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# Review: 'The Gospel of Faith and Justice'

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*The Gospel of Faith and Justice*. By Antonio Gonzalez. Translated by Joseph Owens. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2005. xii + 179 pages. \$24.00 (paper).

Gonzalez seeks to establish an evangelical basis for liberation theology. Influenced by the work of Ignacio Ellacuría, one of the Jesuits murdered in El Salvador in 1989, Gonzalez calls for a radicalization of the Gospel. Ellacuría, influenced by Rahner's theology of grace, especially the "supernatural existential," goes beyond Rahner to argue that general human history and history of salvation are one and the same. Rahner had argued for two distinct but coexistent histories (general history and salvation history).

Gonzalez shares Ellacuría's view of one single history and advocates a theology that is grounded in the primacy of practice and the perspective of the poor. He calls for a new Christian way of doing theology that retrieves the Exodus event which, for him, grounds the Judeo-Christian faith on justice. For this reason Gonzalez would have us abandon the expression "historical Jesus" for "pre-Easter" because the latter makes evident that there is only one Jesus, i.e., the Jesus who took the side of the poor.

Gonzalez interprets Ellacuría as favoring a theology that is based on ecclesial praxis. He used Matthew 25:31–46 to develop an argument for Christian social praxis, calling for a "humanist Constantinianism". Humanist Constantinianism "implies that people who are affluent, and yet socially conscious, will be committed, sometimes heroically, to the poorest people of their society" (47). Gonzalez also embarks on social analysis to denounce all forms of domination: economic, political, and religious, characterizing them as different forms of violence against the poor. Given that our world has been characterized by different injustices (93), Gonzalez reminds the Christian community of what it means to be a living Christian community: ensuring that the economic, social, and political inequalities of our world are not reproduced. The book ends with a message of hope, not hope that is otherworldly, but hope that is related to our own history (107).

Gonzalez uses biblical texts and gives good exegesis of the texts, blending them neatly with Ellacuría's hermeneutic of praxis. He also favors the sociological analysis of Waldo Cesar and Richard Shaull, the pioneer of liberation theology among Protestants. Gonzalez agrees with Shaull that the Pentecostal experience, as an authentic experience of the Spirit, is a much needed piece in the quest for social transformation of this unjust social order.

Themes that run through the text are basically those of liberation theology presented in a new light and well articulated. The strength of the book is in its historical reconstruction and use of multiple sources. Gonzalez retrieves insights, not only from traditional liberation theology, but also from Rahner, Shaull, Pannenberg, and Moltmann and weaves them together with good biblical narratives.

The book could have been better served if the author had left out polemics against the Catholic Church. Some statements against the "Vatican State" distract from the overall thrust of the book. Nevertheless, *The Gospel of Faith and Justice* is a good book that meets the growing needs of general education in

theology and religious studies. It is useful for those who wish to know about the praxis of faith and its relevance to justice, although the lack of an index limits its use for research.

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*Happiness: A History.* By Darrin M. McMahon. New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2006. xvi + 544 pages. \$ 27.50.

As readers of *Horizons* (30/1: 170; 33/1: 181), *Time* magazine (17 Jan 2005; Inside Business, Feb 2006), and *The New York Times (Magazine)*, 7 Jan 2007) know, happiness has become a popular topic in psychological research, economics, and even financial planning. In a *Times* Op-Ed essay (29 Dec 2005) anticipating the arrival of 2006, Darrin McMahon offered reflections on New Year celebrations titled "In Pursuit of Unhappiness." A Florida State University historian, McMahon points out that although our preoccupation with perpetual happiness may seem timeless, it is in fact relatively recent. He quotes approvingly Thomas Carlyle's 1843 observation: "'Happiness our being's end and aim' is at bottom, if we will count well, not yet two centuries old in the world." In McMahon's estimation, "changes in both religious and secular culture since the 17th century made 'happiness,' in the form of pleasure or good feeling, not only morally acceptable but commendable in and of itself." In a "monumental shift," the ideal of heavenly felicity was brought to earth. Suffering was no longer our natural state. "Happy was the way we were meant to be." The new doctrine of earthly happiness raised expectations to an impossible level. The cranky Carlyle put it this way: "Every pitifulest whipster that walks within a skin has had his head filled with the notion that he is, shall be, or by all human and divine laws ought to be, 'happy'."

But, despite all the earthly goods the modern world has offered, humans are, McMahon suggests, "arguably no happier now than they've ever been." The new doctrine orders, "Thou shalt be happy," but the very commandment tends "to undermine its fulfillment, even to make us sad." McMahon brings the point to a head with a quotation from John Stuart Mill, Carlyle's contemporary, reflecting on his own gloomy experience: "Those only are happy who have their minds fixed on some object other than their own happiness; on the happiness of others, on the improvement of mankind, even on some art or pursuit, followed not as a means, but as itself an ideal end. Aiming thus at something else, they find happiness by the way." McMahon concludes: "For our own culture, steeped as it is in the relentless pursuit of pleasure and endless cheer, that message is worth heeding." But, we may note, that message implies a different meaning of happiness; it calls for another "monumental shift" in understanding.

Happily for us (and, I trust, for the author), in the year since that *Times* essay, McMahon's *Happiness: A History* has appeared. McMahon calls his work an "intellectual" history; but given his rich use of literary and artistic as well as philosophical and theological sources, perhaps we should add "cul-