

# Hope of the Kingdom and Hope of the Resurrection: Hope for Whom? Broadening a Liberationist Perspective

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In order to begin a treatment of the articulation of Christian hope within the liberation theology of Jon Sobrino, it will be helpful to examine briefly the context out of which liberation theology arises and which shapes its approach to the question, “hope for whom?”. The development of Latin American liberation theology finds significant roots both in German political theology and in the reception and implementation of the documents of the Second Vatican Council by the Latin American Bishops’ conferences at Medellín (1968) and at Puebla (1979). German political theology developed largely by Johann Baptist Metz and Jürgen Moltmann rejects the separation of theology and the world and, therefore, sets as its task theological reflection on and critique of the contemporary political world.<sup>1</sup> By engaging in this task, political theology provided liberation theologians with “new categories of religious language, introducing distinctively political concepts such as liberation...and oppression.”<sup>2</sup> It also grounded the theological language of salvation and hope in concrete historical conditions,<sup>3</sup> which enabled liberation theologians to articulate salvation and hope in terms of the particular conditions of the poor and the oppressed in Latin America.

The transformative effect of Vatican II within Latin American countries facilitated by the synods of bishops at Medellín and Puebla as well as by Pope Paul VI’s encyclical *Populorum progressio* provided perhaps the most immediate context for the development of liberation theology. Vatican II’s urging of the Church to be attentive to the ‘signs of the times’, its articulation of the task of

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<sup>1</sup> Rebecca Chopp, *The Praxis of Suffering: An Interpretation of Liberation and Political Theologies* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1986), p. 19, 101.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

evangelization as bringing “deliverance to the human conditions, to cultures, [and] to social and familial relationships”, and its understanding of the Church as servant of the world found creative reception and rearticulation within the Latin American synods.<sup>4</sup> In the context of the Latin America church, the conferences at Medellín and Puebla understood the ‘signs of the times’ as “social injustices and forms of dehumanization”, they interpreted evangelization as “efforts to liberate and humanize the peoples”, and they saw the servant Church as characterized by its service to the poor and the oppressed.<sup>5</sup> Liberation theology emerged out of the synods’ interpretations of these themes as Segundo Galilea notes: “[T]he Medellín Conference may be regarded as the point of departure for this theology [of liberation].”<sup>6</sup>

Liberation theology’s treatment of Christian hope must be understood within this context as an articulation of hope for the poor and the oppressed. Thus, hope within liberation theology is a particular and historical hope, that is, it is particular to the poor and the oppressed and it is primarily a hope for liberation within history. Gustavo Gutierrez clearly understood this particularity of the kingdom for the poor as compatible with the kingdom’s basic inclusion of all people.<sup>7</sup> Sobrino, however, claims that Christian hope is a “partial hope” for the poor and the oppressed<sup>8</sup> and this assertion seems to go a step beyond the articulation of a particular hope and beyond the Medellín and Puebla interpretations of Vatican II. My treatment of the question “hope for whom?” in this paper primarily raises a critical question about the exclusivity implied by Sobrino’s understanding of the partiality of Christian hope. In critiquing Sobrino’s understanding of hope, it is not my intention to deny the unique and particular place that the poor and the oppressed have in the Kingdom of God. Nor is it my intention to lessen or excuse the responsibility of the rich as the oppressors of the poor. Rather, because I wish to uphold and protect the unique and particular claim that the poor and the oppressed have on kingdom and resurrection hope, I question Sobrino’s assertion of partiality which seems to oppose or at least make secondary the kingdom’s fundamental universality.

I begin my discussion of the question “hope for whom?” by critically searching for an answer to this question within the christologies of Jürgen

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<sup>4</sup> Segundo Galilea, “Latin America in the Medellín and Puebla Conferences: An Example of Selective and Creative Reception of Vatican II” found in *The Reception of Vatican II* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University Press, 1987), ed. by Giuseppe Alberigo, Jean-Pierre Jossua, and Joseph Komonchak, p. 63-65.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 65.

<sup>7</sup> Gustavo Gutierrez, “The Church and the Poor: A Latin American Perspective” found in *The Reception of Vatican II* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University Press, 1987), ed. by Giuseppe Alberigo, Jean-Pierre Jossua, and Joseph Komonchak, p. 179.

<sup>8</sup> Jon Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), p. 124.

Moltmann and Edward Schillebeeckx. These two theologians provide understandings of the universality of Christian hope which also emphasize the particularity of this hope for the poor and the oppressed. That is, their theologies attempt to hold in balance universality and particularity. By beginning with Moltmann and Schillebeeckx, I hope to make my critique of Sobrino's assertion of partiality more precise and offer a correction to Sobrino's approach rather than suggesting its rejection.

For Moltmann, Schillebeeckx and Sobrino, the proclamation of the kingdom of God through Jesus constitutes the basis for shaping their understanding of Christian hope. Yet, each of these theologians assumes a different starting point and presents varying themes of emphasis in approaching the three linked and interrelated segments of this proclamation, which are Jesus' life, death and resurrection.

