

# philippine studies

Ateneo de Manila University · Loyola Heights, Quezon City · 1108 Philippines

---

## **The Bible and Liberation, Political and Social Hermeneutics**

Review Author: Philip J. Calderone, S.J.

*Philippine Studies* vol. 31, no. 4 (1983) 503–505

Copyright © Ateneo de Manila University

---

Philippine Studies is published by the Ateneo de Manila University. Contents may not be copied or sent via email or other means to multiple sites and posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's written permission. Users may download and print articles for individual, noncommercial use only. However, unless prior permission has been obtained, you may not download an entire issue of a journal, or download multiple copies of articles.

Please contact the publisher for any further use of this work at [philstudies@admu.edu.ph](mailto:philstudies@admu.edu.ph).

<http://www.philippinestudies.net>  
Fri June 27 13:30:20 2008

Philippine political scene. Salanga speaks in his review of the social responsibility of the writer, and gives Jose high marks for his courage to "speak out the truth that will, sooner or later, set us free." But even without the undertones of political allegory, these are stories of quality and talent. Jose is an author to be reckoned with in contemporary Philippine writing in English.

*Joseph A. Galdon, S.J.*

THE BIBLE AND LIBERATION. POLITICAL AND SOCIAL HERMENEUTICS. Edited by Norman K. Gottwald. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1983. xii + 542 pages.

This anthology of biblical essays is a revised and expanded version of a *Radical Religion Reader* published in 1976 under the same title, and with Norman Gottwald as one of two editors. Its purpose, as expressed in the Introduction, is: (1) to bring to light the actual social struggles of our biblical ancestors and to locate the human and religious resources they drew upon, and (2) to tap the biblical and social struggles and religious understandings as important resources for directing us in our social struggles. Liberation is the central theme of this volume, but the articles deal with the broader methodology of sociological analysis and interpretation of the Bible, and with various specific applications in the Old and New Testaments.

In 1976 it was difficult to find a wide range of articles on liberation in English; in this revision at least twenty of the twenty-eight are from English writers. Seventeen authors contributed from North America; three from Latin America, and four from Europe. Asia is represented by only two reviewers of Gottwald's monumental work, *The Tribes of Yahweh*: a European professor of Scripture in India and a Chinese director of a China program for the National Council of Churches in New York. (This meager representation will obviously disappoint Philippine readers. And Africa, it would seem, does not exist at all! ) Most of the authors are scholars and academic teachers in the Bible and Religion, prominent in their fields. But other approaches are presented by a pastor, a director and teacher in church schools, a community organizer. Besides two addresses and seven essays from the original *Reader*, there is a score of articles collected from various books and professional journals.

Sociological analysis of the Bible has been spreading in exegetical work and academic research, and should soon be taking its place as a necessary partner with the historical method that involves the familiar scholarly methods of literary and historical analysis. There are now many exegetical articles and books utilizing sociological data, tools, and analysis, but there seems to be no fundamental general work with applications of sociological

method in Bible studies. The first edition of this anthology, which apparently was popular in the USA and was quickly exhausted, is inaccessible in the Philippines. Even references to it in the usual biblical and theological journals are virtually non-existent. This revised anthology clearly fills a real need in offering a fundamental presentation of sociological method in biblical studies that could lead to effective liberating insights and energies. Not everyone will be pleased with the heavy dose of liberation theology, nor with the several explicitly Marxist essays. But this is a basic textbook with a variety of topics that should appeal to different interests and stimulate the study of interrelated themes. The publisher, Orbis Books, has been in the forefront in bringing works on liberation to a wider reading public, and is to be congratulated for their latest contribution that should prove to be one of their most popular and helpful volumes.

The articles are presented in five major sections. Part I, "Social Scientific Method in Biblical Studies," deals with basics: B.J. Malina, "The Social Sciences and Biblical Interpretation" (pp. 11-25); N.K. Gottwald, "Sociological Method in the Study of Ancient Israel" (pp. 26-37); and G. Theissen, "The Sociological Interpretations of Religious Traditions: Its Methodological Problems as Exemplified in Early Christianity" (pp. 38-58).

