

obscurity, and Bryant does nothing to show that we are justified in so understanding (if that is the right word) the traditional doctrine. One feels that there may be something in what he says, but

here, as throughout the book, he explains too little and moves too quickly over too wide a field. It would have been a better book had it been more careful and less ambitious.

GARETH MOORE O.P.

LETTERS FROM A PRISONER OF CONSCIENCE by Carlos Christo. *Lutterworth Press*. 1978. pp. 241 £3.95.

In November 1969 a group of Brazilian Dominicans were arrested on charges of subversion, as part of a campaign against the Dominicans in Brazil by that country's political police. In *New Blackfriars* July 1970, one of that group, Tito de Alencar Lima O.P. described in chilling detail his own agony from torture inflicted by the brutal Department of Political and Social Order (D.O.P.S.): "electric shocks, kicks in the genital organs and in the stomach were repeated. I was beaten with small planks of wood, cigarette butts were snuffed out on my body. For five hours I was subjected to this dog treatment ... I was assured that this was just a sample of what would happen to the Dominicans". He tried unsuccessfully to end this horror by slashing arteries and veins in his wrists. Eventually he was released and lived for a while in the Dominican priory of St Jacques in Paris, but the torture had brutally wrecked both mind and body, and he finally broke down and killed himself.

Sharing a prison cell with Tito was one of his brethren, Carlos Christo, (Betto), and this book is a collection and translation of his letters over a period of four prison years to his family, Dominican brothers, and friends. Anyone who wants to get under the skin of Latin American Liberation Theology to understand what it is *really* about, (as opposed to the comfortable, flabby criticism of it in the 1978 Reith Lectures), please read these letters.

Betto was born in 1944 into a middle-class traditional family in a part of Brazil known for its social and political conservatism. After secondary school he moved to Rio de Janeiro, worked with the Young Christian Students, and started journalistic studies at the university. He left university in 1965 to join the Dominican Order, and after making solemn profession embarked on his theological studies in Sao

Leopoldo Seminary. It was there in 1969 that he was arrested in the anti-Dominican purge, on charges of subversion against the military government. He was in prison for twenty-two months without trial before being sentenced to four years imprisonment. He was released in October 1973.

The letters collected here were written over the period from his arrest in 1969 to Jan. 1973 and cover a fairly wide spectrum of topics, observations and feelings, including family gossip, prison life, capitalism, corrupt government, ("what phonies and liars people in power are"), torture, ("torturers fear a smile, even a weak one"), spirituality, biblical criticism, faith and politics. The editor has kindly provided a helpful subject-index.

One of the fascinating things is to watch his spiritual progress in prison. His early letters suggest a youthful, heady zest for the ordeal, confident and even thankful that he has been chosen to be a dramatic witness to the Gospel. "We are well in the profound joy of the Spirit. We are grateful to be allowed to re-enact in our own lives Jesus' way to redemption. He was persecuted, imprisoned and condemned.... I have not felt one moment of discouragement in prison. In fact I find it a truly enriching experience!" But it later becomes clear that that 'enriching experience' is by no means inevitable, ("prison can humanise a person or turn him into a brute"), but is grimly gained through suffering and darkness. "At dawn this prison is the image of hell. Banging and shouting and songs of desperation reverberate through the cell block, exploding from hearts steeped in bitterness.... I make every attempt to put this period of seclusion to good use. It is cruel but it is not in vain. Many things will be born in this darkness." But through the darkness he has to go, including the darkness of a sense

of failure which can only be resurrected by a tenacious trust in God: "Sometimes," he writes in March 1971, "I'm afraid I won't be able to see this thing through.... What keeps me going is an immense, exaggerated confidence in divine providence; I cling to providence like one waiting for a miracle." Prison, he discovers, has shattered many of his convictions. "At the age of twenty-six, I suddenly realise that all my adolescent dreams have gone up in smoke.... All the principles that once resounded in my head and made me the prototype of the Western Christian have now broken to smithereens". Out of the ruins come a new, Christ-centred spirituality and a fresh understanding of religious life, especially Poverty, "In my eyes poverty means putting yourself entirely at the service of the poor.... I must be accountable to the disadvantaged and oppressed, not to the rich and powerful. It is the former who are the living image of Jesus Christ ... Goodbye to the myths of the bourgeoisie! ... I absolutely do not wish to return to the social class from which I came." When he was released he asked his provincial that he be not ordained priest but allowed to live and work as a lay-brother with the shanty town poor.

