after the Vatican II into a more inclusivist *extra mundum nulla salus* (outside the world there is no salvation). The book should be in shelves of scholars and students of contextual theology, theology of mission, and political theology.