

Reviews

LIBERATION THEOLOGY AFTER THE END OF HISTORY: THE REFUSAL TO CEASE SUFFERING by Daniel M. Bell, Jr., *Routledge*, London and New York, 2001. Pp. 224, £15.99 pbk

Daniel Bell's work, *Liberation Theology after the End of History*, offers a theological response to the perceived triumph of the capitalist machine—a triumph which, according to Francis Fukuyama, heralded the 'end of history'. The focus of the work is an analysis of the current state of (Latin American) liberation theologies and the extent to which they offer effective resistance to, or are (unwittingly) complicit with, 'savage capitalism' (to use Franz Hinkelammert's term). The result is a challenging and at times quite disturbing volume, which urges the church to articulate its resistance to capitalism, not through the call for justice, but through the risk-laden strategy of forgiveness and 'the refusal to cease suffering'.

The book begins by offering an analysis of the situation facing the Church and society under capitalism. Drawing primarily on the work of Gilles Deleuze and Michel Foucault, Bell sets out to show how capitalism has taken control of the very flows of desire that constitute both the state and the subject (Deleuze), disciplining them by various 'technologies of power' (Foucault). Against this background, Bell charts the way in which Liberation Theology developed in the wake of the decline of the New Christendom movement. Though acknowledging the many strengths of Liberation Theology, Bell argues that the failure of the liberationists to break from the New Christendom model of a depoliticised church and politics as 'statecraft' left their thought insufficiently radical to overcome the disciplines and technologies of the capitalist order. Desire is still held captive.

In response to this, Bell puts forward the model of the church as a community of desire—a community with its own technologies and therapies that 'fund resistance and liberate desire (p. 88).' In particular, Bell considers the writings of St Bernard of Clairvaux and aspects of twelfth-century monastic discipline, highlighting how Christian practices such as confession and liturgy create a 'veritable economy of desire'. (p. 92) In contrast to this, however, Bell highlights how resistance to capitalism in liberationist thought has been largely articulated in terms of a demand for justice, rather than a therapy of desire. But such justice, Bell argues, merely perpetuates a terror—a terror born of the endless cycle of demands for 'what is due'. This leads Bell to suggest, in his final chapter, that the key therapy of desire that the Church must employ in order to liberate itself from the bonds of savage capitalism is the therapy of forgiveness—a forgiveness that we meet at the heart of the Christian message, on a cross at Calvary in an act that utterly overturns our conception of 'what is due' and in a refusal to cease suffering. Commenting on David Hart's work on

St Anselm, Bell reminds us: 'The atonement is not about meeting the demands of an implacable justice before which even God must bow, but the forgiveness that enables desire to return to its source.' (p. 147). This is an excellent book, and should be welcomed by anybody with an interest in Liberation Theology, Pastoral Theology or the relationship between Church and society. Indeed, Bell's examination of the captivity of desire under savage capitalism should be read by a far wider audience, highlighting, as it does, the way in which we are all imbricated into a system that is both pitiless and death-bound. However, one feels that there is a sense in which Bell's analysis of the captivity of desire could have been developed further. For instance, there seems to be insufficient awareness of the physicality of desire, its erotic or libidinal aspects—such considerations being invited by the work of Gilles Deleuze, upon which much of Bell's argument is based. Also, to whom is the book primarily addressed? For, whilst Bell, quite rightly, shows how capitalism holds sway in both 'first' and 'third' worlds, one might ask to what extent the disciplines and technologies that shape and reshape desire operate differently in each case. Does capitalism seduce us in different ways? And, if so, does the Church need to draw upon different therapies of desire to fund effective resistance? Indeed, while two of the endorsements that preface the book urge it to be read in conjunction with William Cavanaugh's *Torture and Eucharist*, it would perhaps be more illuminating for those of us working in a first world context to read *Liberation Theology After the End of History* alongside Graham Ward's *Cities of God*

Notwithstanding these points, this is a very worthy book. Bell clearly spells out the challenges facing the Church, sensitively examines the work of the Liberation Theologians, and points to a response that is both radical and distinctively Christian—the therapy of forgiveness. A message which surely deserves to be heard.

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STORY AS TORAH. READING THE OLD TESTAMENT ETHICALLY
by Gordon J. Wenham, *T & T Clark*, Edinburgh, 2000. Pp. 192,
£25.00 hbk.

By 'reading the Old Testament ethically', the author primarily means reading in this way those 'historical' stories in the Old Testament which seem to have little relevance to the actual revelation of God's purpose and will: many of the tales of the Patriarchs in the earlier days of the nation's history, various adventures during the time of the Judges, and so on. These are often 'dismissed' as being without much significance and the author is keen to show that this is a misconceived attitude. By examining the intentions of the authors concerned they can be seen to have relevance to the Torah itself.

In his reappraisal, Wenham comes up with some very exciting ideas, even visionary ones, and he presents much of these ethically 'arid' parts of the Old Testament in a new light. He concentrates largely on the 'stories' which

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