Still, in spite of the differences in their approaches, the central issue of the universality and particularity or partiality of kingdom hope emerges in each of their christologies. A consideration of the particularity or partiality of Christian hope pushes us to seek specific answers to the question "hope for whom?" within each of these theologians' perspectives. It raises the more specific questions: Who in particular can hope that Jesus is "on their side" and whose cause does he take up in his life, death and resurrection? Does Jesus take up the cause of humanity, the cause of sinners, or the cause of victims? In what sense is the hope to be included in the kingdom of God a universal hope and in what sense is it a particular hope? In comparing Moltmann, Schillebeeckx and Sobrino on their treatments of these questions the issue of the inclusivity or exclusivity of the kingdom and Christian hope rises to the surface. Sobrino's liberation theology presents a narrower picture of who can hope to be included in the kingdom than do the theologies of Moltmann and Schillebeeckx. Their broader perspectives assert that the fundamental universality and inclusivity of the kingdom is the necessary precondition for its inclusion of any particular person or group of people.

In moving forward with this analysis, I first define an understanding of the content of Christian hope, that is, I address the question "hope for what?". Then I turn to the question "hope for whom?" by exploring this question within each of the christologies of Moltmann, Schillebeeckx and Sobrino. In my treatment of each of these theologians, I look at his interpretation of the kingdom as made manifest in Jesus' life, death and resurrection. I conclude each treatment with a brief analysis of the theologian's understanding of the universality and particularity of kingdom hope. Finally, I close this discussion by comparatively assessing their basic claims about the universality, particularity and partiality of Christian hope.

Before I turn my to the question "hope for whom?", it will be helpful for me to briefly specify a basic and mediating answer to the question "hope for what?".

For the purpose of my discussion here, I understand Christian hope as essentially consisting of two parts. First, it is a hope for salvation and eternal life – for a lasting place in the fully realized reign of God, which is still to come. Secondly, Christian hope is a hope for liberation within history. It is a hope to be free from the oppressing power of shame and guilt as well as from economic, social and political oppressors. This understanding of Christian hope is often referred to as hope for ‘integral salvation’. It is this understanding of hope as hope for integral salvation that I carry forward into my investigation of the question “hope for whom?”. I begin this investigation with the christology of Jürgen Moltmann.

Moltmann’s christology begins with the suffering of God in Jesus’ death on the cross, which he calls the “death in God” because he asserts that through Jesus’ death suffering entered into God himself. Thus, on the cross, God reveals himself as a ‘moved mover’ who suffers with humanity. In order to explore the question “hope for whom?” in this context, we will have to ask the questions: (1) for whom did Jesus suffer and die? And (2) who can identify with Jesus’ suffering and death? In understanding the “for whom?” in Jesus’ death, we will clarify Moltmann’s view of the “for whom?” of resurrection and kingdom hope.

Moltmann explores Jesus’ suffering and death through an examination of three trials each of which hands down a particular judgment upon Jesus. First, Jesus is condemned as a blasphemer for teaching with an authority “above the authority of Moses and the Torah.”<sup>9</sup> This makes Jesus guilty of the “blasphemy of self-deification.”<sup>10</sup> By preaching the reign of God as the justification of sinners by grace and not as judgment, Jesus undermines the law, deceives sinners and blasphemes the God of hope.<sup>11</sup> The second trial is the political trial before Pilate. In order to be sentenced to crucifixion, Jesus had to be misrepresented as a rebel. Moltmann claims that the political dimension of Jesus’ gospel, which had some similarities to the political aims of the Zealots, was misconstrued to have Jesus crucified as a rebel.<sup>12</sup> Thus, He was a victim of misunderstanding.

Finally, Jesus underwent a trial before God which resulted in his rejection by the Father. In the end, Jesus died godforsaken. Jesus’ death on the cross was an experience of profound abandonment in which the Father to whom he felt so intimately close throughout his life remained silent at the time of his greatest need. Moltmann argues that Jesus ultimately did not die because of the religious leaders’ understanding of the law, or the political power of Pilate, but rather he died

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<sup>9</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1974), p. 128.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 129.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Moltmann, p. 144.

because of the silence of the Father.<sup>13</sup> Jesus' words on the cross in Mark 15:34, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" expressed the suffering of Jesus crying out to his Father and claiming the Father's unique faithfulness to himself.<sup>14</sup> Thus, Jesus felt God's silence as his personal abandonment by the Father. This is the height of his suffering and the cause of his death. Simultaneously, the Father experiences the loss of his Son and suffers along with him. On the cross, God, in the persons of Father and Son, experiences suffering.

The hope brought about by the resurrection can only be understood from Moltmann's perspective if we understand Jesus as not just any man raised from the dead, but as one condemned and crucified by the oppressors of his people as a blasphemer and a rebel, and ultimately as one abandoned by God, his Father.<sup>15</sup> He died as a misunderstood, misrepresented and abandoned victim, so his death raises the question of the triumph of executioners over their victims. The resurrection of this victim proclaims that executioners will not triumph over victims, nor will victims triumph over their executioners, but rather Jesus who died for both victims and executioners will triumph.<sup>16</sup> The hope of the resurrection then is a hope for the falsely condemned and crucified, the godforsaken, the victim and the executioner. According to Moltmann, the resurrection brings to the world "the new righteousness," which "creates right both for the lawless and those outside the law."<sup>17</sup> Thus, both the lawless oppressors and the victims excluded by the law are offered hope within the new law inaugurated in the resurrection.

