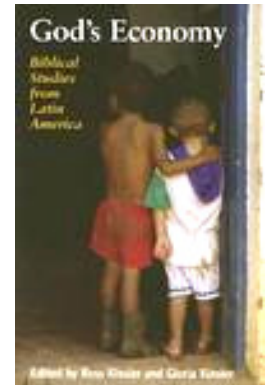


Foreword to Ross and Gloria Kinsler's *God's Economy: Biblical Studies from Latin America*

(Orbis Books, 2005)

by Ched Myers



“And Baruch wrote down again all the words of Jeremiah from the scroll that the king had burned in the fire...” (Jer 36:32)

There is an extraordinary story in Jeremiah 36 that the great Jesuit radical Daniel Berrigan drew our attention to not long ago in a retreat with Christian peace and justice activists. It concerns how the prophet’s condemnation of Judah’s economic and military policies earned him an official “cease and desist” letter by the authorities of his time, and how he turned to his *amanuensis* Baruch to be his “voice.” Baruch was commissioned not only to write down Jeremiah’s testimony, but also to proclaim it in contested public spaces, at crucial political moments (36:2f).

Baruch listened carefully to the prophetic oracles, inscribed them lovingly, and declared them faithfully. He even accompanied the banished Jeremiah underground when the “Word of the Lord” was pronounced subversive to the logic of national security (36:15-19). The story goes on, however, to relate the following grim scene:

The king sent Jehudi to get the scroll...and Jehudi read it to the king and all the officials... Now the king was sitting in his winter apartment...and there was a fire burning in the brazier before him. As Jehudi read three or four columns, the king would cut them off with a penknife and throw them into the fire. (36:21-23)

While not the last book-burning in history, this is surely one of the most shocking: an Israelite king derisively whittling the Word into the courtroom fire-pit! (And we thought *our* political leaders, who invoke God’s blessing on imperial conquest, were blasphemous!)

Even more remarkable than this breathtaking exhibition of hubris by the powerful, however, is what happens next:



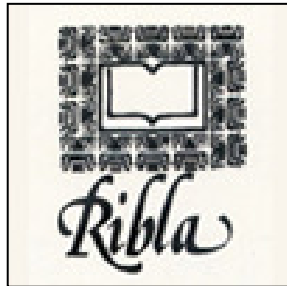
Now, after the king had burned the scroll with the words that Baruch wrote at Jeremiah's dictation, the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah: "Take another scroll and write on it all the former words that were in the first scroll..." (36:27f).

So did Baruch commence writing Jeremiah's hard truth-telling down all over again.

We might say that such has been the vocation of all those who Jesus called "scribes trained for the kingdom" (Mt 13:52) ever since—to bear written witness to the prophetic mandate, even in the face of official contempt. The authors represented in this volume stand in this very tradition. They are some of the finest bible scholars in Latin America, yet unlike so many academics in North America, they do their work in relationship with, and on behalf of, prophetic people's movements for justice throughout their hemisphere. These reflections on the Word arise not just from the seminary and the sanctuary, but also from the streets, as Pablo Richard's Introduction makes clear (right: *Pablo Richard*).



I've been privileged to know a few of the contributors to this collection, but like so many in North America, I have greatly benefited from the work of all of them over the years. In many respects, these chapters reflect the "second generation" of liberation theology. After the broad themes of the movement were laid out by theologians such as Gustavo Gutierrez, Jon Sobrino and others, the next task was to "reread" carefully the entire biblical tradition from the perspective of the marginalized. This project, known as *relectura*, has animated a renaissance in Latin American biblical studies over the last two decades, as the reader of this volume will see. The ecumenical *Revista de Interpretación Bíblica Latinoamericana (RIBLA)*, published out of Costa Rica, has been a particularly valuable vehicle for giving voice to this growing body of creative and powerful exegetical and hermeneutical work.



Unfortunately, this voice remains largely unknown to non-Spanish speaking audiences. Beginning in the late 1980s, many North American theological publishers (Orbis being a notable exception) felt that the "time" of liberation theology had come and gone, and thus largely stopped seeking, translating and publishing new work from Latin America. (One must assume that the cultural shifts associated with two decades of Reagan-Bush conservatism and Clinton neo-conservatism has had a great deal to do with such lamentable editorial decisions.) Nevertheless, south of the border the project of *relectura* has continued to broaden, deepen and mature--despite the many political and economic setbacks that have plagued Latin America under the new totalitarianism of Neoliberalism. It is a sad commentary on the times

that Christians in the U.S. should be so unaware of this exciting biblical movement, precisely when our own political and theological imaginations seem so impoverished.

In this volume, Ross and Gloria Kinsler seek to begin remedying this problem. Presbyterian missionaries in Guatemala and Costa Rica for almost four decades, the Kinslers have long been intimately associated with these theological and political developments in Latin America. Upon their retirement and return to Southern California, they realized afresh that little of the vitality reflected in *RIBLA* was “trickling up” to the North. Loyal to their academic *companeros/as* in the South, and sobered by the dysfunctional contemporary theological terrain in the U.S., they decided to “make a way out of no way.” This collection is the result of their passion, dedication and long hours of hard work assembling, translating, and editing.

This book is a gift from South to North, delivered by the Kinslers, in the same way that Baruch's scrolls were a gift to Israel—despite the scorn of Israel's rulers. The following chapters bear witness to prophetic hard truths, challenging many of the new orthodoxies, both economic and theological, that are prevailing in our post-Gulf War II political culture that is now unabashedly imperial. But while the costs of U.S. power, privilege and pretence may only just be dawning on us, they have long been understood by these authors. After all, liberation theology taught us that everything is clearer—both the Word and the world—when viewed from the perspective of the marginalized.

This collection offers another opportunity for those of us in the “belly of the monster” (Jose Marti) to listen afresh to the voices of latter-day Baruchs from the South. And if we understand them, we North American Christians will then attend to our *own* work of “re-reading” the Bible and the newspaper, and bear witness to the prophetic Word in our context, “that we may turn from evil” (Jer 36:3).



Los Angeles, Pentecost, 2004