

aid from the various developed countries as a percentage of their respective GNP: they are startling not only because of the tiny pittance which the benevolent rich deign to dole out, but because they indicate the slender percentage of *that* aid which goes to the poorest countries because of the arbitrary nature of the choice of recipients.

Part 2, which the author sees as the most important, gives 'A Biblical perspective on the poor and possessions'; the biblical data are taken very much at their face value, as one would expect from a conservative evangelical; but they're also taken seriously, without the sort of explaining away which evangelicals who are conservative normally resort to. For instance, the 'jubilee principle' as in Lev. 25: 10-24, whereby God ... gave his people a law which would equalize land ownership every fifty years' is pointed out as an institution (whether historically realized or not) which flies in the face of unlimited-and-irreversible-profit-motive economics.

The chapter in which the jubilee principle is discussed reveals a certain problem which evangelicals tend to have about Church and World and the relating of biblical ethics to modern life: given that the Church is the new people of God; do biblical laws apply to the human community at large? Are Christians to practise justice merely within the Church (that wouldn't be bad for starters ...), or are

they to insist on its practice throughout the 'secular' world? Catholics may be puzzled that such a problem arises for evangelicals, but in fact it does. (And of course there are plenty of Catholics who will roundly assert that politics and religion don't mix - except where specific issues like abortion or denominational schooling are on the agenda.) Sider's answer in his last chapter is to point out that 'the biblical authors did not hesitate to apply revealed norms to ... societies outside the people of God'. And 'social structures do exert a powerful influence on saint and sinner alike'. Therefore, 'Christians ... should exercise political influence to implement change in society at large'. (p. 180)

The third part of the book, from which those questions are taken, contains various suggestions for Christian response to the economic and biblical data presented in parts 1 and 2. There is a stress on the Church becoming much more visibly a community, with the members supporting each other in a thrust towards a simpler life-style. And there is a list of American (and, in an appendix, British) pressure-groups which work for non-violent change in national and international structures.

The author is not a marxist, though he's not out to labour that point. But the implications of this book are revolutionary - for the Church and for the world at large.

COLIN CARR O.P.

**A HISTORY OF AFRICAN CHRISTIANITY 1950-1975 by Adrian Hastings. Cambridge University Press. £15.00 and paperback £4.95.**

Adrian Hastings' distinguished history of African Christianity covers Catholicism, Protestantism and Independency south of the Sahara since 1950. After a penetrating survey of the predominantly colonial Africa of 1950, he divides the dissolution of that Africa into three periods: 1951-58, 1959-66, and 1967-75. He discusses the history of these periods in terms of separate sections on Church and State, the Historic Churches, and African Independency. So much has happened in Africa in the past thirty years that it is hardly surprising if he occasionally sounds out of breath, but his style is lucid, his approach eirenical, and his bibliographical support immense. The inevitably compact, episodic treatment is bound to leave room for argument

about specific cases: his various references to the Bantu Catholic Jamaa movement in Zaire, for example, don't leave quite the same impression as one might obtain from Willy de Craemer's fascinating *The Jamaa and the Church* (1977) - which, of course, he has read. But overall, this is a brilliantly designed picture of change, decay and growth. His broad outline of what has happened stresses the expansion of 'village Christianity' in contrast to 'mission Christianity', and the declining importance of African Independency as an alternative to the mission churches. With this has gone a shift, taking Africa as a whole, in the Catholic-Protestant balance, in favour of Catholicism, and this not just in numbers, but in terms of intellectual and polit-

ical leadership. Here the changes made possible in Catholicism by the Second Vatican Council, and the failure of Anglicanism to sustain an effective challenge either to the Afrikaners in South Africa or to Ian Smith's version of Rhodesia, have been decisive. Nevertheless, Hastings regards the future of African Catholicism as highly unpredictable, because to 'village Catholicism' 'the Mass, the priesthood and canonical marriage' are all becoming peripheral. Yet the resilience of Christianity, which has not been swept away in the flood-tide of African political freedom, but has instead evolved again and again into the one non-political hope of some sort of political and social stability, has been quite remarkable. One senses a lift in one's spirits as one reads on, because chaos has not confounded faith. And once in a while Hastings pauses to draw our attention to one of those deeply religious figures whose lives have changed whole areas of Africa. Most impressive of all is perhaps Simon Kimbangu, a Baptist who in 1920, in an

essentially pacific mission which lasted six months, was listened to as no missionary in the Congo had ever been; who was seized by the Belgians, for whom any kind of African initiative was unthinkable, and condemned to death in Elizabethville in 1921 on vague, irrelevant charges. His sentence was commuted and he lived quietly in prison until his death in 1951. 'He was never permitted a visit from any member of his family or a Protestant pastor'. No sentence in any book that I have read for years has given me a more desolating sense of the inhumanity of men. Yet his followers survived Belgian persecution, emerged confidently at independence, and remain a powerful Church. In Africa, to misquote Newman, there is a silence which speaks. And Adrian Hastings has caught, in what must, of course, be a provisional assessment of these tumultuous years, something of a *religious* history which has been at least as remarkable as anything which has happened politically,

JOHN KENT

**PERCIVAL AND THE PRESENCE OF GOD** by Jim Hunter. *Faber & Faber, 1978.*  
pp. 141 £4.95

In spite of some very good writing, I find this a disappointing novel. Neither the religious interest promised by the title nor the Arthurian apparatus really get us anywhere. Hunter situates his Percival firmly in a post-Roman Britain which is relapsing into barbarity, in which chivalry is present only as a fading ideal. Percival is looking for the Castle of the Grail, convinced that he will find it again one day; meanwhile he wanders around telling his story to anyone who is prepared to listen. He has come to doubt whether Arthur exists at all. And God has come to seem very remote.

There is obviously considerable potential here. In the medieval tales there is already good material to draw on for an account of the spiritual evolution of Percival, whether we focus on the mystical interpretation of the Grail offered by the prose Quest, or rather on the development from the childish "Mother, what is God?" of Wolfram's hero, through his cynical rejection of God ("Alas, what is God?"), to the final conversion. But all that Hunter is able to make of it is a detailed account of his hero's sex life, in which he assures us

that he "opened a direct way to God" the first time he made love to his wife, and periodic harmless references to his saying his prayers every day, and then a final acceptance of God's remoteness and the apparent pointlessness of life ("to some this is cynicism and to others it is faith. Either way, we have to live with the appearance of arbitrariness").

Apart from a good motif of a face seen in pain (Percival's knightly tutor first, then his enemy on the funeral pyre, then the Fisher King, then the figure of Christ), the symbolic potential is not exploited; the Grail is unexplained and unexplored. The quest for the Grail is left as a rather vacuous ideal. And since Arthur too, is an ideal with little content, we find ourselves with rather a superfluity of undetermined aspirations. Even the hoped for eventual return to Whiteflower does not bring anything together into any kind of coherence. There is some attempt to use Arthurian chivalry as a foil to show up the barbarity of the ordinary people, but the knightly "code" to which reference is often made especially at the beginning of the story has