Yet to understand more clearly the "for whom?" of the resurrection, we need to say more about Jesus' suffering and death. On the cross, Jesus not only experiences abandonment by the Father, but in the humiliation of that abandonment, Jesus comes to the fullness of his humanity by sharing in the depths of human suffering. Thus, "[t]he incarnation of the Logos is completed on the cross."<sup>18</sup> In Jesus' humiliation and dehumanization, his becoming human is completed. Moltmann seems to claim that in becoming "the kind of man we do not want to be: an outcast, accursed, crucified,"<sup>19</sup> and in identifying with the least of humanity, Jesus becomes fully human and thus becomes one with all of humanity. Because Jesus' suffering becomes the Father's suffering, the Father too demonstrates his willingness to identify with and suffer out of love for humanity. Moltmann argues that God's true identity is revealed on the cross. Here, the truth of God is revealed in his humiliation, helplessness, self-surrender and humanity

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 149.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 150.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 175.

<sup>16</sup> Moltmann, p. 178.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 204-5.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 205.

because “[h]ere he himself is love with all his being.”<sup>20</sup> On the cross, God reveals himself as the God of freedom<sup>21</sup> who respects human freedom and then unites himself with the human suffering which results from that freedom.

In this context of understanding the cross as the completion of the Incarnation and the disclosure of God’s true identity, the question “for whom?” finds its clearest answer. In embracing complete self-humiliation and becoming fully human, God extends himself to all humanity without reservation: “He lowers himself and accepts the whole of mankind without limits and conditions, so that each man may participate in him with the whole of his life.”<sup>22</sup> For Moltmann, Jesus’ full humanity on the cross indicates that each individual can equally claim participation in his divinity. Moltmann does not see the distinctions between kinds of sinners that we will later see Sobrino finds. Rather, he argues that Jesus came to justify sinners by grace without distinction “whether they are Zealots or tax collectors, Pharisees or sinners, Jews or Samaritans, and therefore, also, whether they are Jews or Gentiles.”<sup>23</sup> Moltmann asserts this claim even more forcefully when he calls attention to the fact that the place of Jesus’ death, Golgotha, is outside Jerusalem at the boundary of society, where there are no distinctions among people.

It [Jesus’ crucifixion] happened, in fact, on the boundary of human society, where it does not matter whether a person is Jew or Gentile, Greek or barbarian, master or servant, man or woman, because death is unaware of these distinctions. So the crucified one does not recognize these distinctions either.<sup>24</sup>

One could add rich or poor, oppressors or oppressed, righteous or sinners to this list. “The ‘crucified’ God is the human God of all godless men and those who have been abandoned by God.”<sup>25</sup> Those who are inhumane (oppressors) and those treated inhumanely (the oppressed) are recognized equally by Jesus on the cross. Thus, although Moltmann does see Jesus’ death as the unjust death of a victim of misunderstanding, he does not subsequently see participation in and redemption through his death as belonging partially or primarily to victims. Instead, Moltmann argues that it is precisely in his death that Jesus identifies himself with the whole of humanity and all sinners without distinction.

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, p. 195.

<sup>22</sup> Moltmann, p. 276.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 142.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 194.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 195.

Because the resurrection can only be appropriately understood as “the resurrection of the crucified Christ,”<sup>26</sup> the hope of the resurrection has to be as inclusive, or as lacking in distinction, as Christ’s death. Thus, for Moltmann, hope of the resurrection is a universal hope by its very nature. Yet, in spite of its universality, hope of the resurrection particularly includes each individual in every position, inside or outside the boundaries of society. We could say that this hope is universally particular, that is, it is particular to all sinners, or all humanity. Because, through Jesus’ death and experience of abandonment, God allows suffering to enter into himself, he does identify particularly with those who suffer. Yet, this identification with those who suffer destroys old distinctions between the godforsaken and the godless and it does not negate the fundamental universality of resurrection hope. The resurrection of the crucified Christ institutes the kingdom of God: “Thus resurrection...is already itself the new creation.”<sup>27</sup> In this new creation, the righteousness of God is revealed “as grace which makes righteous and as the creator’s love of the godless.”<sup>28</sup> Moltmann clarifies further that the grace of the kingdom “makes both lawbreaker and lawless righteous.”<sup>29</sup> Thus, the kingdom of God, the new creation, the new righteousness, does not make distinctions, but rather extends itself to all humanity in the resurrection of Christ, the condemned, crucified and abandoned Son of God.

