

Samuel Adams decrying the Constitution of 1787 and dreading centralized government. Theirs were sour grapes. Other Americans, contemplating the "vineyard of liberty," would produce grapes of wrath; women, non-Caucasians, the poor, recent immigrants, all would wonder at the nation's hypocrisy. While Burns spends some time on these "outsiders" of the period and speculates on why there seemed so little potential for coalition radicalism among the repressed, his main focus is on the white men who created an American ideology and the institutions that were to buttress and enclose "liberty." The author challenges the clichés about an American pragmatic temper. Those who created the nation were ideologues, who seriously debated the content of those lovely words they tossed about. As Burns sees the problem, while the words could be debated, they could not be examined systematically or implemented. Our Founders' premises, logically extended, were frighteningly anarchic. Given the diversity of the nation, the institutions created to embody national aspirations

also embodied an unresolved tension between order and the centrifugal. Our political dialectic did not produce polar extremes or the merely pragmatic adoption of the efficacious but, instead, a constant interaction of forces leading to relative concentration or dispersal of authority, elitist or collective determination, transformational or transactional leadership, the benefits and detriments of voluntarism. Burns is at his most provocative and fascinating when describing how political groups and institutions worked or failed and when illustrating what he calls the "third cadre" of decision-making—what Van Buren, one of his heroes, described as the "sober second thought of the people."

So there are two books within this volume: an artful but eventually soporific reminder of textbooks past, and a matured contemplation of how and why the body politic has reflected or dodged the agonies of the American social conscience. Trying to produce a narrative survey and an incisive treatise within the same covers may have been a mistake. **WV**

A HISTORY OF THE CHURCH IN LATIN AMERICA

by **Enrique Dussel**

(Translation by Alan Neely; Eerdmans Publishing Co.; 345 pp.; \$17.95)

Jorge I. Domínguez

What is the history of the Roman Catholic Church in Latin America and how should it be written? These are the questions posed by Enrique Dussel's important, ambitious, and comprehensive work. This volume is a translation of the third Spanish edition, updated to include a discussion of the Third General Conference of Latin American Bishops, which met in Puebla, Mexico, in January and February, 1979.

The first part of Dussel's book, a hermeneutical introduction, discusses broad themes of theology, culture, and ecclesiology. The second part considers "The Christendom of the West Indies" from the beginning of the Spanish conquest until formal independence early in the nineteenth century. The third, on "the agony of colonial Christendom," looks at the period from independence to Vatican Council II. The fourth part—half the book—ponders events from Vatican II to the Puebla General Conference of Bishops. There are also three

appendices, two of which reflect at considerable length on methodology for a history of the Church in Latin America and on hypotheses for the history of theology in these countries.

Despite its title, then, this book is not just—perhaps not even—a history. For Dussel it is "basically theology." He did not wish to "produce merely secular history" but wanted to consider "the ultimate meaning of history...in the light of faith." What began as a "scientific endeavor" was "transformed into a particular reading of our history" when "history is viewed as an eschatological teleology." That "particular reading" is not easy to describe, although it is easiest to say that it is history consistent with a theology of liberation.

Dussel's description of the Church under the Spanish empire is extraordinarily benign. He is strongly supportive of a radically assimilationist approach to religious and cultural missionary work and defends the Spanish

Crown somewhat quaintly for not being capitalist. What numerous historians of the colonial period see as the climax of the empire—the Bourbon period—is for Dussel an era of "decadence" marked by the expulsion of the good Society of Jesus. He also views benignly the role of the Church during the wars of independence, and he entitles his discussion of the immediate post-revolutionary period "the constructive attitude of the Holy See since 1825." Throughout this early section Dussel's clerical orthodoxy is impressive. His reading, however, flies in the face of a considerable and accumulating historiography of the colonial, independence, and immediate post-independence periods. These histories are, frankly, rather less clerically triumphalist than Dussel's.

Because "history...cannot be the manifestation of negative and incoherent aspects," Dussel picked out from the colonial and subsequent periods those individuals and events that support his "particular reading" of history as a teleology toward his own version of liberation. Thus the book often reads as a collection of anecdotes connected only because they constitute a trend toward the struggle for liberation. This makes for exhortatory rather than explanatory history. Dussel is quite right to describe divisions within the Church, for example, but he is unable to provide a satisfactory explanation (except of the "white hats" versus "black hats" variety) of their causes.

Indeed, he finds it difficult to cope with those who disagree with him, and one can readily see why. He documents the persecution suffered by many of those associated with the theology of liberation; as a human being and as a member of the Church he is right to be angry. But this anger has gotten in the way of both his historiography and his understanding of history.

