

is sufficient empirical evidence for theistic belief here and now, rendering eschatological verification 'unnecessary in Hick's system of thought, if not impossible'. (p. 45). Mathis never shows why eschatological verification is 'impossible', but he does make an interesting case for the possibility of its redundancy. The first argument suggests that Hick, like Hume, unsatisfactorily dismisses attempts to establish the reality of God through philosophical reasoning from the evidence of nature on the questionable grounds that probability judgments of this sort cannot be made with a unique object such as the universe in its entirety. Although Mathis could have pursued his point further in the light of much contemporary discussion, his main objection is that total interpretations are, in principle, valid for 'there is always the possibility of new input that might confirm one world view and disconfirm another'. (p. 74). Total explanations are not invulnerable. An example of such evidence would have been useful. Nevertheless, given that empirical verification in the form in which Hick uses it requires that doubt is removed from a rational observer's mind, Mathis argues that Tennant and Swinburne may well provide a more probable (in a nonmathematical, allogical sense) theistic interpretation of the universe rather than the naturalist. If so, then Hick's case for the necessity of eschatological verification collapses. Even allowing for the brevity of the book, Mathis should have dealt a little more fully with serious internal objections to Tennant and Swinburne to show whether Hick's thesis is really called into question by these alternative strategies. The possibility of evidence here and now for theistic belief is simply not enough to show the redundancy of Hick's eschatological enterprise, but only its possible redundancy.

Mathis' next step is to take the most serious objection, as Hick sees it, to the immediate verification of theism – the problem of evil. Mathis puts forward the interesting suggestion that a theodicy of martyrdom, exemplified in the cross, can sufficiently explain evil: as producing steadfastness; as demanding total love and trust in God; as a vehicle of judgment and reconciliation. Just over three pages of this theodicy, which is far too scant, provides, according to Mathis, an alternative to eschatological verification as it allows the theist here and now to intelligibly maintain theistic belief. In principle Mathis' argument is correct, in practice it requires far more treatment to bear the weight of his thesis.

In the final section he argues that Hick's assumption about the veracity of religious experience is questioned; both by the often conflicting plurality of religions and religious experiences as well as Hick's epistemological assumption that the world *is* ambiguous. Concerning the latter point, he suggests that Hick finally has no more evidential grounds for an eschaton than for believing in a world full of unicorns and centaurs, however logically possible both may be.

This is an interesting book raising more questions than it answers, but questions which deserve more thorough treatment than they receive.

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**THE TRUE CHURCH AND THE POOR** by Jon Sobrino. *SCM Press Ltd.* pp. 374, pb. £9.95

The poor will always be with us; the observation of Jesus (and now government policies) assures us of that, but the attitude of the Church towards the poor is not necessarily that of Jesus himself. The unsettling claim, "Blessed are the poor", was soon translated into the mundane ethical assurance, "Blessed are those who give to the poor". In this his most recent book the Jesuit theologian Jon Sobrino, who teaches in San Salvador, seeks to confront us with the original challenge, saying that "a Church *for* the poor is not yet a Church *of* the poor". The kingdom of God is not about the rich giving to the poor. Why is it that without "idealizing or sacralizing" the poor, *theirs* is the Kingdom of Heaven? The poor are not simply the object of charity, but in some way constitute a criterion of the being of the Church. There would seem to be a profound connection between the Son of Man who

became poor, and the poor who somehow were able to understand his message. Sobrino brings together the beatitudes and the *kenosis*, the self-emptying of Christ when he took the form of a servant. Suddenly the tables are turned, or overturned. It is not that giving to the poor is a mark of the true Church, rather that truth perceived by the poor is required by the Church. Sobrino sums this up in a saying presently circulating in Latin America: "the poor evangelize the Church". The Church does not possess God, not even in showing charity to the poor. If not possessed, then according to Jesus God is at least to be found among the poor, in what Sobrino calls God's "scandalous and partisan love for the poor and his intention that these poor should receive life and thus inaugurate his kingdom". With this another dimension is added. Evangelism is not only a message but an action and the criterion is the life of the poor. "The ultimate issue is whether the Church is an institution of the *gnosis* type, that is, one whose function is to transmit saving knowledge, or whether it is a people who continue the saving action of Jesus".

This is the main theme of the book and it provides the perspective for the treatment of a variety of issues, including evangelism, the nature of the Church, the religious life today. There is however another important theme which is treated in the opening chapter, an important issue of method which then forms the background to the whole work. We might approach this rather different topic by saying that the previous discussion of the Church and the poor is illustrative of two different views of theology. Inevitably Sobrino presents this schematically as a contrast between the theological tradition of Europe, and the new theology of Latin America. European theology is a child of the Enlightenment, accepting Kant's view that reason liberates man from dogmatism and authoritarianism, but also from myth and historical error. Theology has to stand at the bar of reason to show that revelation is worthy of belief, and is not incompatible with science. More recently it has attempted to argue not simply that the religious picture is reasonable, but that is meaningful, that it makes sense of our world, natural and social. It has dealt with objections and difficulties. Theology has been able to interpret the world to modern man. But with this of course we see Sobrino's criticism, as he borrows from Marx's XIth Thesis on Feuerbach: "The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways, the point is to change it". The theology of Europe has interpreted the world, to show it rational and meaningful, but has not felt responsible for attempting to change it. In passing we might note that Latin American theologians are also children of the Enlightenment, well trained in philosophy and in the historical critical method. I think that Sobrino is actually associating European theology not so much with Kant as with Hegel, whose aphorism, "What is real is rational, and what is rational is real", provides a basis for legitimizing what is as if it were what ought to be. According to Sobrino, European theology assumes that there are certain truths of revelation which are to be shown reasonable and meaningful. Latin American theology begins at quite a different place and proceeds in the opposite direction. "The theological concern is not to explain as accurately as possible what the essence of sin is, or what meaning a sinful world has, or what meaning human existence has in such a world. The concern is to change the sinful situation". We might illustrate by saying that European theology has traditionally been concerned about the *idea* of evil, and its theoretical reconciliation with the doctrine of God. Latin American theologians begin with the fact of evil, as experienced in the suffering of the poor. The response is not to explain it, but to expose it, not to show why it is necessary but to end it.

While this scheme is too neatly drawn up, it does focus attention on two different methods for theology. In the remainder of the book Sobrino gives us a series of illustrations of the practical effect of this methodological decision, and challenges us with the claim that the Latin American method is the one which does justice to the witness of the gospels.

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