Edward Schillebeeckx interprets the relationship between Jesus and the Father on the cross differently than Moltmann, which leads him to a slightly different understanding of kingdom and resurrection hope. Schillebeeckx argues that, although Moltmann correctly understands the cross as a demonstration of God’s desire and choice to suffer with suffering humanity, nevertheless he incorrectly places the blame for Jesus’ death on God’s silence rather than on human injustice.<sup>30</sup> Schillebeeckx characterizes Jesus’ death not as an experience of abandonment and godforsakenness, like Moltmann, but as a personal experience of profound failure.<sup>31</sup> As Jesus approaches his death, he experiences the rejection of his preaching of the reign of God and, thus, he experiences the apparent failure of his entire life’s work and mission. In the face of this failure, Jesus experiences God’s hiddenness and silence. However, God’s hiddenness does not lead Jesus to feelings of abandonment but rather pushes Jesus to continue trusting in his Father’s presence even though he appears to be absent. This expression of trust in the hidden God during a real experience of failure creates the ground for hope.

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<sup>26</sup> Moltmann, p. 204.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 176.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 140.

<sup>30</sup> Edward Schillebeeckx, *Christ: The Experience of Jesus as Lord* (N.Y.: Crossroad, 1981), p. 728.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 825.

Only if Jesus really experienced failure in a limited but real dimension of our history...can his own experience of failure as a historical event provide any encouragement, productive or critical force towards helping men to cope with the problem of failure.<sup>32</sup>

It is precisely in the face of this failure that the true nature of God's power is revealed. The revelation of God's power turns on its head our concept of power because it is the power of defenselessness which disarms evil.<sup>33</sup> It is a "gratuitous action" which gains victory over the historical and empirical facts by choosing to stand vulnerable before them.<sup>34</sup> Thus, Jesus' faithfulness and trust in the midst of a real experience of failure in history demonstrates hope in something deeper and more powerful than the facts, namely, "the Lord of history."<sup>35</sup> This hope is a hope for personal validation through communion and relationship with God which will be unchanged by experiences of failure and the facts of history. This is the essence of Christian hope for Schillebeeckx.

Yet, Schillebeeckx asserts that resurrection hope is nothing more than "human longing" and Jesus' death is "sheer failure" if there are not signs of the resurrection within Jesus' life of preaching the kingdom.<sup>36</sup> Jesus' praxis of the kingdom anticipates his resurrection.<sup>37</sup> Hope of the resurrection then is closely associated with and grounded in the hope of the kingdom. Thus, for Schillebeeckx understanding Jesus' praxis of the kingdom is necessary for understanding the "for whom?" of resurrection hope.

Schillebeeckx defines the kingdom of God in terms of Jesus' association with the sick, the marginalized, tax collectors and sinners, the poor, "and finally in terms of all the oppressed."<sup>38</sup> Jesus' practice of table fellowship and his protection of the children thought to be a burden by the disciples demonstrates the "for whom?" of the kingdom, according to Schillebeeckx. The reign of God seeks out the outcasts, the poor and those like children. Schillebeeckx asserts that the poor in the New Testament refer to those that are "really socially and economically poor, exploited and oppressed."<sup>39</sup> Thus, as we will see shortly, he appears to be in agreement with Sobrino's classifications of the economic and sociologically poor.

The difference between Schillebeeckx and Sobrino will be seen in each of their understandings of what the kingdom brings to these poor. Schillebeeckx

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 824.

<sup>33</sup> Edward Schillebeeckx, *Church: The Human Story of God* (N.Y.: Crossroad, 1990), p. 90.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 95.

<sup>35</sup> Schillebeeckx, *Christ*, p. 831.

<sup>36</sup> Schillebeeckx, *Church*, p. 127.

<sup>37</sup> Praxis here means action and demonstration based on continued reflection and prayer.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 112.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 113.

acknowledges that liberation occurs within a cultural context and, therefore, “includes the recognition of systematic disruptions of communication like sexism, racism...and the Western cultural and religious sense of superiority.”<sup>40</sup> Yet, for Schillebeeckx, the kingdom of God does not mean “direct liberation from poverty, exploitation and oppression,” but rather it means rescuing “the poor from their sense of shame at being outcast.”<sup>41</sup> Freedom from shame is more basic and more difficult to achieve than freedom from economic and social oppression because it requires the direct intervention of God whereas the latter can be healed through human intervention.<sup>42</sup> Thus, Christian hope for liberation within history begins with and consists primarily of liberation from sin and shame rather than from poverty and economic and social oppression.

Although Schillebeeckx emphasizes the kingdom of God as a kingdom for the poor, this emphasis is rooted in a broader understanding of the kingdom: “The kingdom of God is a ‘kingdom of men and women’, a human kingdom.”<sup>43</sup> It is because the kingdom is a human kingdom that it “takes concrete form above all in justice and peaceful relationships among individuals and peoples.”<sup>44</sup> The poor and the oppressed have special significance in the realization of the kingdom because in their exclusion as outcasts the fullness of humanity is denied and undermined. Thus, the kingdom of God comes with the “abolition of the blatant contrast between rulers and ruled” and the elimination of social distinctions.<sup>45</sup>

But, how are these distinctions to be abolished and how much depends on human vs. divine intervention? Here, Jesus’ response to his experience of failure as he approaches death provides a model. Jesus spent his life proclaiming and building the kingdom by drawing close to outcasts and sinners and challenging the rich and the powerful. Yet, in the face of death, Jesus’ mission seems to have failed. However, in choosing to accept suffering and death with trust in God in spite of his hiddenness, Jesus allows God to achieve a victory which is greater than the historical and empirical facts of the rejection of his mission in the crucifixion. Thus, Jesus’ example suggests that the elimination of distinction and division in society comes through human initiative toward the loving inclusion of sinners and outcasts. Yet, at the same time, individuals must respond to the failure, which will inevitably accompany this initiative, by continuing to trust in the God who is often hidden and silent. Liberation within history through the abolition of social divisions, therefore, requires human praxis carried out with loving trust in the Father, but that praxis is not rendered ineffective by human failure because the

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<sup>40</sup> Schillebeeckx, *Church*, p. 132.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> Schillebeeckx, *Christ*, p. 833.

