

Brian Frost has made an important contribution to a neglected part of theology and social ethics. *The Politics of Peace* will stimulate Christian theologians and believers to investigate seriously the claim that forgiveness is eminently political, and productive of social and political change.

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e. P. Vallely. **Bad Samaritans**. *First World Ethics and Third World Debt*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1990. ix + 374 pages.

The encounter between peoples, cultures, and different systems of thought leads a group of people within a given area to develop for better or for worse. Of all continents and peoples of the world, the black race, mainly located in sub-saharan Africa, may have had the most traumatic experience of inter-cultural or inter-racial encounter. From their contact with Arab-Moslem slave-kingdoms installed in Africa, through the encounter with European merchants/pirates/slave-raiders/colonialists, to the present insertion of the continent into a world history made "universal" by others the experience of Africans has been negative.

Paul Vallely in **Bad Samaritans** narrates as a journalist not only his experiences of Ethiopians and other peoples of hunger but takes the reader through "the shocking details" of the encounter between the West and the Third World; an encounter which is responsible for the misery of Africa and other Third World countries. In the camps where thousands die, the author was tempted to ask whether this was not "an act of God": "The sheer size and intractability of the problem was mind-numbing" (p. 23). After an informed analysis of the problem and its structural causes, he was not afraid of proposing solutions in order "to transform indignation into action" (p. 329).

Vallely's book is very informative in many ways. The gory details of poverty and hunger in Africa, the statistics of children who die of hunger annually in the Third World, the various

meanings attached to Western aid to developing countries, the concept of development, and of course the crucial question of the "debt trap", which is the main concern of the book, are all handled with style and expertise. In addition, the author devotes the last three chapters of his book to a theological reflection on wealth and debt.

The issue of the debt burden has become part of the menu on the breakfast table of most families in the Third World. Vallely not only researches into the origins of the debt, he also helps the reader to personally assess the debt crisis. Informed and influential opinions from the West and the Third World are cited to help in the assessment. The great proponent of *free trade*, Adam Smith, qualified the acquisition of capital by Europe through slavery and colonialism as "the savage injustice of the Europeans" which was "ruinous and destructive to several of those unfortunate countries" (p. 88). Dr. Henry Kissinger described the IMF adjustment packages as having produced "a cure that is worse than the disease" (p.184). But what will shock the average reader is to what extent the rest of the world (especially the Third World) subsidizes the economies of the West (especially that of the United States); as Wim Duisenberg, the head of the Dutch central bank said, "The war in Vietnam was not financed by the United States... but by other countries. This amazing fact is the result of the privileged financial position of the United States in the world" (p. 134). And by the ruse of giving loans to needy countries the First World through the IMF and the World Bank, whose main role is "the construction, regulation and support of a world system where multi-national corporations trade and move capital without restrictions from nation states" (p. 185), supervise the oppression of the poor countries of the world. In this way it becomes clear how "capitalism has not eradicated poverty in the West but (has) merely exported it" to the Third World (p. 267). The reader with or without a degree in economics will be bemused that the billions of dollars owed by Third World countries to the West have been paid many times over. For "70-80 per cent of the existing debt was not money which had ever been borrowed but was simply accrued interest" (p. 296). A Brazilian economist could thus describe them as "fictitious dollars" which represented nothing more than a series of book-keeping entries

in New York' (p. 192).

For the Third World, however, the debt burden is certain death. Vallely delved into Old Testament and New Testament writings to work out his christian response to the debt crisis. The "jubilee year" which in economic terms is the forgiveness of the debt is the key to his solution of the problem. The Western banks would not hear of such remission. But the christian's fundamental option for the poor, necessarily commits him to a solution which favours the poor. This option for the poor has not always been the position of the christian churches which capitulated to the prevailing individualist ethos. But the entrance of Third World countries into the World Council of Churches and the convocation of Vatican Council II signalled the major shift in the approach of the Churches to social problems. Vallely's book helps the christian community to move beyond the individualism of the Western experience to the commitment of the good samaritan.

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