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## Review of Justo L. Gonzalez, *Santa Biblia: The Bible Through Hispanic Eyes*

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now through the resurrection of Christ. It also ends with the importance of Revelation for the present, such as challenging fundamentalistic apocalypticism, constructing a new vision of history, establishing a prophetic analysis of the present situation, understanding the symbols and myths of Revelation, rereading the origins of Christianity, and finally, contributing in reconstruction of liberation theologies in the Third World.

In the overall assessment of the commentary, a number of comments are in order. First, the line of argumentation, a present eschatological reality, is threaded and supported well throughout the chapters. In the climate of fundamentalist apocalyptic groups, the recapturing of Revelation's main thrust (present eschatology) is very important in keeping an eye on present oppressive situations in the world. However, more development and discussion, especially in the conclusion, with regard to the impact of Revelation in relationship to the Third World could have been provided. Second, R's. use of historical, sociological, and literary criticisms surely displays his sharp and creative use of all three approaches, though, I was disappointed that the reading strategy advanced a subtle positivistic impulse at times. This is especially visible when R. fails to disclose directly his social location in relationship to the text, a constant oversight of the dominant exegetical paradigm. Nevertheless, R. clearly pays attention to the experience of oppressed Christians in Third World countries. Finally, R. does a splendid job dialoguing with the history of scholarship concerning Revelation, especially in his reconstruction of the origins of Christianity behind Revelation. Even though I would have enjoyed more discussion in this area, I was not the primary audience.

In conclusion, R. surely keeps in line with the scholarly pursuits of the series. He not only provides a clear view of the world behind the text, he also demonstrates how this world can be a model for the world in front of the text, that is, the present world. In short, the commentary is an excellent example of how one interprets Revelation from a liberation perspective, providing an alternative story from the standpoint of the marginalized.

*Francisco Lozada, Jr.*

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*Santa Biblia: The Bible Through Hispanic Eyes.* By Justo L. González. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996. Pages, 123. Paper.

One of the most important developments in recent biblical study is the awareness of the role of the reader in completing a dialogue with a text—a dialogue that we now understand to be absolutely necessary to

any comprehension, let alone interpretation. Concomitant with this development is the realization that different readers bring different backgrounds, assumptions, and experiences to the task of reading—irrespective of whether we are reading a menu or a poem. In biblical studies, this awareness of the role of the reader has provided an important opening for serious discussions of the role of culture and social experience in the comprehension and interpretation of the Bible both as a historical document in critical analysis, and also as “Scripture” for various religious traditions. González’s work is an important contribution in this growing field, and all the more welcome because we are still in the midst of the beginnings of this discussion among Hispanic theologians. *Santa Biblia* is a distillation of issues that came out of an important discussion of these matters which took place at Perkins School of Theology. The discussion was the Hispanic Instructors’ Program, convened by the Mexican American Program at Perkins. Judging from González’s work, the discussion was extremely productive.

At the outset it is important to clarify that González, in his introduction, states that he is acutely aware of the difficulties of his task. He is aware that he speaks from one *kind* of “Hispanic” community that is only part of a diverse and multifaceted series of social experiences too often simply lumped together as “Hispanic” (Mexican, and Mexican-American experiences are demonstrably as different from Puerto Rican experiences as Chinese-American from Sri Lankan-American!). To his credit, González is not intimidated by this reality. Nor does he hesitate, beyond mentioning it autobiographically as a certain element of his perspective, to engage in his creative analysis despite the fact that he is Protestant and most Latinos are Catholic. His task is to identify in general ways those experiential aspects of an “Hispanic” experience that will influence how one reads, comprehends, and interprets the Bible.

His first experiential context for reading the Bible is “marginality”: “No matter what our background, most Latinos, when speaking of their own experience in this society and in the church within this society, identify with the image of marginality” (32). From such a perspective, González is attentive to a reading of the New Testament that takes notice of the role of “the people,” “the crowds”—the marginalized of first-century Palestine—and their role as both supporters, and opponents, of the new ideas introduced in the preaching of the early apostles. But marginality can be a perspective for interpretation and application, as well as historical analysis. González, for example, expresses his impatience with readings of the Bible that serve to merely preserve power and maintain the marginality of the marginalized. In his comments on Jonah, for example, he notes that Jonah’s aversion to going to Nineveh

was not fear of evil, but rather fear of God's *acceptance* of those who ought to be kept marginal from the promises of God! God, indeed, did exactly what the conservative, nationalist Jonah did not want—forgive the enemies and include them in salvation. From the view of marginality, furthermore, González points out that Jesus' parables of the lost (lost sheep, coin, son) were directed *toward the center* (that is, toward the power-elite) and not toward the masses. Indeed, Jesus spoke *from the margin* in this sense. Clearly, González has identified a significant issue of interpretive perspective in considering the issue of marginality as a strategy of reading and interpretation, and compares it to later Christian experiences as Wesley's preaching to miners in Bristol, only to be transformed by his contact with the "marginal" of his era. While such themes are not new to hermeneutical discussion since Marx and "reading from the under side," that there can be a unique element of this from the perspective of "Latino" or "Hispanic experience" is part of González's important argument.