<sup>43</sup> Schillebeeckx, *Church*, p. 112.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 111-2.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 112.

'Lord of history' holds the final say even in the face of failure, injustice and death. As Schillebeeckx says, "God's transcendent overcoming of human failure is historically incorporated in Jesus' never-ceasing love for God and man, during and in the historical moment of his failure on the cross."<sup>46</sup> Jesus' trust in the Father during his real experience of failure on the cross was a definitive success which made God's overcoming of human failure a historical reality.

On the cross, Jesus illustrates the "positive link between the 'kingdom of God' and the 'kingdom of human freedom'."<sup>47</sup> God's overcoming of human failure does not involve a removal of human experiences of failure, which naturally accompany human freedom. God's kingdom does not enact its authority through force or oppression, which would violate human freedom. Rather, God's power manifests itself in defenselessness, vulnerability and love, which respect and enable human freedom. Schillebeeckx asserts that the connection between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of human freedom is inherent in creation because in creation God assents to "a sort of 'divine yielding', making room for the other."<sup>48</sup> And "[b]y giving creative space to human beings, God makes himself vulnerable."<sup>49</sup> On the cross, Jesus demonstrates the love of God which leaves room for human freedom while at the same time overcoming human failure by disarming evil with defenselessness. God's recurring action in history to eliminate divisions and distinctions continues to demonstrate the positive link between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of human freedom.

Schillebeeckx's caution against a condemnation of the rich and the oppressors, when seeking a means to abolish the division between rulers and ruled, rich and poor, reflects this understanding of the relationship between the kingdom of God and human freedom. He argues that humanity is redeemed despite Jesus' death on the cross and this redemption despite his death has to be understood in terms of "the refusal of Jesus to look for a culprit."<sup>50</sup> It does not facilitate the kingdom to make a culprit out of this or that person or group of people even if they have failed to live up to the love of the kingdom. Looking for a culprit violates the kingdom of God because it encroaches on human freedom. God's respect for human freedom requires leaving room for and remaining open to the rich and the oppressors. Making them into culprits falls short of this openness. Jesus demonstrates the kingdom by associating particularly with the poor and outcasts, while at the same time respecting human freedom by refusing to exclude the rich and the oppressors in labeling them as culprits.

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<sup>46</sup> Schillebeeckx, *Christ*, p. 830.

<sup>47</sup> Schillebeeckx, *Church*, p. 88.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 90.

<sup>49</sup> Schillebeeckx, *Church*, p. 90.

<sup>50</sup> Schillebeeckx, *Christ*, p. 730.

Thus, for Schillebeeckx, the kingdom is particularly for the poor precisely because it is a universal, human kingdom. The universality of the kingdom is the necessary precondition for its particularity. We further the kingdom by emphasizing its particularity for those who are being excluded while at the same time maintaining its universality in refusing to exclude those who are doing the excluding. Any understanding of the particularity of the kingdom for the poor that does not arise out of its fundamental and constant universality violates human freedom and, therefore, misinterprets the kingdom.

Coming from the viewpoint of the Third World in El Salvador, Sobrino brings the experiences of the poor and the oppressed into his interpretation of the kingdom. He sees the kingdom of God proclaimed and made manifest by Jesus as especially the kingdom for the poor.<sup>51</sup> Borrowing from Moltmann, Sobrino understands the death of Jesus on the cross as the ‘crucified God.’<sup>52</sup> However, he goes beyond Moltmann by interpreting the death of Jesus, a condemned, crucified, and abandoned victim, as an indication of God’s partiality toward victims. This understanding of Jesus’ death along with his understanding of Jesus’ ministry as directed specifically toward the poor and those oppressed by society allow him to approach the resurrection from the view of the victims and thus to interpret Christian hope as primarily the “hope of victims.”<sup>53</sup> Thus, for Sobrino, hope of the resurrection is, at least initially, “a partial hope” belonging particularly to all those ignored, abandoned and crucified in history.<sup>54</sup> This hope can become universal only when those of us who are not “victims” in the particular sense of the poor and the oppressed or those of us whom Sobrino calls the “non-poor” share and “participate, analogously, in the life and death of victims.”<sup>55</sup> In order for hope in the resurrection to become real and personal for us, we must first share in the crosses of our time in history. Sobrino argues that these crosses are found in the lives and deaths of the innocent victims of the Third World.

