

BOOK REVIEWS

GUTIERREZ, Gustavo, *We Drink from our Wells: the Spiritual Journey of a People* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books/Melbourne Vic: Dove Communications, 1984), pp. 181, US\$7.95.

In some quarters, the theology of liberation still has the reputation of being “unspiritual”, “too-political”, “horizontal”, rather than “vertical”. It is fitting that Gustavo Gutierrez, the Peruvian Catholic priest, whose book *A Theology of Liberation*, made him the “father” of liberation theology, should now present this study of the spirituality, which has always been at its source. Both the theology and the spirituality bear the marks of their origins in Gutierrez’s experience as a pastor to the slum-dwellers of Lima, yet both are deeply rooted in the Catholic tradition. Among the authors most-frequently quoted, are Saints Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Bonaventure, Bernard of Clairvaux, John of the Cross, Teresa of Avila, and even Therese of Lisieux (“a powerful saint”, p. 111). The book is rich in its use of scripture, and trinitarian in its theological structure. Yet it is closely attuned to the Latin American situation. Though it is simply written as Gutierrez’s personal statement of the spirituality that has guided and nourished him, the tensions and paradoxes of Latin American Christianity are never far from the surface, coming to their most-moving expression in the frequent testimonies of Latin American martyrs and prophets, whether known (like Archbishop Oscar Romero), or unknown. These often-lengthy quotations from prison letters and spiritual diaries are among the book’s greatest treasures.

This very traditional spirituality is, at the same time, “new”, because it incorporates experiences peculiar to the Latin American context. It is not individualistic, but entirely of the people, the laity, the oppressed, as they struggle, not for rare and esoteric spiritual experiences, but for survival and their most-basic human rights. It contains a special note of anguish, because the persecutors are not pagans, but Christians. It emerges from the catacombs of a Christian culture. When it speaks of conversion, it implies solidarity and commitment to the liberation struggle; when it celebrates the gratuitousness of grace, it envisages efficacy in working for structural reform; when it holds fast to the joy of Easter, it repudiates the sadness of

the lonely and satiated, and embraces the suffering and sacrifice demanded by a objective situation of injustice.

Christians in the Pacific will be shocked and bewildered by some aspects of this book, yet it is so profoundly ecumenical that I am sure it can be a means of communicating with their brothers and sisters in the much-harsher circumstances of Latin America. Our challenge is to prevent the kind of institutionalised injustice that prevails there from establishing itself here. Gutierrez's reminder that we drink from the same wells of theology and spirituality as his slum dwellers and peasants is timely and prophetic.

Dr John D'Arcy May,
The Melanesian Institute, Goroka.

TROMPF, Garry W., ed.: *The Gospel is not Western: Black Theologies from the Southwest Pacific* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1987), ix + pp. 213 paperback.

This book is a good collection of Melanesian writings, gathered primarily at a conference held in Australia in 1981. The collection was then enlarged by adding writings of other important indigenous persons from the South Pacific region.

It is difficult to critically review a book, which contains so many pearls from so many friends. There is so much here from so many great leaders from the South Pacific, that in any limited review, someone's contribution is bound to be left out, or overlooked. Thus, if articles appear to be overlooked, I apologise. It is impossible to critically review such a varied collection without writing another book of almost the same size. Better that readers, interested in the theology of the Pacific, read these authentic contributions from black theologians from our region.

And, I must say, that a review of this book would be doubly difficult if the Melanesian writers actually did set out to show what *The Gospel is not*. . . . At the risk of using a double negative, the lasting value of this book is not in showing what the gospel is not in the South Pacific, but rather in the many helpful articles that show the *unique way in which local people have planted and nurture the gospel of Jesus Christ in our region*.