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Review of *Mysterium Liberationis*: Fundamental Concepts of Liberation Theology

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Mysterium Liberationis: Fundamental Concepts of Liberation Theology, edited by Ignacio Ellacuria, S.J. and Jon Sobrino, S.J. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1993.

This book intends a "systematized presentation of the core" of Latin American liberation theology. Despite the tragic assassination of coeditor Ellacuria when the project was in midstream, his colleague Jon Sobrino, aided by twenty-six theologians, succeeded in realizing this objective. The book also aims to show this theology's ongoing relevance in response to critics who would tell its death knell because of the demise of communist nations and the rise of the politically conservative Pentecostal churches. The book persuasively argues that experience of God by the poor and oppressed, not socialism, demands a theology of liberation.

This shorter English edition of the two-volume Spanish original presents first the history, methodology, and distinctive features of liberation theology, and second, its systematic contents, including perspectives on transcendence and history, the Trinity, sin and grace, ecclesiology, Mary, evangelization, sacraments, and spirituality. An ample bibliography lists works in English.

Four commendable features are the book's insightful reflections on the reign of God and its presence in history; its emphasis on the reality of the poor and oppressed that discloses their hope, creativity, commitment, and martyrdom; its inclusion of European critics; and its integration of liberationist themes with traditional areas of theology. The authors consistently reveal how the "option for the poor" operates within their theologies as a hermeneutic illuminating their interpretations or as an ethical norm guiding human acts. They broaden and thus universalize the norm's content by including among the poor and oppressed those who suffer because of their ethnicity, race, and gender. Unfortunately, only four of twenty-eight contributors are women. A few articles repeat certain themes but do not advance them. Only two chapters treat ethics.

Church-state relations is not treated explicitly, although a few theologians, like Ellacuria and Azevedo, discuss it within the context of church and society. Ellacuria, for example, says the church's commitment to the preferential option principle may mean that the church must respect political positions not in line with the preferences and needs of the institutionalized church. He also presents three historical models of church in relation to society, each of which implies a theology of church-state. This reviewer recommends this integrated, systematic treatment as a reference for serious students and teachers of liberation theology.

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