Dussel claims that his opponents espouse the "theology of the center"—that is, the theology familiar in Europe and in North America. *Ipsa facto*, these same theologians "become more culpable ideologists of oppression." Dussel's notion of ideology is interesting: Ideology "provides some knowledge for undergirding action but at the same time it conceals the fundamental level of its ultimate or actual meaning." The difficulty here is that, following unfortunate custom, only one's adversaries

are enfeebled by ideology. One's friends evince a "critico-prophetic theology." Again, while theological ideologues are assisted by the "ideological scientificism of the sciences of the center," Dussel is assisted by the good social science of the periphery. Is he offering an example of the latter when he says that "the Trilateral Commission 'invented' Jimmy Carter and put him in power"?

How is one to judge this book? Dussel displays an impressive command of the history of the Church in Latin America, but he uses it for a purpose so "particular" that it becomes difficult to read the book if one has not come to it already committed to its biases. Nor does the book lend itself to use as an impartial reference work. Dussel has valuable and poignant insights into a wide variety of topics ranging from the conciliar traditions of the Church in Latin America to the relations between prophet and people, elite and mass. It is clear that his is a thoughtful understanding of leadership in the Church. But Dussel's strong commitment to the search for justice for the people of God has made him hard of heart toward those whom he ought to call his colleagues. His history of the Church in Latin America since Vatican II has the great value of bringing together much otherwise uncollected information; but the pre-1962 part of his book serves at best as cursory background, and the post-1962 part is too partisan.

Finally, Dussel's treatment of the biblical bases and interpretations of the theology of liberation gives one pause. He makes clear, for example, that Luke 4:18 is a fundamental text of the theology of liberation, and he is able at first to render that vibrant text even more dramatic: "the servant is dedicated to subvert the system" on behalf of the poor. Subversion as the mission of the Church in the world is clearly a major theme of Dussel's main text. And yet that theme is weakened in the footnotes and in an appendix: The poor, it turns out, "are not poor only economically and politically....The fact is that biblically, the poor is essentially the 'servant of Yahweh'...who gives himself unto death in the service of God...and also...those who receive the service of the prophet" (Appendix I). As for "subversion," it turns out to be

no more than "sub-vertere," to put "below" what is "above" and vice versa (endnote 20). Luke 4:18, it appears, is not all that different from the "theology of the center."

Dussel's achievement, then, is to have communicated a different interpretation of the history of the Church; he clearly poses for us the need to understand how the Church must work to "bring good news to the poor...to proclaim to the captives release...and to set at liberty the oppressed." Unfortunately Dussel has not met that need, nor has he communicated his own "particular reading" in a persuasive and fraternal manner. WY

**STRATEGIES OF CONTAINMENT:
A CRITICAL APPRAISAL OF
POSTWAR NATIONAL
SECURITY POLICY**

by John Lewis Gaddis
(Oxford University Press; 432 pp.;
\$25.00/\$9.95)

John B. Keeley

From time to time, though infrequently, one comes across a book whose quality is such that it must be called exceptional. This is the case with John Lewis Gaddis's *Strategies of Containment*, a splendid example of the blending of the disciplines of history and political science. It provides a

**"Lord, when did
we see you hungry..."**

FAMINE

Kevin M. Cahill, M.D., ed.

In *Famine*, the most comprehensive book on the subject, experts from various disciplines consider the *history* of famine, the *economics* of famine, the *reality* of famine, the *response* to famine, and the *ethical* aspects of famine.

Contributors include: Dennis G. Carlson, Victor H. Palmieri, Lillian M. Li, John Bongaarts, Mead Cain, Kevin M. Cahill, M.D., William J. Byron, S.J., Mark Perlman, D. Gale Johnson, Harvey Leibenstein, Sudhir Sen, Eileen Egan, Stephen Green, Arthur Simon.
cloth \$15.95, paper \$8.95

WORLD CITIZEN

Action for Global Justice

by Adam Daniel Corson-Finnerty

"Out of his personal involvement in working for social justice, Finnerty gives us tangible answers to the recurring question, 'But what can I do?' He surveys global problems in human terms. Then he guides us to further reading and to a wide choice of organizations through which we can act. This impressive compendium of concern will help empower all those who want to live out their faith in this troubled world." OLCUTT SANDERS,
Friends Journal

paper \$6.95

WORLD HUNGER

**The Responsibility of
Christian Education**

by Suzanne C. Toton

"Suzanne Toton has brought together in this one volume all of the resources on this topic that are useful for an educator. She has analyzed world hunger as a moral problem in the first world rather than an economic problem of underdevelopment in the third world. Religious educators will be especially interested in the third part of the book which critically examines educational practice and describes some of the things which the author has done with this issue in her own classes."

GABRIEL MORAN, *New York University*
paper \$7.95

Also of interest:

HUNGER FOR JUSTICE

The Politics of Food and Faith

by Jack A. Nelson

paper \$5.95

**PARENTING FOR PEACE AND
JUSTICE**

by Kathleen and James McGinnis

paper \$4.95

Write for new catalog

ORBIS BOOKS
Maryknoll, NY 10545

