

that only a minority of children in schools could ever be students of theology, a view reflected by John Hull in 'Theology and RE', who suggests that theology enters into religious education only occasionally and obliquely. By contrast I am committed to the view, not to be found in this dictionary, that theology as an open, critical, investigative and hermeneutic "science" should be available for all school pupils regardless of their particular religious commitments and non-commitments. For such a line of argument readers will have to consult the papers of the last Downside Symposium recently published by the Epworth Press and edited by James Barnett under the title *Theology at 16+*. It is noteworthy, however, that several entries in the dictionary suggest that a move is about to take place in the teaching of religious education away from the objective observation of religious phenomena towards a more theological approach, though it will be essential to avoid a move which favours a conservative shift to a methodology which encourages attempts at the formation of children into specific beliefs.

GEOFFREY TURNER

**THE RELIGIOUS ROOTS OF REBELLION: Christians in the Central American Revolutions by Philip Berryman. SCM Press, London, 1984. Pp 464. £12.50.**

Latin American liberation theologians, such as Sobrino and Gutierrez, make much of the fact that all theology is "contextual", that it arises from the need to follow Christ in particular economic, social and political circumstances, a particular historical context. Unfortunately, while this is a point that can not be too heavily stressed in a theological project whose aim is to make a real difference to the way people live, these theologians often tend to write as if their readers were already quite familiar with the "context" in which they are writing. While this may be true of those readers of the Spanish original texts who happen to live in Latin America (and for whom these works are perhaps, primarily written) I suspect that many of us who read only the English translations are considerably less well-informed. In the first 270 pages of this book we are offered some understanding of the historical background to the present situation in Central America, and the development of the economic and political context of a theology that has led many Christians to struggle and to take up arms against their rulers and oppressors.

This historical survey offers only a general discussion of the regional situation in Central America, but a much more detailed discussion of three countries (Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala) where governmental repression has been the harshest, where popular opposition has been most organised and effective and, in the case of Nicaragua, where insurrection has been (at least for the present) successful. However, though the discussion centres on these three countries, the issues brought into focus by this section will help us to understand much of what is going on throughout Latin America.

Particular attention is paid to the role of the Church in these developments, both as an ideological ally of the ruling elites, and as an agent of change in opposition to oppressive regimes. Though the Church has never found herself entirely on one side or the other, there has been a profound change among both laity and hierarchy, a change expressed by the bishops of the Medellín and Puebla conferences in their "option for the poor"; by the Nicaraguan bishops' declaration on the "just insurrection" that overthrew the Somoza tyranny; by the preaching and death of Oscar Romero, and so on.

The second half of the book is a series of reflections on some of the ethical and theological questions raised. It begins with a well-argued case for the need for radical change, the revolutionary "proyecto", which makes good use of John Paul II's encyclical of 1981, "Laborem Exercens", on relations of production and socialisation of the means of production. Berryman goes on to argue convincingly that western forms of democracy are not entirely suitable for Central America, and that the revolutionary forms of local and "economic" democracy such as have appeared in Nicaragua may

have more to offer in terms of equality and participation.

The following discussion of the use of violence by popular organisations suggests that such use of violence, while justified in the traditional teaching of the church on the "just insurrection", is equally justifiable simply in terms of self-defence, such is the level of violence directed against the poor. But he is not only concerned with justifying revolutionary violence as such, the "ius in bellum", but also offers useful guidelines as to the kind of violence that is to be regarded as permissible, the "ius ad bello", making the very important distinction between insurrection and terrorism. This is followed by a discussion of human rights which presents another challenge to the liberal western view, in which Berryman argues that there is a hierarchy of rights, some rights being prior to others, and this must be borne in mind when we are tempted to be overly critical of revolutionary movements. This discussion has successfully "unpacked" some of the issues that most disturb western observers of the Central American revolutionary process, and answers many of the objections that are raised against it.

Berryman offers a series of reflections on the Church's commitment to the poor, her relationship to the popular and revolutionary organisations, the role of political theory in the Church and the use of Marxist tools of analysis by Christians. In conclusion, a discussion of some theological aspects of the revolutions, the idea of "social sin", the need to extend the idea of personal conversion to that of a collective "conversion of the Church" to a preferential option for the poor, and the profound Christocentricity of liberation theology (perhaps in its defence against its critics who accuse it of "ideologising" the faith).

This book should have a wide readership, not just among those readers of liberation theologians who wish to gain some insight into the background to their writings, but also those who are deeply suspicious of what they see as a heterodox theological development—they may be surprised at just how orthodox and traditional this movement is. It should also be of interest to people working in the many Latin American solidarity organisations and human rights groups in Britain and North America, many of whom suffer from an ideological sclerosis that renders them incapable of seeing Christianity as anything other than a force of reaction.

GILBERT MÁRKUS OP

**FROM DARKNESS TO THE DAWN** by Anton Van Der Walle (Tr. John Bowden), *SCM Press 1984* pp.261. £8.95.

This book is by a Dominican Prior who is acutely sensitive of the difficulties facing belief in life after death today and who wrestles with the task of reinterpreting the doctrine in terms which he hopes will speak to the contemporary believer. He is conscious of how strongly modern science endorses the ancient Hebrew view of man as a psychosomatic unity and believes that in the light of this knowledge, the immortality of the soul is "scientifically impossible" (p. 25). At the same time he believes that once we appreciate the enormous extension of the human race, we must realise that "any conception of a resurrection of the body, coupled with some thought of material identity, is sheer nonsense" (p. 26). He realises that his views break with tradition but he holds that the New Testament's "hopelessly mistaken conceptions" about the Universe are "in no way binding" (p. 132), and that even though the latest pronouncement of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith endorses the concept of the soul "we must be clear from the start that the teaching office of the Church cannot make any binding pronouncements on a scientific or philosophical anthropology as such" (pp. 25 and 159).

However, Fr Van der Walle seeks to write as a believer whose purpose is to liberate the message of the resurrection from its classical mode of presentation, in order to make "the notion of life after death at least comprehensible to modern educated readers" (cover). He insists that life after death must be recognised as a religious belief

491