

BOOK REVIEWS

Alves, Rubem A. *A Theology of Human Hope*. Washington D.C.: Corpus Books, 1969. xv + 199 pp. \$ 5.95.

Rubem Alves, formerly Director of Studies of Church and Society in Latin America and Professor of Philosophical Foundations of the Social Sciences at the University of São Paulo, and now Associate Professor of Christian Ethics at Union Theological Seminary in New York, powerfully formulates what he calls "a new language" for the Christians of the Third World. This new language is rooted in the present historical situation but is "the language of faith in the context of their commitment to the historical liberation of man" (p. xiii).

The brilliant introductory chapter expresses bluntly the author's assessment of the current situation among the "world proletariat"—"the situation of oppression" remains "but his consciousness is no longer domesticated" (p. 11). The world proletariat's response to his situation is necessarily negative but his negativity is not final for he sees the situation changing and sees hope in the future. Man's hope is his humanization, *i.e.*, he becomes the creator of his own future. How does the present situation change? Here Alves rejects technologism as the new savior. Instead he sees it (not technology but totalitarian technological societies) as a means of enslavement. For example, technology teaches a man to find happiness in the gadgets and trinkets it provides; by robbing man of meaningful work and forcing leisure on him it tells him that he is no longer needed. "Free time will be then the time of impotence, time of play, but not the time of creation" (p. 26). The creators of the future will be the "technological elites."

Political humanism which seeks to bring liberation and humanization criticizes theological language because it speaks of transcendence as above and beyond history and not in the midst of life. Political humanism refuses to make "man at home in the inhumanity of the present." It also rejects existentialism because it does not lead "to the transformation of the world by man for man. It is rather man's liberation of himself from the world" (p. 39). For a similar reason it rejects Barthianism. It rejects Moltmann's theology of hope because of the arrogance of the Church's claim to be the midwife of the future and of neglect of men outside the Church who seek to make life human.

What is lacking in these various theologies is found in Biblical theology, for Alves finds that "vocation for freedom" which characterizes political humanism is basic to Biblical theology. Israel refused to be bound by its environment, refused to adapt, and created a

new future. Paul also by his radical rejection of law refused to adapt to the concept of law and legality. Thus he concludes that "Christian and secular men who speak the language of political humanism" "participate in a fundamental refusal to be absorbed by systems that required adaption to given structures" (p. 83).

Alves, however, points to the dilemma in which political humanism finds itself. Because it is totally dependent on man and the dominating forces do not seem to be losing their grip, it is "confronted thus with the alternative between, on the one hand, optimism at the expense of its thoroughly historical character, becoming thus romantic, and, on the other, faithfulness to history and the abandonment of hope, becoming then prey to cynicism generated by frustration" (p. 87).

On the other hand, messianic humanism has been criticized as non-historical, extra-mundane, above history. Alves denies this. He affirms that messianic humanism is thoroughly historical. The Biblical concept of God is not ontological or metaphysical, but refers to what happened or can happen in history. God is the God who acts, not simply is. Human events were the loci of God's actions.

These acts of God are a history of freedom. God's will is future-oriented and can never "be invoked in order to justify the status quo" (p. 93). God's time is the presence of the future and is opposed to "organic time," which is the presence of the past since "the present emerged from the past by repetition or evolution" (p. 96).

Thus political humanism and messianic humanism are not to be distinguished by the fact that the former is historical and the latter is not, since both are historical. "The difference between them is that humanistic messianism is born out of a historical experience in which only the statistically and quantitatively tangible resources of man's freedom and determination are available, whereas messianic humanism was created by the historical reality of liberation in spite of the collapse of all human resources" (p. 98).

The new in history does not naturally appear but is created only through a dialectical process. This is so because the old opposes and resists the new. Human institutions become fixed and inflexible. Those in power establish laws to maintain the status quo. But God's presence establishes a confrontation. "The presence of the past and the presence of the future cannot coexist" (p. 112).

God is a suffering God who suffers with the oppressed. The community of faith, to be worthy of His name, must participate in the suffering of God for the liberation of men. Liberation, however, confronts the powers of domination and counter-violence meets violence. But the counter-violence which seeks liberation for the slaves is also the means of the Master's freedom from the past. The resurrection becomes meaningful in this context but it cannot be understood only subjectively, otherwise hope without history will be the result. It must be understood both objectively and subjectively together. It points to "freedom's power over history, and therefore to the possibility of hope from, in, and for history" (p. 130). He closes with the point

that life can be enjoyed even in the midst of suffering as long as one does not succumb to despair and hopelessness.

Following Marcuse, Alves has a very negative view of the technological society. He wants it to be clearly understood, however, that his critique is not a negation of technology but of totalitarian technological systems. It is the humanization of technology rather than its destruction that he seeks. The issue is whether it is possible to humanize technology. It is to this point that we could wish the author had directed his remarks. One is still left with the impression that Alves has a negative attitude toward technology itself.

Alves seeks to relate messianic humanism to political humanism through the language of Biblical theology. In this he builds upon Wright's God who acts and on Paul's radical rejection of law. Alves has many insights here as usual, but seems somewhat superficial. He has selected only that which fits his theology, for much of the OT is not only an opening to the future but a calling to the past, and Paul's rejection is not of the law but of legalism. Even a new society must be governed by laws. Change *per se* also cannot be the *summum bonum* of life. As history has shown, change can lead to dehumanization as well.

Alves criticizes Moltmann for making the Church the midwife of the future, but Cox in his "Foreword" chides Alves for not utilizing "more resources outside the Protestant tradition," and also for following more closely than necessary the work of Barth, Bonhoeffer, and Lehman and asks: "What would he say to those young Christians who are simply not touched by biblical theology, that new generation of radical mystics, visionaries, and ecstasies who are certainly his allies in the struggle?" (p. ix).

No doubt we shall hear more from this provocative writer in the future. Perhaps he will broaden his theological base; perhaps also he will bring more refinement and clarity to some of his points. At any rate he has given us much to ponder for a long time.

Andrews University

SAKAE KUBO

Campanhausen, Hans von. *The Fathers of the Latin Church*. Translated by Manfred Hoffman. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1969. vii + 328 pp. \$ 6.50.

This book was originally published in German with the title *Lateinische Kirchenväter* in 1960. It was translated into English and was published with the title *Fathers of the Latin Church* in England in 1964 and in the United States with the title *Men Who Shaped the Western Church* in 1965. This reprint coming four years after the first American edition attests its continuing popularity.

The book is directed to the general reader rather than the expert (who nevertheless can also learn much from it), but it is written with