In order to appreciate Sobrino’s claiming of the hope of the resurrection as primarily a hope for victims, it is first necessary to understand his view of the kingdom of God made visible and initiated by Jesus’ ministry. Sobrino says that “liberation theology deliberately chooses the Kingdom of God and not the resurrection as ‘ultimate’” because it is the kingdom of God that has the power for showing us “how to live in history,”<sup>56</sup> that is, it informs our praxis. For Sobrino, hope only has meaning when it is grounded in a particular praxis. The particular struggles and sufferings that we undergo to make our lives meaningful create the

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<sup>51</sup> Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, p. 79.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 233.

<sup>53</sup> Jon Sobrino, *Christ the Liberator* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001), p. 15.

<sup>54</sup> Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, p. 124.

<sup>55</sup> Sobrino, *Christ the Liberator*, p. 43.

<sup>56</sup> Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, p. 124.

context necessary for hope to make sense. Thus, the praxis of the kingdom demonstrated by Jesus is the necessary context for the hope of the resurrection to make sense. We can only share in the hope of the resurrection if we have reflected on Jesus' particular mission and taken it up in our own lives. This particular mission seeks out sinners (or those labeled as sinners by society), the poor, and the oppressed. We will see that, for Sobrino, Christian hope refers primarily to a hope for liberation within history.

Sobrino places particular emphasis on understanding the kingdom by "the way of the addressee" because if the kingdom of God is "good news," then it is the audience of the kingdom who "will intrinsically clarify what is 'good' in the news."<sup>57</sup> Sobrino states that the addressee of the kingdom made manifest in Jesus is clearly the poor and the kingdom's relationship to the poor "appears as a relationship as of right, based on the very nature of God."<sup>58</sup> Thus, God loves the poor and addresses the kingdom to them precisely because they are poor. Sobrino, then, has the task of defining who Jesus understood as the poor when he addressed the kingdom of God to them specifically. Sobrino distinguishes between two classes of poor described in the Synoptic gospels.<sup>59</sup> First, there are "those who groan under some type of basic need" and they include the hungry, the thirsty, the naked, the mourning, and the imprisoned.<sup>60</sup> They are those "weighed down by a real burden" and Sobrino calls these the "economic poor" because they are denied that which is "basic and primary in life."<sup>61</sup> Second, the poor are "those despised by the ruling society" and they include prostitutes, publicans, and sinners.<sup>62</sup> They are those viewed as "the least" and Sobrino calls these the "sociologically poor" because they are denied the minimum of human dignity.<sup>63</sup> Sobrino includes sinners in this category but by sinners here he refers to those whom the ruling society has labeled as sinners.

These two classes of poor together make up "those at the bottom" of society; and for Sobrino "being at the bottom...means being oppressed by those on top."<sup>64</sup> The kingdom is addressed especially to these poor, then, because they are oppressed. Jesus showed "undoubted partiality" to both classes of poor.<sup>65</sup> He demonstrated this partiality through his shared meals with publicans and sinners, which scandalized those at the center of society, 'those on top'.<sup>66</sup> His parables also

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 70.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 79-80.

<sup>59</sup> The Synoptic gospels include the gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke. It excludes the Gospel of John.

<sup>60</sup> Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, p. 80.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p. 81.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p. 103-4.

caused scandal because they proclaimed the partiality of the kingdom for the poor.<sup>67</sup> Jesus' healings and exorcisms are primarily "signs against oppression" because they give reason to hope that the "ultimate" oppressive power of evil can be undone and is, therefore, not ultimate.<sup>68</sup> They demonstrate the kingdom addressed to those poor oppressed by evil. Thus, in his meals, his telling of parables and his performing of healings and exorcisms, Jesus clearly and consistently makes visible the partiality of the kingdom for both classes of poor.

Sobrinó goes on to examine Jesus' concern for sinners. Here, Sobrinó distinguishes between two categories of sinners in the Synoptics, just as he did in his treatment of the poor. First, there are those who are "oppressors" and they sin by "oppressing, placing intolerable burdens on others, [and] acting unjustly."<sup>69</sup> We could think of these sinners as those who sin from power. This contrasts with Sobrinó's second category which is "those who sin from weakness."<sup>70</sup> He equates this group with "those 'legally considered sinners'."<sup>71</sup> This second type of sinner seems closely associated with or almost equivalent to the sociologically poor described above. Those who sin from weakness must be those who are denied the minimum of human dignity by being oppressed by those in power. This linking of the sociologically poor, or those viewed as 'the least', with those legally considered sinners fits well with Sobrinó's claim that Jesus welcomed sinners more than forgave sins.<sup>72</sup> In essence, Jesus gives back dignity to the least and those labeled as sinners by welcoming them into relationship.

Sobrinó states that Jesus offers salvation to both types of sinners, the oppressors and the oppressed, but he offers it to each differently. For those who sin from power, the kingdom can only approach them if they put an end to their oppression. For those who sin from weakness, inclusion in the coming kingdom simply requires an acceptance of God as love and therefore it approaches them much more easily. Based on his distinction between types of sinners and degrees of sin, Sobrinó implies that, although the kingdom is for all sinners, it is especially addressed to those who sin from weakness, those labeled as sinners, those who are victims of oppression. By identifying the principle of liberation for this second group of sinners as Jesus' welcoming initiative, Sobrinó acknowledges the need for liberation from sin and shame, or from an "inner principle of enslavement."<sup>73</sup>

However, in spite of Sobrinó's affirmation of the need for liberation from sin and shame, he seems to imply that first priority goes to liberation from economic

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 100.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p. 89.

