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Jean-Pierre Ruiz. Revelation in the Vernacular

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Jean-Pierre Ruiz. *Revelation in the Vernacular*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2021. 164 pp. \$26.00 Paper. ISBN: 9781626984196.

Jean-Pierre Ruiz is a well-known American biblical scholar of Puerto Rican and Belgian descent. His exegetical contribution to our understanding of the book of Revelation is thought-provoking, as he usually engages Scripture from a challenging, postcolonial perspective. In this instance, however, Ruiz does not investigate the last book of the Christian canon in particular; the title of this work in its simplicity deceived even this naively committed reviewer! *Revelation in the Vernacular* is rather an essay on the pervasiveness and inclusiveness of God's revelation amongst all peoples. The book charts the way the Catholic Church both participated in and reckoned with the European "encounter" of those Indigenous to the Americas, and how painfully slowly some qualified acceptance of their intrinsic religious values came about. It is a laudable addition to the Orbis series "Disruptive Cartographers: Doing Theology Latinamente," edited by Carmen M. Nanko-Fernández, Miguel H. Díaz and Gary Riebe-Estrella.

As a "disruptive cartographer," Ruiz sets off to retrieve untapped sources for theologizing in the concrete lived experience of people in the Americas. He thus introduces the archeological discovery and study of pre-Columbian rock art and colonial carvings found in caves in Mona Island (between Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic), markings that witness to the early encounter there between the Spanish and Taíno cultures in the 16th century Caribbean. Ruiz discusses two inscriptions in Latin, "*Plura fecit deus*" and "*Verbum caro factum est*," alongside one in Spanish, "*Dios te perdone*," exegeting what they might mean as a response to the Taíno glyphs found in the caves. In Ruiz's assessment, the very fact that the aboriginal paintings were not defaced or erased, nor the colonial carvings superimposed on them, indicates that some degree of openness to dialogue was present in those

early stages of encounter. Even as crosses were drawn in dominant positions, the European inscriptions leave room for interpretation, especially the ones in Latin. “*Plura fecit deus*” (“God made many things”) may be construed to express admiration at the Taíno reaching out for the divine. “*Verbum caro factum est*” could reflect some vague or incipient appraisal of the power of the incarnation of the Word of God among cultures. In any case, these were not academic or normative statements, but spontaneous expressions of faith lived in *lo cotidiano*—and I would add *lo extraordinario*—of a momentous experience of encounter.

From there, Jean-Pierre Ruiz moves on to prod at what might have been the general state of mind of Spanish theologians having to deal with the consequences of so unforeseen a historical development. Moving away from the well-rehearsed disputation between de Las Casas and Sepúlveda in 1550 regarding the “intellectual and religious capacity of the American Indians,” Ruiz focuses instead on the Augustinian Fray Luis de León, champion of the Spanish vernacular language, defender of its beauty and intrinsic capacity to convey the loftiest theological ideas. De León’s pioneer work in making room for God’s revelation in a vernacular language is a beacon of light that would open up the Catholic Church to acknowledge much later the “seeds of the Word” in non-European cultures, as a wonderful consequence of God’s will for the salvation of the entire humankind, through the Incarnation. The retrieval of the Spanish poet’s incarnational view of language and Scripture is thus a key conceptual bridge that Ruiz provides to support and expand our thinking *latinamente*, in order to land in the Amazonian Synod of 2019. The theological foregrounding of Pope Francis’s nod at *teología india* and his polyhedric approach to intercultural *encuentro* and evangelization can thus be better fathomed.

Finally, Jean-Pierre Ruiz traces, step by step, the theological use of the expression “seeds of the Word” in Catholic Church pronouncements, from the Amazonian Synod Final Document (2019), through the CELAM conferences in Aparecida (2007), Santo Domingo (1992), Puebla (1979), and

Medellín (1968) and in the Vatican II Decree *Ad Gentes* (1965), all the way back to its Patristic source in Justin Martyr's *Second Apology*. Ruiz is conscientiously thorough and nuanced in his review. His work generously provides us with a close, frame-by-frame view of the growing Church awareness of God's self-disclosure in non-European cultures. His critique that this awareness remains mission-focused, as *praeparatio evangelica*, and has not yet crossed over into the *sacrosanctum* of the theology of revelation proper, should be taken seriously and attended to as possible. Significantly, the expression "seeds of the Word" is absent from Vatican II's Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum* (1965), Ruiz astutely remarks.

This reviewer was humbled by the scope of the study and the erudition of a fellow biblical scholar, daring to map a path beyond the strict borders of the canon. Jean-Pierre Ruiz not only retrieves untapped sources for theologizing *latinamente*, he also documents those sources in much detail and is conversant with the scholarly debates regarding each one of them. At times, I stumbled upon unnecessary repetitions (for instance, footnote 98 on page 66 is the exact replica of footnote 43 on page 46); at other times I lost track of the thread of ideas, in a labyrinth of long and convoluted sentences—not the ideal cartographer's style! At all times, however, my interest and curiosity were generously sustained by a wealth of *latiné* waters flowing from the Amazon to the Tiber and back. Jean-Pierre Ruiz's *Revelation in the Vernacular* is not only a necessary addition to any theologian's library; it also charts the way ahead for Catholicism to think God's revelation anew.

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