Part II, "Social Class as a Hermeneutical Factor," puts the emphasis on the poor in the Bible and on social-class factors that influence the understanding of the Bible. A definite leftist and Marxist orientation is present, as is evident even from the titles: S. Rostagno, "The Bible: Is an Interclass Reading Legitimate?" (pp. 61-73); D. Lochhead, "The Liberation of the Bible" (pp. 74-93); J.L. Hardegree, Jr., "Bible Study for Marxist Christians: The Book of Hosea" (pp. 94-107); G.V. Pixley, "Biblical Embodiments of God's Kingdom: A Study Guide for the Rebel Church" (pp. 108-18); C. Messers, "The Use of the Bible in Christian Communities of the Common People" (pp. 119-33); and K. Füssel, "The Materialist Reading of the Bible: Report on an Alternative Approach to Biblical Texts" (pp. 134-46).

Part III consists of "Sociological Readings of the Old Testament." It contains an interesting discussion of Gottwald's book — "Theological Issues in *The Tribes of Yahweh* by N.K. Gottwald: Four Critical Reviews," by A. Myers, W. Brueggemann, F.J. Woo, and L. Legrand (pp. 166-89); and Gottwald's own response, "The Theological Task after *The Tribes of Yahweh*" (pp. 190-200). In addition there are the following: F.S. Frick and N.K. Gottwald, "The Social World of Ancient Israel" (pp. 149-65); P.R. Wilson, "Prophecy and Society in Ancient Israel" (pp. 201-34); H. Mottu, "Jeremiah vs. Hananiah: Ideology and Truth in Old Testament Prophecy" (pp. 235-51); P. A. Bird, "Images of Women in the Old Testament" (pp. 252-88); C.L. Meyers, "The Roots of Restriction: Women in Early Israel" (pp. 289-306); and W. Brueggemann, "Trajectories in Old Testament Literature and the Sociology of Ancient Israel" (pp. 307-33).

Part IV, "Sociological Readings of the New Testament," contains seven substantial essays: R. Scroggs, "The Sociological Interpretation of the New Testament: The Present State of Research" (pp. 337-56); J.P. Brown, "Techniques of Imperial Control: The Background of the Gospel Event" (pp. 357-77); G.V. Pixley, "God's Kingdom in First-Century Palestine: The Strategy of Jesus" (pp. 378-93); E.S. Fiorenza, "'You are Not to Be Called Father': Early Christian History in a Feminist Perspective" (pp. 394-417); L. Schottruff, "Women as Followers of Jesus in New Testament Times: An Exercise in Social-Historical Exegesis of the Bible" (pp. 418-27); J.G. Gager, "Social Description and Sociological Explanation in the Study of Early Christianity: A Review Essay" (pp. 428-40); and R.H. Smith, "Were the Early Christians Middle-Class? A Sociological Analysis of the New Testament" (pp. 441-57).

The final section of the book Part V: "The Bible in Political Theology and Marxist Thought," views the Bible in "current radical theology and political thought." Four representative essays are included: A.F. McGovern, "The Bible in Latin American Liberation Theology" (pp. 461-72); A Fierro, "Exodus Event and Interpretation in Political Theologies" (pp. 473-81); J.L. Segundo, "Faith and Ideologies in Biblical Revelation" (pp. 482-96); and R.J. Siebert, "Jacob and Jesus: Recent Marxist Readings of the Bible" (pp. 497-517).

The three indexes of Scriptural References, Names, and Subjects (pp. 519-44) render this anthology eminently usable.

*Philip J. Calderone, S.J.*

**THE MEN WHO PLAY GOD.** By Arturo B. Rotor. Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1983. 147 pages.

The men who play God are doctors, as the title story in this collection says. And indeed they weigh the pros and cons of a patient's case with the ease of deities who award antibiotics and bedspace instead of eternal beauty and everlasting life. The irony in the title story is sharp; the contrastive imagery between the excerpts from a historical document and the painful throb of life in the hospital itself lends deep pathos; the medical language (as in all the stories) establishes authenticity; and the stark reality of the business of healing ("Admit the patient whose clinical condition furnishes interesting material for study, investigation and research. . . . Do not admit the hopeless, for whom nothing can be done, no terminal cancer, advanced liver disease or contagious disease.") sears the unwary mind. But the second story with the rather intriguing title of "The Orchid of Five Wounds" and the "The Balik-bayan Doctor" are easily the best in the collection.

"The Orchid of Five Wounds" plays with what one might term "literary brinkmanship." Its formula has been tried and found wanting: the young and restless resident, the hopelessly blind, tremulously lovely sixteen-year old