Chapter 2 addresses "poverty" as an interpretive context. Reflecting a major liberationist theme, González argues that discussions about "the poor" must move beyond a simple question, "What does the Bible say about the poor?" or "What does the Bible teach about what to do about the poor?" Instead, we must recognize that "The question is rather, what do the poor find in the Bible that is an important message to the entire church?" (58). This, of course, radically reverses the direction of discussion. When discussing Matthew 20:1-16, the parable about the workers being paid equally despite working various lengths of time, González reads from a perspective well known to the thousands who wait for work on the street-corners of the city. From this perspective, paying all a day's wage is seen as redressing the injustice of an economic system that condemns thousands upon thousands of able men and women to *wait* for work, desperately attempting to find enough to keep going: "The landowner pays them what they justly need and what they justly deserve, not what society, with its twisted understanding of justice, would pay them" (63).

Chapter 3 takes up one of the most interesting themes in a variety of Latino contexts, namely "Mestizaje and Mulatez," the experience of being "mestizos" and the unique perspectives that cross- and multi-cultural identities bring to the otherwise mundane discussions of "preserving cultures." The reality of living in more than one tradition, a self-consciousness based on being composed of different and older experiences, and the further reality of being a creative part of forging the continued meaning of this, has obvious significance to discussions of, for example, the nature of early Christian dialogue about Jewish and Gentile identities and definitions of Christian faith, as well as

"Diaspora" identities generally. This chapter leads naturally and powerfully into chapter 4, a discussion of the themes of "Exiles and Aliens." Although Exodus is powerfully meaningful in liberation struggles in many South American societies, González perceptively cautions that ". . . for many of us in the United States, that function belongs to the Babylonian Exile" (91). González then surveys some of the important textual evidences in the Hebrew Bible that allude to the importance of developing a "Diaspora identity," including key texts like Jeremiah 29, Daniel, and Esther. Again, focussing on exile as theologically paradigmatic is not an entirely new theme, but to relate this to "mestizo" experience is a creative contribution to that dialogue.

Chapter 5 focuses on "Solidarity," particularly the kind of family solidarity that has been a helpful and interesting perspective in the work of C. Gilbert Romero, surely one of the most articulate Old Testament scholars working in a similar area (Cf. *Hispanic Devotional Piety: Tracing Biblical Roots*, Orbis: New York, 1991, and his "Tradition and Symbol as Biblical Keys for a U.S. Hispanic Theology," pp. 41-61, in A. Deck, ed., *Frontiers of Hispanic Theology in the United States*, Orbis: New York, 1992). Picking up on a theme of "home" as metaphor for faith—a theme that has been previously developed at length by John H. Elliot (*A Home for the Homeless: A Sociological Exegesis of 1 Peter*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), González briefly synthesizes the Hispanic tradition of extended families, family solidarity, and mutual family responsibilities as defined much more widely than the so-called "nuclear family." Indeed, he rather strongly suggests that "the nuclear family, far from being the ideal, may already be part of the problem . . ." (106)! In such a perspective, Biblical metaphors of "family" and "home" become much more powerful paradigms for an affirmation of community and faithful solidarity.

Reading González's work as a European-American, I found the work both provocative and promissory by offering an insight into what a truly multi-cultural, dialogic approach to Biblical studies may yield in future discussion. While there may be many issues on which other Latino/a scholars would take issue, particularly in evaluating the fairness or accuracy of the selection of experiential metaphors, González clearly serves as an excellent introduction to the discussion for non-Hispanic American Christians. One also wonders whether in the future, attention to certain denominational distinctives would contribute, rather than hinder, such dialogue. While the ecumenical tendency today is to downplay such "European inflected distinctives," it is interesting to wonder what a Mexican-American Mennonite would consider important in a dialogue with Mexican-American Catholics, for example—and which of these points would be equally important

elements of his/her theological identity? Certainly such issues could be included in the "mestizo" quilt of contemporary theological self-understanding, especially in the American, Australian, and Canadian contexts.

A further strength of González's work is that it is a moderately popular work that will prove interesting for undergraduates as well as suggestive for graduate students. Indeed, part of the success of González's work leads one to hope for more detailed and critical examination of exegetical issues that are in dialogue with contemporary historical critical scholarship in both Old and New Testament. That some of the interpretive issues raised by González would most certainly *have* implications for the historical-critical examination of some of the texts he cites is clear, and we can only be grateful for his provocation, and be hopeful about future contributions.

Daniel L. Smith-Christopher

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*¡Alabadle! Hispanic Christian Worship.* Justo L. González, ed. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996. Pages, 133. Paper. Introduction, Appendix, Notes, and Glossary.

The series of articles contained in this book are compiled from papers presented at the 1994 Biennial Assembly of the Asociación para la Educación Teológica Hispana (AETH). Each of the essays purports to present a different perspective and experience of worship in the Hispanic context of the United States. It is important to note that "worship" in Protestant circles normally connotes the formal gathering of the community assembled to venerate God; Catholics use the word "liturgy" to describe this gathering. For purposes of this review I will generally use these terms interchangeably since most of the authors of this volume reflect on the experience of the official communal gatherings of Hispanic Christians.

The essays address such diverse topics as Hispanic values, popular religion, and distinctive approaches to worship as well as the blending of cultural and religious values taking place in liturgy. One author (Professor Raquel Gutiérrez-Achón), for example, presents an ecumenical analysis of hymnody. The other authors represent various denominations including the American Baptist (Dr. Miguel Angel Darino), Assemblies of God (Dr. Samuel Soliván), Disciples of Christ (Dr. Pablo A. Jiménez), Presbyterian (Rev. Teresa Chávez Saucedo), Roman Catholic (Dr. Allan Figueroa Deck, SJ), and United Methodist (Rev. María Luisa Santillán Baert and Dr. Justo L. González).