<sup>69</sup> Sobrinó, *Jesus the Liberator*, p. 96.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Sobrinó, *Jesus the Liberator*, p. 97.

and material poverty. He sees Jesus' pity in healing the sick and feeding the hungry crowds as an indication that Jesus saw something ultimate in material and bodily suffering and thus his pity for the economic poor and the physically unprotected was foremost and "not to be superseded by anything."<sup>74</sup> Jesus' pity for sin and the sociologically poor, while still a priority, must then come second. This emphasis on economic and social liberation over psychological liberation from sin and shame distinguishes Sobrino from Schillebeeckx. Both assert that liberation must occur to some extent on both these levels and that resurrection hope includes a hope for liberation within history, yet, they make opposing claims about which form of liberation is primary. Sobrino's assertion of the priority of economic and material liberation tends toward an overlooking of Schillebeeckx's claim that Jesus refused to look for a culprit. By emphasizing economic and material oppression, Sobrino also highlights the economic and material oppressors and opens the door for labeling them as culprits.

This increased potential for labeling culprits becomes clearer in Sobrino's treatment of the kingdom's relationship to the rich or those included under Sobrino's label the 'non-poor'. Sobrino points out Jesus' frequent denunciations of the rich and calls it "an absolute denunciation...that nothing can soften."<sup>75</sup> Sobrino interprets Jesus' analogy between the camel passing through the eye of a needle and the rich man entering the kingdom (Mk 10:25-27) as a demonstration that riches in and of themselves "ultimately mean damnation."<sup>76</sup> Thus, when the disciples ask who can be saved, Jesus replies that God can make possible what is impossible for mortals. For Sobrino, this means that God will make it possible for the rich to denounce their riches and thus gain the hope of the kingdom.<sup>77</sup> Sobrino gets more specific about what it means for the rich to denounce their riches when he says:

The solution has to be found in the line of lowering themselves to material poverty in the form of...real service to and support of the materially poor, of sharing in and taking on the fate of the poor...[and] in this to establish a real relationship with the materially poor and with real poverty.<sup>78</sup>

Thus, the non-poor can have hope in the kingdom only in so far as they lower themselves to share in the life of the poor. To participate analogously in the hope of the kingdom a hope for victims, the rich must in some real and material way give up their riches and identify with victims of material and economic poverty.

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., p. 90.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p. 171.

<sup>76</sup> Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, p. 171.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p. 172.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p. 128.

Sobrino, then, maintains the universality of kingdom hope in spite of its partiality for the poor by way of analogy. He argues that the universality of the kingdom is lost if it becomes a rejection of its partiality. The poor and oppressed are the majority in the world and, therefore, a universality which fails to take them particularly and even partially into account is not very universal at all.<sup>79</sup> In light of this understanding of the kingdom for the poor, the hope of the resurrection “is not the universal hope of an afterlife, but a partial hope – which can later be universalized – for the victims of this world.”<sup>80</sup> The universalization of this hope comes through the analogous sharing in the lives of victims. Sobrino argues that we cannot understand this hope as equally addressed to everyone by spiritualizing the poor so that all persons can be counted among them in some way because this spiritualization dilutes the essence of what the kingdom of God is. He specifically renounces Walter Kasper’s understanding of the kingdom as the “Kingdom of Love” for this very reason. As an “abstract-universal” it loses its sense of the true nature and specificity of the kingdom and “becomes practically interchangeable with other theological realities.”<sup>81</sup>

Sobrino’s understanding of Jesus’ death and resurrection is grounded in this partiality and specificity of the kingdom. His explication of the significance of the cross is largely based on Moltmann’s theology of the “crucified God,” described above. Sobrino summarizes this significance in terms of the “God of solidarity” when he says:

[I]n history there is no such thing as love without solidarity and there is no solidarity without incarnation...Solidarity in a world of victims that was not prepared to become a victim would in the end not be solidarity.<sup>82</sup>

Thus, Jesus’ death was the death of a victim in solidarity with all the victims in history. Sobrino goes beyond Moltmann by claiming that Yahweh’s Suffering Servant is present in history as the victims or “crucified peoples” of the world.<sup>83</sup> We can take up the cross of Christ today by taking up the crosses of these victims. The hope of the resurrection is clarified by the life and death of Jesus as the life and death of a victim in history as well as by the lives and deaths of the countless victims today. Sobrino adds one reflection regarding the resurrection as an indication of the kingdom’s partiality for the poor. He notes the command in Mark’s gospel: “But go...to Galilee; there you will see him” (16:7).<sup>84</sup> Because “Galilee is the place of the poor and the despised,” Sobrino suggests that this

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., p. 82.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p. 124.

<sup>81</sup> Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, p. 121.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., p. 245.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., p. 255.

