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Feet-on-the-ground Theology

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to convert the individual in the depth of one's being. Liberation theology, notes Barbé, still lacks an adequate approach to "human interiority".

But Barbé pushes even further, posing a gentle question to those who have felt forced to use violence in their struggles for justice: "When we overcome power by force... could there not have been in this attitude a fatal germ of mistrust with regard to grace?" (73). In fact, argues Barbé, the Latin American people already know how to struggle for justice in a nonviolent way, and in a moving chapter concluding the book, he documents the growth of this spiritually-based nonviolent movement in Brazil.

Grace and Power is a book that reflects the dynamic quality of the theology being developed in Latin America in our time. In the opinion of this reader, it engages the existing discussion in creative and exciting ways; it is a book that deserves to be read and pondered by any who have doubted the spiritual vitality of Liberation Theology. Still, a word of caution: the book is more like a fugue than a ditty; it is possibly too eclectic and nuanced in its approach to serve as a first-time introduction to the subject. The reader must be ready to move at a moment's notice from the gritty slums of Sao Paulo to a discussion of Trinitarian theology, then on to an argument with Marx. While the trip is worth taking by all who have an interest in theology, it would be appreciated best by those with at least a rudimentary introduction to Liberation Theology and the issues it has posed.

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Feet on the Ground Theology: A Brazilian Journey

Clodovis Boff

Translated by Phillip Berryman

Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1987 (1984)

xv + 185 pp.

The title of Clodovis Boff's diary musings, reflections and appeals has an appropriately double meaning. Quite literally it portrays his mission and pastoral journeys among the base Christian communities in the Brazilian hinterland where the exploited rubber workers toil. Much of his voyage is on foot, and we are treated to this reality even to the point of descriptions of the fatigue and physical hardships endured by Boff himself in these travels. However, the title has another more profound meaning. It is a diary of theological description and reflection in and about the concrete stuff of life. Boff does not serve up an organized, systematic *weltanschauung* disembodied from people's lives. Instead, he speaks of the daily experiences and religious struggles of the marginalized and oppressed people among whom

he moves and serves in this pastoral visit. In short, the so-called "praxis-reflection-praxis" model of doing liberation theology is here displayed in all its compelling splendour.

To the systematically minded the book will be extremely frustrating. It does not fit that mode, nor does it try. Instead, it has its own *raison d'être*. It is a diary, a journey, and it addresses itself as a thoughtful response to the presence of the gospel among the forgotten baptized. And these marginalized, oppressed and poor are not concepts in the book. They are real people, with strengths and foibles, and they have real names. They speak with their own voices throughout the book, and their stories individually and collectively are an honest and concrete picture of the base Christian community life in Brazil. One reads of their work, their marital and family life, their games, their sense of humour, their food, their illnesses and their superstitions. The reader is confronted with their Bible study, their prayer life, their sacramental practices, their relation with Protestants, their internal church squabbles, their retreats and training sessions, their successes and failures. In short, we are given a glimpse into the colorful totality of their life. Finally, Boff does manage a fair number of outright theological analyses and reflections, but interestingly enough, they are the kind of theologizing done by our own parish clergy in a pastoral context. They are much more like the material found in a parish adult education class than what we would read among the First World's theological masters.

Feet on the Ground Theology is a profound challenge to all of us who live and minister in a middle-class, North American *ecclesia*. It offers to us a sense of the profound simplicity of the gospel and an opportunity to break out of culturally confining ideas and constructs. Further, it serves to obliterate myths about liberation theology so common in the North American church. Notions of base Christian communities as fire-breathing communist cells with a phony veneer of Christianity is patently absurd, and Boff's descriptions expose such a fraudulent opinion.

Above all, this book is a direct call to us to re-think our notions of church. In one reflection, Boff puts it this way: "I had a very strong sense that today the BCC's really represent a way of returning to the early church, the church of Peter and the other Apostles, the church of the Virgin Mary and the other holy women. That means a church that's plain, made up of ordinary persons, austere and poor. A church that's human and yet full of the Holy Spirit. A church that's primarily lay, where priests are the ones most ready to serve. A church that's missionary and persecuted, and yet joyful" (130). To be such a church is to be liberated, and that is the gospel that emerges in each step of *Feet on the Ground Theology*.

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