Many of the letters take up the theme of the role of the Church in the world, and often he is very critical; of the church clinging to middle-class respectability, of its ease with compromise masquerading as prudence, its preaching of an individualistic morality and spirituality, and of the inability of much of its theological language to make a relevant critique of our world. "Our cell mates do have a great curiosity about Christianity, and it becomes obvious that our language is inadequate to express clearly who and what we are ... What do we have to offer to people whose courageous witness is a silent challenge to us? When have our theological reflections dealt with crucial problems of the present day? ... I would like some bishops and theologians to spend at least a month in prison ... We must scrape the rust off theology ... We haven't shown the daring of the Church Fathers, of men like Augustine and Thomas Aquinas who thought in theological terms about their own times." But it is

clear that his criticism comes from a deep love for the church and the Gospel she carries, and a longing for her liberation—that is the only sense he can make of his imprisonment. So he writes at Easter to a congregation of nuns, "Easter, which is liberation, has not yet arrived for us, who are prisoners for Christ. It is important that it arrives for the Church, that our imprisonment help to liberate God's word from every kind of subjugation and compromise. That is our mission, and we shouldn't grieve over it. It must be carried out to the end." In another letter, after criticising Paul VI's *Octogesima Adveniens*, he says "The root of my severity and my impatience is a profound and passionate love for the Church. I want to see the Church free and untainted and poor—at one with its founder ... I do not want it to be, like a prostitute, the tool of anyone who can pay. I want it to be the image of Jesus Christ".

Reading these letters, I couldn't help being reminded of Bonhoeffer's *Letters and Papers from Prison*. Certainly Bonhoeffer was an older man, perhaps more learned, a professor of theology, but he and Carlos Christo suffered the bitter-sweet price for living their belief in the truth of the Gospel of Jesus—as Betto says, "funny isn't it? In every age people who fight for freedom end up in prison and some are condemned to death by the judges of their day". And I found reading these letters a bitter-sweet experience,

moved not only by feelings of bleak sadness for his sufferings and the sufferings of the people of his country, but also thankfulness to God for the inspiration of his witness. Because in Betto, in the dead Tito, in Bonhoeffer, in all his prison brethren the crucified Jesus lives. Finally, listen to him writing about the lot of a political prisoner:

Everything that society banishes from its midst ends up here. It's like a giant sewer into which refuse drains on its way to the ocean that is freedom. Living in a sewer is an indescribable experience. Here all sorts of cast-offs meet ... we live here together with the moles and cockroaches that breed under the city. We smell our lack of freedom almost unbearably. Above us, the rest of the city goes on as usual,

chewing, digesting, and excreting what it produces. Through these sad and narrow tunnels of cement and iron run peoples' dreams, ideals, blood, hopes and unalterable faith that the water of the ocean is not far away. One day we will get up there, and then the desert will bloom and the oases will dry up ... We are pariahs, criminals, dissenters—banished, oppressed and alienated: the wretched of the earth ... But in all this we find salvation. We iden-

tify with one who was born in a stable and died on the cross ... Ill-treated and in rags, we hear the voice of him who bids us to the banquet where the chalice of his blood will slake our present thirst ... This is our path. It leads to liberation. It winds but it never turns back. To turn back is to betray, to be afraid. We have passed the point of no return. We cannot look back. We can only go on.

ALBAN WESTON O.P.

POPE JOHN SUNDAY MISSAL Edited by **Mgr Michael Buckley Kevin Mayhew Ltd.**
1979. £4.00 or £6.50.

During the last few years Mgr Buckley has not been devoting the whole of his time to the absurdities of the "Peace People", he has also been usefully engaged in producing probably the finest English Sunday Missal since the old St Andrew Missal of pre-conciliar days. In one compact beautifully printed volume it contains all the Sunday masses for the three year cycle together with the major feasts. The binding of the cheaper edition (which this reviewer received) is such that the book will probably disintegrate shortly after three years of regular use, but then the obvious thing to do is to buy another. At the astonishingly cheap price of £4 this would work out at about 2½p per Sunday.

Like the St Andrew's Missal this one contains much more than the liturgical texts. Mgr Buckley provides forty pages of excellent catechesis on the christian life and the sacraments as well as explanations of the structure of the liturgy and of the gospels. This is just the kind of book that could be lent to an enquiring friend puzzled about what Catholicism is all about. There are prayers before and after Mass and a useful collection of occasional prayers including both the rosary and the stations of the cross. As Mgr Buckley says in his introduction "there is a combination of old and new prayers and devotions so that this missal may become a reconciling and healing factor in a changing Church and world."

The Grail psalms are used, which I suppose is all right since this version has become the most singable one in English, but I think it a pity that the scriptural readings should have been taken from the Jerusalem Bible. The great value of that bible lies in its annotations and cross-references; as an English translation, especially for liturgical use, it is for the most part a calamity.

With so much else in the book it seems a pity not to have included the Latin texts of the *Missa Normativa Ordo Missae*, with a parallel column of English, for those who wish occasionally to take part in the Latin Mass (and to recognise its enormous superiority to the so-called 'Tridentine' Mass peddled by Archbishop Lefebvre and his friends). The mean little page or two of Latin texts of the 'People's parts' added as a sort of afterthought at the end is no substitute for this.

Music is provided for the congregational responses of the Ordinary of the Mass—but when will our musical elite realise that we musical illiterates find it much *easier* to follow plainchant than these fussy five little line squiggles that have been creeping in over the past few centuries? The book is disfigured, in my view, by fuzzy little pictures here and there, but they are not actually offensive or particularly distracting.

All in all an exceedingly good buy. Let us hope it spells the final doom of those horrible missalettes.

HERBERT McCABE O.P.