

Preface

I am grateful for the opportunity of presenting this book before the English-speaking public, which allows me to revise and update a work to which I have been committed over many years. This work began as a thesis presented more than twenty years ago for my doctorate at the Instituto Superior Evangélico de Estudios Teológicos (ISEDET), in Buenos Aires, Argentina, under the supervision of Professor J. Severino Croatto. Subsequently, in 2006 I revised the work to fulfill certain requirements established by the ministry of education in Argentina. Its nucleus is still a sociopolitical reading of the first sample of Christian literature, Paul's letter to the believing community of Thessalonica.¹ However, the ideas I originally postulated have been appropriately transformed by my experience and the changes that have occurred since that time, although I maintain the same founding epistemological options of the original. The methodology of this work has been enriched by some contributions to my life and intellectual trajectory over these twenty years. However, I continue to affirm what I said more than twenty years ago: that Paul, in his letter to the Thessalonians, also performs a social and political reading of his world and the place of his community in confronting the Roman Empire, using the tools and symbolic media available to him. The current revision has involved an in-depth analysis of what I wrote originally and some qualification of it in light of the scholarly contributions emerging between the time of the original writing and today.

Style has also been part of the revision because the academic demands of a dissertation are not those required of a book for the academic trade. In relation to redactional modifications, I have tried to create a more friendly text, although certain technicalities end up being difficult to avoid. The reader who is not interested in exegetical details may skip those parts and follow the conceptual development of the argument.

I have tried to take into account the need of using inclusive language and concepts with respect to gender—which is not always easy to do—and I have not always done it successfully, at least in Spanish. At several places, I have tried to leave some signs of my awareness of this limitation, but I must acknowledge that in this issue I have not been consistent. It is not because I do not value gender inclusivity, but because I consider that we have not found the appropriate linguistic tools to make this evident without detracting from the expressive dynamism of writing or falling into reiterations that would make the reading of this book more difficult. I have relied upon the translator to overcome my limitation in this respect.

One more observation about the editorial changes: I have broadened the concept of “resistance,” which dominated my militant position twenty years ago, to

“resistance and anticipation.” Part of my reflection during recent times—which may be seen in the most recent articles I have published—is that resisting the logic of the empire is not enough. True resistance passes through an anticipation of a postimperial ethics, a postcolonial consciousness; in the semantic sense of the term, an emancipating subjectivity. History is not made looking back; it is “memory,” not just “remembrance” in the absence of resisting movements; it is made from forward-moving proposals, from the quest to overcome the present and its oppressions in a vision of the future, in a demand of eschatological anticipation. I believe this concept was present in Paul to a great extent. He did not just resist the Roman Empire; he anticipated a different reality in Christ’s *parousia*. Moreover, this anticipation resulted in specific ethical-political conduct.

Precisely because of a contrast between the development of the meaning and value of apocalypticism in Latin American biblical literature and the meaning of this theme in the culture of North America, it has occurred to me to give a special treatment of this theme in a brief excursus, inserted at the end of Chapter 13.

Finally, it is proper to express some words of gratitude. My original work was dedicated to my children (Anahí, Esteban, Santiago, and Irene), but now I need to add the seven grandchildren who bring happiness to my days and have awakened the vocation of a grandfather who makes up funny stories. My wife of more than forty years, Graciela, has developed her own vocation in public education, and her achievements have been recognized. It is not her vocation to revise my manuscripts or to make theological suggestions, although we share political opinions and recommend certain readings to each other. However, without her support, dedication, and love, I would not have been able to develop my work and militancy and, indeed, my life would be harder. The congregations of the Argentinian Methodist Church that I have served as pastor have shown great patience during my absences for study or trips abroad for academic work.

In the academic area, my indebtedness and gratitude are infinite. I would have to include my colleagues from the Bible Department of ISEDET and other Latin American Bible scholars who have enriched my views and with whom I have discussed many of these themes. I am also grateful to those who, through economic resources shared at the right time, facilitated my access to the libraries of Yale University and the Biblical Institute of Rome to consult bibliography to which we have no access in our countries. To mention any names would be unfair since the list would be too long, and someone would be left out. In spite of this, I would like specially to mention my tutor and teacher, J. Severino Croatto (already deceased), and my other theological teacher, my father, José Míguez Bonino.

The English-speaking public should know that the present translation and edition have been made possible thanks to the interest shown by Dr. Richard Horsley, who recommended the publication of my book, and Dr. Neil Elliott of Fortress Press, who made the corresponding arrangements for it.