

THE POLITICS OF THE CRUCIFIED: THE CROSS IN THE POLITICAL THEOLOGY OF YODER, BOFF, AND SOBRINO, by John C. Peet, Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2021. 303 pages. \$40 paperback.

In his recent book, *The Politics of the Crucified: The Cross in the Political Theology of Yoder, Boff, and Sobrino*, retired Church of England vicar and Methodist minister John C. Peet constructively outlines a contemporary political theology of the cross. In the post-Christendom West, Peet seeks to show how a cruciform political theology, untethered from Christendom's synthesis of ecclesiastical and secular rule, is both faithful to the politics of Jesus and offers a penetrating theoretical critique of contemporary views of power and social influence. To develop this cruciform political theology, Peet engages Mennonite theologian John Howard Yoder and liberation theologians Leonardo Boff and Jon Sobrino. By critically and charitably drawing on these theologians, Peet explores how the cross and resurrection of Jesus redefines and redirects our understanding of power and shapes the church into a beatitude community of solidarity, resistance, and hope in conformity with the kenotic character of God in the economy of salvation.

The book consists of twelve chapters arranged into four parts. Chapters one to three examine how Yoder, Boff, and Sobrino have drawn on the historical and contextual death of Jesus on the cross to articulate their political theologies of the cross (40–67). They also describe how the cross is situated within and coherent with the whole of their respective theological projects, i.e., how their political understanding of the cross informs their Christology and soteriology (20–39).

Chapters four to six examine how in the work of Yoder, Boff, and Sobrino, for different theological reasons and emphases, the cross of Jesus is definitive for Christian political ethics (68–81), the nature and posture of Christian discipleship (82–95), and shapes the Christian's response to violence and oppression (96–113). For Yoder, the nature of Christian politics and discipleship must be in cruciform conformity to the nonviolent suffering of the crucified Jesus, which calls into question the use of violent power by the world's politics (68–72; 82–87). For Boff and Sobrino, the cross is the definitive example of Christ's suffering and, simultaneously, a protest against the suffering imposed on him by the Roman imperium and the Jewish authorities (54; 72). For Jesus and his people to accept the crosses imposed on them by their oppressors and experience martyrdom nullifies the autonomy of the oppressor and starkly points to an alternative social order and use of power (87–94).

Chapters seven and eight focus on the church as a concrete community in the world. Chapter seven focuses on Yoder's cruciform ecclesiology, and chapter eight focuses on Sobrino's discussion of the "crucified people." Drawing on the work of liberation theologian Ignacio Ellacuría, Sobrino sees a connection between Jesus's suffering on the cross and the suffering of Latin America's poor and oppressed peoples. Sobrino's understanding of Christ's solidarity with the crucified people provides a foil for Peet to describe how God is present with the suffering and the vulnerable, whether they are Christian or not (171).

Chapter nine examines how Yoder, Boff, and Sobrino's thought is shaped by a cruciform faith and an eschatological hope because of Jesus's resurrection from the dead (188–199). Chapter ten describes how God's simultaneous power and powerlessness in the cross and resurrection of Jesus both subvert the world's powers and reveals a kenotic understanding and embodiment of power (200–218).

Chapters eleven and twelve are Peet's constructive chapters. Chapter eleven explores how the cross of Christ redefines power and redirects its *telos*. A cruciform political theology must be "victimological" (224), focusing care on vulnerable neighbors in society rather than influencing those who possess and wield power. Similarly, a Christian use of power must not be interested in coercive, authoritarian control, what Peet calls "power over," but in collaborative, creative, and harmonious interaction for the sake of the other, what Peet calls "power to" or "power alongside" (225–231). In chapter twelve, Peet describes how a kenotic, cruciform political ethic is embodied in the church. Drawing on the suffering servant motif in Isaiah, Peet argues that the body of Christ must stand in solidarity with those who suffer and use its voice to advocate for them (284–285). He also employs the image of a woman in labor and the subsequent birth of a child as a metaphor to describe how the church labors and helps give birth to new possibilities for social and political relationships in the future (288–291). In continuity with the crucified Christ, Peet argues that what characterizes a cruciform political theology is the church's embodiment of the beatitudes as a counter-cultural spirituality of kenotic generosity and solidarity (296).

In terms of critique, I'll address two aspects of the work that remain underdeveloped. First, Peet draws on Karl Rahner's understanding of the "anonymous Christian" to propose the "anonymous crucified." The "anonymous crucified" are those who have had "the cross thrust upon them" like Jesus but are not connected to the body of Christ by faith. He argues that while these people do not know Jesus by faith, Jesus is

with them in their vulnerability and suffering (268–269). The Psalms and other portions of the Scripture are filled with the truth that God hears and knows those who suffer, but while this idea is present throughout the book, the theme of the “anonymous crucified” is not sufficiently developed. Second, while Peet develops a cruciform, kenotic political theology, relatively little attention is given to God’s work to shape his people into cruciform people. While Peet nods at worship (290), very little is said about God’s divine action through baptism, the Lord’s supper, or the preaching of the Word, to shape God’s people into a cruciform and kenotic people and preserve them in that same posture.

Nevertheless, Peet’s work is a constructive contribution to the growing field of Christian political theology. While not denying the truth and importance of the cross as the means of atonement (11–2, 15, 20, 225), Peet helps us better understand that “the cross alone is our theology” by demonstrating that the cross of Christ not only shapes and forms the Christian understanding of soteriology and justification but political and social ethics, as well.

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