

that we now need to find a new word to talk about descriptions as opposed, say, to questions. Advocates of descriptive content do not have to say that all sentences are descriptions, if that offends. And they can perfectly well distinguish between descriptions and questions without inventing new words. As for the problem about symbols and what is expressed by them, it is just false that anyone committed to a notion of descriptive content is also committed to regarding truth as a property of sentences (at least in some absolute sense). Many would say that it is *propositions* that are strictly speaking true or false. Baker and Hacker are here just blurring the issue and refusing to acknowledge what there is to be acknowledged. They are presenting what purports to be *reductio ad absurdum*, but by sleight of hand they are diverting attention from a matter which ought to be dealt with quite differently.

And this, it seems to me is characteristic of their approach in many parts of the book. The result is a vigorous, lively, and often very funny piece of polemic which contains many good things of which I have said nothing. But it is not, I think quite clearly the cure-all its authors would have us believe. Nevertheless, it is evidently a book which will be much read and discussed.

BRIAN DAVIES OP

**THE GOSPEL IN ART BY THE PEASANTS OF SOLENTINAME** *Gill and Macmillan, Dublin. £5.95 1984*

Solentiname is an archipelago of thirty-eight islands in Lake Nicaragua, inhabited by fishermen, farmers and craftsmen. Since 1966 it has also been a Christian commune, founded by the Marxist priest and poet, Ernesto Cardenal. When the Pope visited Central America he ordered Cardenal to keep out of politics but Cardenal is still the Minister of Culture in the Marxist Sandinista government. He is a radical. He is a radical Christian, devoted to the gospels, impatient of the established Church with its conservatism and its priestly caste. He is a political radical because, he says, the gospels oblige him to be one.

This book is a collection of reflections on the gospels by the peasants who joined Solentiname in the 60s and 70s and by their beloved leader Cardenal, known affectionately as Ernesto. The reflections are short, simple, passionate and always about the poor. There are visual reflections by the peasant artists of Solintiname, wonderfully sumptuous and evocative paintings which are like naïf Gauguins with political undertones. The crowd in the Psalm Sunday carry banners proclaiming "Long Live Jesus the Liberator" and "Down with Somoza", then dictator of Nicaragua. Herod's massacre of the innocents is carried out, with ghastly savagery, by Somoza's National Guard. It is the National Guard who drag Jesus to Calvary through the jungle. Jesus is a peasant like the people of Nicaragua, who watch him in helpless misery, one of them beneath a notice stating baldly "Jesus comunista".

It is easy to see why Somoza destroyed Solentiname. In 1977 his men descended on the islands, burning the commune and the peasants' homes, killing and raping the people, destroying the library and turning the Church into a military barracks. It is easy to see why the peasants took arms. They had lived in repression for fifty years. For the first time in fifty years the gospel meant something to them; the Church was their Church, not the religious department of the establishment, and when Somoza attacked it they fought back. They joined the Sandinista revolutionary army, which overthrew Somoza in 1979 and set up the present Sandinista Marxist government. They rebuilt Soltiname. Cardenal became Minister of Culture.

The book is uncomfortable for an affluent western reader. It sees western life as not just complacent and unreal but guilty. It is universally and accusingly political, or as the peasants at Solentiname would say, Christian. The world consists of the rich and the poor, the guilty and the innocent, the people of power and the people of God. The reflections all date from the Somoza years and there are none concerning the

Sandinista régime, which many Nicaraguans have found increasingly disillusioning. There is no easy way out of the problems raised by Solentiname.

TERESA MCLEAN

**A VISION OF HOPE. The Churches and Change in Latin America, by Trevor Beeson and Jenny Pearce. Fount Paperbacks. pp. 290. £2.95.**

Books on Latin America sell notoriously badly, and Fount are to be congratulated on having dared to bring out this timely response by an ecumenical working party to the British Council of Churches' request for a study project.

An initial overview of Latin American history, both drawing out the common threads in the continent's development and emphasizing the immense diversity of each republic, is followed by an introduction to the context and formative elements of the Liberation Theology stance. The various elements — base communities, conscientization, popular religiosity, the influence and demythification of Marx in the works of some of the theologians, orthopraxis — are introduced with unavoidable simplification. Official Church documents are quoted extensively, and the attitudes of different, non-Catholic, Christian groups are elucidated.

There then follows a chapter each on seven of the major republics and a combined chapter on Central America. Two thirds of each chapter is dedicated to an historical, economic and social survey of the country in question, and the remainder to the Churches. The Chapter on Argentina is very well nuanced, and that on Paraguay is fascinating, given the near complete lack of readily accessible news about it. Cuba, Brazil, Chile, Peru and Mexico are the other republics described. The last, much longer, chapter, which skilfully knits together the Central American republics, is an undisguised plea for support for Nicaraguan and indigenous interests against military and United States intervention.

Although in general (and unexpectedly, given the collective nature of the research and authorship), the style of writing is readable, consistent and clear. There are some ambiguities of attitude owing (I suspect) to the "varying degrees" with which the authors "share the perspective of Liberation Theology" (Preface). This leads: to greater magnanimity being displayed towards the *sectas* in some chapters than in others (cf. Paraguay and Chile); to the assertion that "liberation theologians are in no sense heretical, rather do they express a somewhat cautious orthodoxy" (p. 50) (surely out of place in an informative book directed to a mixed ecumenical readership); and to the remark "This does not mean that the Roman Catholic Church has become a political force. It has however begun to play a new political role,..." (p. 40), when, from the perspective of the rest of the book, unconditional ecclesiastical support for a régime is at least as political as an option for the poor.

The authors are right to balance their emphasis on the progressive factors in the churches by pointing out that these (and any ecumenical ventures) are definitely minority concerns at the moment, and they are justly sanguine as to the 'arduous' nature of any hopes for change. The correctness of detail is an impressive tribute to the experts who were consulted (though Dussel (page 221) who teaches in Mexico is not a Mexican), and the (quite complex) explanations of economic history, while clearly by nature partisan, are extremely lucid and will carry the least initiated reader.

While delighted by the range and actuality of the information and the clarity of its presentation I could not help but be slightly disappointed by the overall focus of the book. The British do not in fact look on Latin America from the viewpoint of impartial observers, but from that of a long tradition of military adventurers, entrepreneurs, immigrants, mercenaries, exploiters and educators, their view coloured by a deep-seated hostility to things Hispanic. Thus a vision of Latin America, and particularly one by and for Christians, is surely not about "them", neatly described, but about "us" and how those of us who are not indigenous to the Americas have participated and failed to