
This is a book by a Latin American liberation theologian tackling a subject which is different from the usual battle-ground of such theologians. This work is not so much about justice and empowerment of the poor and disadvantaged as how to cope with and understand large-scale genocide in the context of Christian theology. Aguilar begins with the felt absence of God during the course of the massacres in Rwanda and in their aftermath. The fact that they occurred in an almost wholly Christianised society, that some priests, ministers and religious were complicit and that even church buildings were not safe as refuges, provides the background to the author's concerns.

It is true that if human evil is the rejection of God, then God is, indeed, absent but is that the same as saying that God has died? Does God being alive depend on political and social circumstances, however tragic they may be? Instead of focusing on the absence or death of God, should Aguilar have focused much more on the origin and nature of human evil; on the Fall, rebellion and the possibility also of repentance, restitution and renewal? He claims that religion was the root of the problem, but he does not say why. Did the tragedy have more to do with ethnic history and rivalry exacerbated by the colonial and post-colonial drawing of boundaries which have left naturally antagonistic groups confronting one another in one territory? In this, at least, Rwanda is not unique and its situation can be paralleled in other parts of Africa, as well as in Asia and Latin America. He claims that God was ‘sometimes dead’ for most Rwandans. We have to ask, for Rwandans or for him? There is a difference.

He is right in saying that Liberation Theology attends to the historical and not the speculative but there is a curious lack of historical sense in a number of areas. For example, in seeking to understand the present ‘shift’ in the centre of Christianity from the North Atlantic to the Global South, it would have been very useful to have placed this shift in the historical context of previous ‘shifts’: to the Hellenised world from the Hebraic, from the Middle East to Western Europe after the rise of Islam, and so on. He attends, very well, to the ending of apartheid in South Africa and the rôle of Christian leaders there, especially Archbishop Tutu, but there is no mention of Europeans like Trevor Huddleston, Colin Winter and many others, who also paid a heavy price for their prophetic stand against the evil of racial segregation in very difficult circumstances. Likewise, there is little about other
African giants like Janani Luwum, Festo Kivengere, David Gitari, Nathanial Garang, Dinis Sengulane, Pius Ncube and others. Is this because his theology is more akin to Desmond Tutu’s than to that of these others? His lack of a historical sense is also evident in his pinning so much on Thomas Merton’s historic encounter with the Dalai Lama as ‘central to Christian dialogue with those of other faiths’, quite ignoring earlier centuries of dialogue and the notable personalities engaged in such conversations.

He is exactly right in saying that love is a sign of God’s presence in post-genocidal Rwanda, but is it correct to assert that it is only acts of love and a common humanity which make us Christian? What about a sense of dependence on God, responding to his grace and forgiveness, being filled with the Holy Spirit? It is this kind of quasi-pelagianism that has made some Liberation Theology spiritually barren and has left the field open for various expressions of neo-Pentecostalism to flourish.

Again and again, Aguilar identifies the colonial enterprise and Christian mission as different sides of the same coin, but does history bear this out? Certainly in the British context, we have to note both cooperation and antagonism between colonial officials and missionaries. Nor can we say that the cooperation was always detrimental to the indigenous people: this was manifestly not so in the freeing of slaves, in the world of education and in the emancipation of women. Even when Colonialism was the occasion for the advent of mission, the interests of the two did not always coincide.

His two poles seem to be the ‘European God’ of the colonisers and the missionaries, on the one hand, and the God of the Africans on the other. But this misses out the whole Middle-Eastern world of the Bible, of the early spread of Christianity in every direction (including Africa) and of its multi-ethnic nature. Some discussion of these may have alerted him to the theological and historical resources which exist for the tasks of inculturation and contextualisation to which he, rightly, draws our attention.

A weak Christology underlies this approach to plurality: the universal logos provides the principle of unity in making sense of diversity and, since the Incarnation, this logos is now identified with Jesus of Nazareth. However and in whatever way the logos is effective in the world, such effectiveness can only be understood by reference to the logos as revealed in Jesus. *Logos spermatikos* was not understood by the Fathers in the way it is set out here.

It is correct that a strong public theology might have been able to question and to slow the processes of secularisation in Europe, but we have also to recognise that the nature of public theology is changing in Europe. It