<sup>84</sup> Sobrino, *Christ the Liberator*, p. 14.

command reflects Mark's theological interpretation that the risen Christ is to be found among the economic and sociologically poor.<sup>85</sup> For Sobrino, the cross and the resurrection continue the manifestation of the kingdom of God as a kingdom partially for the poor.

Moltmann and Schillebeeckx both assert the fundamental universality of the kingdom in ways which lead to a broader interpretation of Christian hope than Sobrino's understanding allows. Moltmann begins his christology with the cross and claims that in Jesus' death and resurrection God institutes a new kingdom which embraces the godless and the godforsaken, the lawless and the lawbreakers alike. In Jesus' abandonment on the cross, God freely allows the suffering of humanity, resulting from human freedom, to enter into himself. The hope of the resurrection in light of Jesus' death is a hope for all suffering humanity and all sinners without distinction. Yet, Moltmann leaves room for victims to hope for God's identification with them particularly without undermining the universality of Christian hope. Schillebeeckx asserts this same universality based on Jesus' demonstration of the kingdom throughout his life, in which he welcomed the poor, sinners and all the oppressed, while, at the same time, refusing to violate human freedom by labeling the oppressors as culprits. Such a violation of human freedom in looking for a culprit would have undermined the kingdom of God. Thus, for both Moltmann and Schillebeeckx, Christian hope is a universal hope right from the beginning. It does not become universalized by analogy. The kingdom's particularity is made possible by this fundamental universality.

Sobrino argues that the universality of kingdom hope can only come about through a recognition of its partiality for the poor: it is "a partial hope – which can later be universalized."<sup>86</sup> Sobrino's assertion of the kingdom's partiality undermines its fundamental universality. If the non-poor share in the hope of the kingdom only by lowering themselves and participating analogously in the lives of victims, then universality appears to be analogous to the kingdom rather than intrinsic to it. If all individuals cannot share in kingdom hope directly at some level then the universality of the kingdom seems to be an extrinsic possibility that we are trying to hold on to rather than a foundational reality. Interpreting the particularity of the kingdom for the poor as a partiality fails to understand its particularity as necessarily grounded in its universality and, therefore, ultimately denies them both.

Sobrino correctly asserts that "if the reality of Jesus' resurrection is not made present in history in some form, then it will remain as something totally extrinsic to us."<sup>87</sup> However, by claiming that the resurrection is partially present in

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<sup>85</sup> Sobrino, *Christ the Liberator*, p. 14.

<sup>86</sup> Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, p. 124.

<sup>87</sup> Sobrino, *Christ the Liberator*, p. 13.

the lives of the poor and the oppressed to the extent that the non-poor can only share in it analogously, Sobrino makes the resurrection largely extrinsic to many. The reality of the resurrection must be accessible to all individuals before it can have a particular significance to anyone. Spiritualizing poverty and oppression does dilute the true force of Jesus' life and message as Sobrino claims. However, if one is not able to identify what is poor and oppressed within oneself because one cannot directly participate in the cross and resurrection, then one will never be free to share in the life of another. Freedom from one's own "inner principle of enslavement," to use Sobrino's language,<sup>88</sup> is a necessary precondition for the freedom to live for others and this is true for the poor and non-poor alike.

Thus, it seems to me that Schillebeeckx's understanding of the necessary interdependence of the kingdom's particularity and universality provides a healthy caution and corrective for Sobrino. The hope of the kingdom and the hope of the resurrection is a human hope which God offers directly to all individuals in the person of Jesus. Because it is a universal, human hope, God offers it particularly to those who are excluded, while at the same time refusing to label as culprits those who are doing the excluding and thereby excluding them. Claiming the hope of the kingdom as a partial hope for victims does not allow for this interdependence because partiality and universality are inherently opposed. If God offers this hope partially to victims, then some are initially excluded and are forced to seek reinclusion. By asserting the link between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of human freedom, Schillebeeckx maintains that all persons must be free to share in this hope directly. In revealing his power, not through force and coercion, but through defenselessness, vulnerability and love, God respects human freedom even to the point of death on the cross and he holds the doors of the kingdom open for all persons, even those oppressors who have victimized and crucified him.

If Christian hope is a hope for integral salvation, i.e., a hope for both eternal life in the coming kingdom and for liberation from all forms of oppression within history, then it must be a hope which is fundamentally and directly accessible to all persons. Because this hope necessarily includes a hope for liberation from economic and social oppression, the victims of the Third World have great reason to rejoice in claiming this hope as their own. This particular claim on kingdom hope by the poor and the oppressed also has direct and legitimate implications for the lifestyles of the rich or non-poor in the First World. However, hope for integral salvation also includes a hope for eternal life, i.e., the final, personal and unique validation of one's personhood through lasting communion with a loving God in the fully realized kingdom. This is the ultimate fulfillment of Christian hope. Therefore, the claiming of this hope by the economically and socially oppressed

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<sup>88</sup> Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, p. 97.

cannot diminish its immediate accessibility to all persons, including the rich. Indeed, this would deny the very openness and inclusivity of the kingdom which Christ demonstrates through vulnerability and love. The openness that Christ embodies in complete defenselessness on the cross reveals that Christian hope must be a hope which God offers uniquely, particularly and directly to each and every individual. It is a fundamentally universal hope.

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