

cultural preservation on the one hand and assimilation on the other. Assimilation is not a unilinear process, and the revival of ethnicity in the USA in the 1960s and 1970s and in the UK in the 1970s and 1980s indicates an emergence of more complex patterns and choices.

Professor William's book is an informative addition to our knowledge of an important Gujarati Hindu religious movement. However, it is far from being a fully comprehensive account of *all* the Swaminarayan sects. Theoretical and conceptual weakness is a striking feature of this study and it is in this realm where its contribution is modest if not limited.

ROHIT BAROT

THE POWER OF THE POOR IN HISTORY by Gustavo Gutierrez SCM London. 1983.

One of the advantages of being summoned to Rome to defend your theological views is that your book sales may soar. The recent criticism of Liberation Theology (LT) by Rome will no doubt increase the desire to know exactly what the liberation theologians are saying. This book by Gustavo Gutierrez will answer some of these enquiries. Gutierrez is probably the best known of the liberation theologians and his first book 'A Theology of Liberation' published just over ten years ago has become the classic of the movement. This new book is a collection of his talks and essays written since then and serve as a useful record of how one of the leading exponents of LT has reacted to mounting criticism. It is not always an easy book to read, certainly not at one sitting. This is partly because the style is very uneven and there is a good deal of repetition. The first chapter is a talk given to a lay summer-school in Lima. It probably was good as a talk but does not read so well. It would be what Gutierrez would call a militant reading of the Bible, but there is too little argument and too much rhetoric dotted with phrases like 'The Kingdom signifies globalisation'. The chapter entitled 'Liberation Praxis and Christian Faith' is a more academic essay written for *Concilium* and offers a good summary of why LT arose. Then there are two chapters which are commentaries on the documents of Puebla. The last part of the book is entitled 'From the Underside of History' and these chapters may help us to understand why the difficulty in grasping his argument may go deeper than rhetoric and repetitiveness. He is writing out of an experience which is different from that of say most of the readers of this journal. He defines TL as 'an attempt to understand the faith from within the concrete historical, liberating, and subversive practice of the poor of this world—the exploited classes, despised ethnic groups and marginalised cultures (p. 37). You need a good deal of imaginative sympathy to understand what he is saying, and that will not be enough. One of G's basic points is that LT is only a second step, the first step is solidarity with the poor. Theology only follows once you have made that step and are ready to reflect on your experience. This is the difference between what he calls progressivist theology and LT. This is not a totally new distinction and he draws on an illustration from the C16th to make this point. There were two great Dominicans in Salamanca who reacted to the exploitation of the Indians by the Spanish. On the one hand Las Casas actually worked among the Indians and had discovered Christ among them in their terrible suffering. de Vittoria on the other hand, while agreeing with Las Casas to some extent 'works with abstract hypotheses, as is typical of a theologian not in direct contact with the facts. Anyone familiar with the situation of the Indies knew the hypotheses were false' (196). Here are two kinds of theologies and you can draw the parallels for today. In a way he is telling some of his critics that they are in no place to criticise him especially as he says in another essay 'the history of Christianity has been written with a white, Western, bourgeois hand' (202). He offers an example nearer home. In his final chapter he shows how Bonhoeffer only began to see history differently, 'from below' when he was waiting execution in his prison cell.

It is not surprising that LT as presented by Gutierrez arouses strong feelings. He expects conflict, as it is integral to the gospel. He is clearly familiar with many of the standard objections as soon as the political implications of conversion to the gospel are spelled out. 'What is the good of changing the structures without a change in the human heart?' As he points out, this is only a half truth for changing the social and cultural structures *is* a way of changing the human heart. Surely this emphasis on politics and structural change reduces the gospel. 'Yes', he answers, 'if we keep the gospel prisoner of an ideology in the service of the capitalist system'. But he is well aware of the dangers and since it would be much easier to classify him as yet another theologian who has confused politics with religion it is worth hearing him on this point. 'The gospel message is a message that can never be identified with any concrete social formula, however just that formula may seem to us at the moment. The word of the Lord is a challenge to its every historical incarnation and places that incarnation in the broad perspective of the radical and total liberation of Christ, the Lord of history' (69).

It is not surprising that Rome may feel a strong challenge from this sort of theology. Others may just feel exasperated at the constant reiteration of certain phrases, like 'option for the poor', 'liberation and justice', 'the exploitation of the oppressed' which he hammers out on page after page. Gutierrez in a footnote quotes someone who was getting irritated at the Puebla documents: 'It's wearisome. All you find here is the poor, poor, poor'. He points out that they are not only in the documents but in the streets too. There is no sign that the poor are diminishing in the world. Gutierrez's book offers a rather uncomfortable suggestion of how they might be helped.

DAVID SANDERS OP

GENESIS 1—11: A COMMENTARY, by Claus Westermann, translated from the German by John J. Scullion SJ. *SPCK*, London, 1984. Pp. 636. £25.00.

Westermann's commentary on Genesis 1—11 is a monumental work of scholarship and its translation into English is greatly to be welcomed. It appeared in German in 1974 as the first part of a massive three-volume commentary on Genesis in the *Biblischer Kommentar* series, the other volumes being on Genesis 12—36 and 37—50. To my knowledge Westermann's Genesis commentary is the largest commentary ever written on a book of the Old Testament. Translations of the other two volumes are in preparation, so the whole of Westermann's great work will soon be more accessible to English readers.

After an introductory section on Genesis 1—11, the main body of the commentary is divided into the following sections: the Creation of the world (1:1—2:4a), the Creation of man and woman and the expulsion from Paradise (2:4b—3:24), Cain and Abel (4:1—16), the Cainites (4:17—26), the succession of generations in the primeval period (5:1—32), the Sons of the Gods and the giants (6:1—4), the Flood (6:5—8:22), blessing and covenant (P) (9:1—17, 28—29), Noah and his sons (9:18—27), the table of the nations (10:1—32), the tower of Babel (11:1—9), and the genealogy of Shem (11:10—26). There is a concluding section on the formation and theological meaning of the primeval story, as well as some useful indices. In keeping with the regular format of the *Biblischer Kommentar* series, each of the sections of the main body of the commentary listed above is further sub-divided into the following sections: literature (i.e. exhaustive bibliography), text, literary form, setting in life, commentary, and purpose and thrust. Such clear signposting facilitates the use of the commentary.

The work contains a vast amount of detail on all aspects of Genesis 1—11, so that scholars will constantly wish to refer to it. However, it is not dry as dust. As is characteristic of the work of this Heidelberg scholar, it contains a wealth of theological insight. As a result the work will be found useful not only by professional scholars and students of the Old Testament but also by other theologians and preachers.