

traditional vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. The conversion of life and stability required by the Rule of St Benedict, and the spirituality and challenge of the vows are dealt with in other chapters. The style is a novice master's shorthand. Some central points have to be made clearly and often, and tangents avoided. The complexities of monastic life are broken down by headings and numerous sub-divisions to manageable proportions for the beginner. Questions and lively quotations from desert Fathers preserve the reader from distractions. There are some confusing diagrams and lengthy bibliographies to each chapter.

The mood is one of confidence. Although the book was a long time coming from its oral stage, it bears the atmosphere of its time. Some anxieties at the period of the Council have been overcome and there is a feeling of having weathered a storm. Hence the book gives an unruffled presentation of traditional values and practices. No probes or radical suggestions are provided. Perhaps they were felt not to concern the novice at this stage. Instead

there is a faint nostalgia in the fastidious tone adopted in discussing chastity. There are familiar rationalisations in the chapter on poverty. The author's comments are everywhere lucid and sensible, but the general teaching is unremarkable.

There is a curiously impersonal tone which may be explained by the unfortunate passage from spoken word to printed page. But the author appears to have had an interesting life. He was born of American parents in China, underwent a conversion in early manhood and has now become an Argentinian citizen in the Cistercian foundation in Azul. One might have expected some expression of this experience to light up the discussion. There is none. This is particularly a pity in the subject of poverty. There are so many platitudes available, that the reader feels disappointed that an obviously spiritual and perceptive writer living by choice in South America has not something more to say.

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RICH MAN, POOR MAN – AND THE BIBLE by Conrad Boerma. *SCM* 1979. pp 106. £2.25

POVERTY AND EXPECTATION IN THE GOSPELS by David L. Mealand. *SPCK* 1980 pp vi + 136 £3.95.

Both these books are about biblical attitudes to poverty, and both, I think, are written out of a conviction that poverty is still a pressing problem, and that what was written and spoken in biblical times offers certain clues to a sound attitude to that problem. 'Offers certain clues', because both are also aware that the Bible is not simply a textbook on social ethics which can be read and applied to our situation without more ado. "It may not be a simple matter to found a modern social and political theory directly on the gospels, but the New Testament gives no comfort to those who think that religion or morality can turn a blind eye to oppression, injustice or flagrant inequalities." (Mealand p 98). "The Bible does not give us a blueprint. From within their own social situation its authors described how God changed their world, how he took the side of the poor and championed their cause. From within this tradition, we, too, can try to do the

same thing in our world we can look for the will of the same God; seek possible parallels; and join the same resistance movement against poverty and its causes." (Boerma, p 29). The two extracts characterise well two different approaches to the problem: that represented by Boerma, the pastor and missionary to Latin America, and that of Mealand, the careful and judicious academic. For the latter, the double negative: it is not irrelevant to look at the modern world in the light of the Gospels; for the former, praxis is the key to understanding what would otherwise be a closed book.

Boerma sees the biblical tradition as offering a 'strategy for change', since it too grew during a period when such factors as private ownership and the development of a military establishment had broken down the older tribal solidarity and caused an ever-widening gulf between the rich and powerful and the poor and oppressed. The

strategy has three aspects: 'Righteousness', which is seen in the covenant demands expressed by Law and Prophets, and in the spontaneous community of goods practised by Christians, beneficiaries of the new covenant; 'Solidarity', which seems to be the same thing and scarcely in need of a separate chapter. ('Poverty', he writes, – p 66 – "is not just a matter of politics; it is just as much an attack on the unity of the people of God." I'd have thought, though, that attacks on the unity of the people of God were very much "a matter of politics".) Anyway, that separate chapter is very short, and he goes on to a third aspect of the Bible's strategy for change: 'Spirituality', or the poor man's self-reliance. The poor, rejected by the powerful, find self-reliance through reliance on God; they take the first step towards liberation by finding the language of lament the outcast find, that Jesus accepts them and gives them a value which is irrespective of the esteem of the powerful. Indeed, so much is it the case that God favours the poor, that we have to ask in a final chapter, 'Can even the rich be saved?' and the answer is no, if riches are held at the expense of the poor, if 'charity' is thought to substitute for justice, if the rich refuse to accept the logic of the cross, which means divesting themselves of their status and standing in solidarity with the poor.

This book is more general, more popular, more pastoral in tone than Mealand's. It is not a work of first-hand scholarship, though it is written by someone who has read scholars. I find it a good attempt at seeing how biblical study impinges on our social consciousness *and vice versa*. On that score it needs more theoretical underpinning: as a friend asked me, would Boerma's hermeneutical *principles* allow one to offer a critique of a slave-owner who found justification for his position in the biblical text?

Mealand's book begins with a brief survey of the economic and social history of first-century Palestine. The Gospels of the title are the Synoptics. The method of the study is to look at the various layers of tradition as they concern property and poverty, starting with the redactional emphases of Matthew and Luke, moving on to the sources (presumed, without arguing the point, to be Special Mt, Mk, Q, and

Special Lk), then the oral tradition and the actual teaching of Jesus. The attempt is made to correlate the various emphases of the particular layers with the various stages of first-century Palestinian history: for instance, the reversal-of-fortunes theme in the Magnificat and in the story of Dives and Lazarus would best be located in the time of the famine, 47-48 A.D. There is a final chapter which includes a 'contemporary postscript' where he looks at the endeavours of various modern theologians to draw conclusions for today from the biblical evidence; conclusions from the left (Miranda etc.) and from the right (Norman) are found wanting, and his own conclusion is the double negative quoted in the first paragraph of this review.

I have three comments to make on Mealand's detailed and careful study. First, I doubt whether it's sound to make a distinction between, say, Luke qua redactor and Luke qua includer of particular materials on wealth and poverty: as though you could say Luke wasn't very stern himself, but he had to include stern material because it was in his sources; surely the choosing of material is itself a redactional activity?

Secondly, what is meant by a statement like: "The woes on the rich (Lk 6:24-26) may well reflect that hostility. [sc. between Christians and wealthy Sadducees around 47-48]." (p 46)? Does it mean that the woes originate from that time, or that they became particularly prominent in an already existing tradition at that time?

Thirdly, although Mealand stresses the importance, especially in Jesus' own teaching, of the connection between the imminence of the Kingdom and the right attitude to possessions, I don't think he makes enough of the political relevance of apocalyptic, either at the historical level (apocalyptic does, in practice, tend to be well correlated with concrete political initiatives), or at the theological level (a biblical theology might be fruitfully practised which notes that apocalyptic functions as a challenge to prevailing forms of consciousness.)

Mealand's book is well appended, indexed, annotated etc. except that it doesn't have an index of Rabbinic references.

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