

over the saint's stigmata. One (Franciscan) Pope forbade representations of Catherine's stigmata on pain of excommunication. Blood was, of course, a dominant feature in her life and thought.

Repeatedly Catherine is portrayed with a book and a crucifix, to be interpreted variously. In letters she spoke of Christ climbing on to the teaching chair, *cattedra*, of the Cross, and of the Word being written on the wood of the Cross not with ink but in blood. She who had been schooled so profoundly, *non solum discens sed et patiens divina* as Aquinas would have said, could aptly be described as *doctrix* over a fresco, where she gazes at Christ very much 'the man of sorrows'. Catherine had not only become wise but was in her lifetime, and has been ever since, a teacher and a guide. Declared a doctor of the Church only in 1970, art had long witnessed to the doctrinal dimension of her sanctity. There are striking 18th-century images of her wearing a doctor's cap.

There is much to assimilate, although it is not always easy to find one's way through all the material. A fully comprehensive index of places would have helped, and manuscript illustrations could have been described more extensively. Yet this is a superb collective achievement, truly a milestone, open to correction but unlikely to be superseded as a whole.

In the end, the scholarship is there to help make the images intelligible and to release their power. There are sophisticated works and popular art, public statues and images for more secluded viewing. Line, colour and volume bring to us the depths of Catherine's astonishing experiences. Different epochs and people have responded to diverse aspects of her manifold personality and public activities, leading to variety in styles of representation and choice of signs and symbols. The chart tracing chronologically the use of nearly 40 attributes will need further testing but is intriguing. Thus, on the evidence provided, why should the devil (to be found with the saint on a 16th-century seal of the Edinburgh Dominican nuns, for example) disappear from images of Catherine for about 300 years, to reappear this century? The future may bring more emphasis on her as a woman in the Church or as a peacemaker. 'You need to think of the role which pictures ... have in our lives'. Wittgenstein comes to mind again in considering a painting that implores protection for Perugia during an epidemic, or the Seitz mosaic of Catherine holding reverently the papal tiara in the funerary chapel of Pius IX, or Maragliano's baroque statue festooned with rosaries and surrounded by flowers and candles.

Art can make-believe that helps make you believe.

ROBERT OMBRES OP

GOD IN SOUTH AFRICA by Albert Nolan OP, *CIR*, London 1988, pp. 241. £6.95

Our shelves are filled with books which draw our attention to theology's need of a socio-analytical mediation, arguing in defence of the hermeneutics of liberation and erecting sophisticated variations on the theme of hermeneutical circle, where the terms are theology and liberation struggle, or the Poor and the Word. And much of this writing is important and well-argued, but somehow, somewhere between the *barrio* and the bookshop, the voice of the originators of liberation theology, the base communities and

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the delegates of the Word, has become almost inaudible. So often the political reality, the actual praxis of struggle, the concrete details of the organisations and forces involved, have simply disappeared from the debate, in spite of the view of the writers that these elements are essential data in their theologies. They are often reduced to abstractions like 'oppression', 'struggle', 'injustice', 'suffering', which tell us little of the reality which they purport to represent.

Nolan's book avoids this pitfall remarkably well. From the very beginning, it reeks of the very particular and concrete conditions of the South African situation in the late 1980's. We are not only told how *important* the practice, the struggle and the concrete conditions are for doing a South African theology: we are told *what* they are. The shape of the book is determined by the conviction that the important hermeneutical circle is set up, not in terms of alternative systems of ideas, but in terms of struggle and theology, the poor and the word. But the conviction is apparent not by being argued for but simply by becoming obvious in the method: the movement backward and forward, from the Gospel to the painful facts of the apartheid system, back to the Gospel and back again to the liberation and salvation experienced in the movements of resistance.

The virtue of this approach—*using* the methodology of the liberation theologians, rather than simply describing or defending it—is that it represents to us both the Gospel and the human reality of South Africa with a power and lucidity, combined with scholarship, which are rarely found in works as accessible as this one.

What Nolan could have managed without perfectly well is the occasional defence of his own position by the odd method of attack by misrepresentation—his swipes at Aristotle and the book of the Apocalypse, for example. So Aristotle's moral approach, where *virtus stat in medio*, is taken quite wrongly to imply that one must compromise justice, seeking a mean between love and failure to love, between justice and injustice. Aristotle's mean is not about moral compromise, but about identifying the right way to act. Once you have identified it, you do it, and you do it too without compromise, to the hilt, and if you are really virtuous you do it gladly. Apart from being wrong in his attack on Aristotle, then, Nolan also thereby loses a potentially useful ally.

Again, there is this suggestion that the book of the Apocalypse is likely to turn people into 'passive observers and spectators' of history because of its 'supernaturalism which excludes the work of human hands.' This is a very strange reading of the book, and of the apocalyptic genre itself, and it does not make a convincing case here. It also seems to imply a kind of dualism which cannot see that liberation might be both a gift of God *and* the work of human hands. God and the ANC are not two different agencies of social change.

But these are criticisms of details in a book which, as a whole, is a much needed contribution to the work of liberation theologians, and which might inspire others to adopt this model in writing in other contexts.

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