

**A PLACE IN THE SUN: AN INTRODUCTION TO LIBERATION THEOLOGY IN THE THIRD WORLD** by Theo Witvliet. *S.C.M. Press. 1985. pp. 182. £5.95.*

This is more than a survey of the new theologies which are emerging from Third world countries. It offers an interpretation, and indeed the author, who teaches in the Theological Faculty of Amsterdam University, is advocating liberation theology to his readers. The title, which at first sight might merely suggest that liberation theology is being written in warmer climes than northern Europe, recalls a phrase from Barth's farewell lecture almost a quarter of a century ago. He spoke of the reduced position of theology, which, especially in the nineteenth century sought, 'to secure for itself at least a small but honourable place in the sun, basking in the rays of science, in order to justify its existence'. But as Althusser, and before him Gaston Bachelard, insisted, there is an epistemological break between scientific and non-scientific knowledge. The new theology does not bask: it is active. It does not interpret the picture of the world presented by science or anything else. Rather, it seeks to engage with the world and change it. When the author advocates liberation theology, he is not simply giving us information about the Third World, but calling us to follow the example of the new theology.

The book begins with the setting of liberation theology, with the poor and the oppressed, who in this theology displace the atheist and unbeliever who have been so long the centre of attention for European theology. It then moves through a series of examples of theology of liberation, beginning with 'Black Theology'. Anyone familiar with this topic would expect it to deal mainly with the American theologian James Cone. Although he is mentioned the chapter dwells too long on the history of slavery. That is an important issue for black theologians, but it is not itself part of black theology. More disappointing is the fact that the very significant criticism of Cone offered by the South African black theologian Allan Boesak is omitted. This may be in part because the book then moves on to 'African Theology and Liberation from Cultural and Religious Domination'. Here Witvliet introduces two very contrasting concerns. The first deals with the problem of acculturation, 'the quest for new, integrated forms of society which overcome the deep split introduced into the African soul by colonialism and imperialism'. Liberation involves coming to terms with traditional African experiences and views of reality. The danger of course is that the return to the tradition can be used to their advantage by the new post-colonial ruling classes, who often draw their power from tribalism. The second concern among African theologians is the Afro-American or South African black theology, which while protesting against economic and political oppression may fall into the trap of taking over precisely those European and American assumptions which are so alien to traditional African culture. A more original chapter deals with 'Theology in the Carribean and the Rastafarian Movement'. The islands are not all at the same stage of cultural development, and there is as yet little in common beyond 'the almost monotonous litany in which the charges against neo-colonial mission are constantly repeated'. The author includes some interesting references to developments in Cuba, observing that there the theology of liberation is not yet capable of following Lenin into a criticism of the state. He also doubts whether the Rastafarians should be included in a Christian theological framework. The book then turns to 'Latin American Liberation Theology'. Possibly because it is better known, Witvliet feels free to proceed to criticise it in two respects. The first is the danger that the poor if not romanticised, are made a new norm for Christian revelation. The second is that just as Marxism fails to take account of racism, so liberation theology ignores racism even in Brazil which has more black people than the USA. In this regard Latin American theology of liberation demonstrates itself to be a thoroughly Western theology. The final chapter, perhaps the best, deals with 'Asian Theology in the Context of Other Religions'. Asian Christians are no longer willing to be alienated from their cultures by an

essentially western missionary faith. In recent theology Christ is presented as the Son of Man, who suffers and associates himself with the poor, the outcastes, the prostitutes, the prisoners. This Christ does not come from outwith Asia. The new theology of Asia brings together liberation and inculturation.

The book is a useful introduction. A much weightier book would be required to do justice to each of the subjects here treated but like other recent books its most important contribution is to question the traditional way of doing theology in the west.

ALISTAIR KEE

**THE CONCEPT OF PURITY AT QUMRAN AND IN THE LETTERS OF PAUL** by Michael Newton. Cambridge University Press. Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series 53. 1985. pp. 171. £17.50 (Hardcover).

This is a valuable book, for its informative clarity and balance, and for its contribution to our understanding of Qumran, Paul and ourselves. Newton begins with an account of the idea of purity in the sect, where it was all-important; for the men of Qumran sought to build, and to be, a community of perfect purity, as a necessary alternative to the Israel centred upon a defiled and discredited Temple. The sect 'did not distinguish' forms of purity 'as either ritual or moral but saw impurity as deriving ultimately from some form or other of immorality'. They used the term *niddah* for such impurity. Originally meaning menstrual, then sexual impurity in general, the word had both moral and ritual implications; and it is essential to grasp that not only for the sect but for ancient Judaism generally—and indeed widely elsewhere—the ritual and moral elements within the concept of purity are indivisible. In the Judaeo-Christian tradition the sect was remarkable for strengthening both elements by its developed sense that moral transgression brought uncleanness.

The ardour of the Qumran members for a community cleansed of all contamination, shown in the rigour of its rules for temporary or permanent exclusion of offenders, derives from their sense of the presence of God in the Temple which they constituted, and from their prior sense of the utter impossibility of God's toleration in his presence of anyone or anything impure.

This conviction, or fundamental sense, of the awful purity of God is the clue to religious preoccupation with purity. Newton explains clearly the chief ways in which the sect implemented this feeling and conviction and goes on to show that Paul regarded the Christian community as the Temple of God, and applied to that community a concept of purity in a manner modelled on the purity regulations governing the conduct of the Jerusalem Temple. In this connection 'cultic language is used by Paul in order to elucidate the community's self-understanding and the language of purity permeates Paul's writing and is by no means 'occasional'. Further, Paul in his teaching on the 'in-dwelling of the Spirit' is 'expressing the view that God's Spirit, which had its special dwelling in the sanctuary of the Jerusalem Temple, now lives within the Church, which is described by Paul as God's Temple.' But did Paul believe (as the Qumran sect did) that God's presence had departed from the Temple, as this seems to imply? Luke in his gospel (1:1–22) implies that he himself, and in Acts 22:17f that Paul believed that God still 'dwelt in' the Temple, even though he taught the Corinthians that his Spirit dwelt within them (1 Cor. 3:16) and 'we are the Temple of the living God'. (Incidentally, as there is no room for idols in the Temple of the real God (cf. 2 Cor. 6:16), so there cannot be in the Church as Temple, i.e. in its members; but Paul does not use the idea of idols retained in the minds or hearts of some pretended adherents, a phenomenon known to the Qumran sect, as in IQS 2:11 where 'the idols of his heart' are the guilty secret reservations of the dishonest neophyte.)

In Paul the concept of the Church as the Temple is extended to include the idea that as such it 'is ministered to in a priestly manner by its members' and receives offerings in the form of converts, who are living sacrifices. Along with these doctrines went the conviction