

Dan Cohn-Sherbok, *The Crucified Jew*, Harper-Collins, 1992, xx + 258. £17.95.

This book has been harshly reviewed elsewhere. One can see what reviewers are getting at. Nonetheless, they are being unfair. Rabbi Cohn-Sherbok is not writing a history of the Jewish people; he has written a history of their victimization over more than two thousand years. Such an account is bound to be one-dimensional: everyone still wants rid of them, even after the *Shoah*, even where there are no longer Jews. If this were a book for Jewish readers it would not be a good book: the history of the Jews is much more, much, much more than suffering. Jewish achievement, in its own right, as an aspect of the history of the world, and as a contribution to European culture, which ultimately has renounced that contribution, as it has rejected and destroyed the contributors, is not sufficiently acknowledged by Christians. Rabbi Cohn-Sherbok, however, is not writing about Jewish achievement. For Jews persecution became a way of life - all the greater their accomplishments (it should be said). They need, therefore, and especially after the *Shoah*, to be reminded less of what has been done to them, more of what they have done for others. This is a book for others, particularly Christian others. The Jewish-Christian relation has been a special one: either the Messiah has come or he has not - for both religions are religions of history. Moreover, too many of the devout on both sides, on all sides, have believed there can only be one Covenant. While Rabbi Cohn-Sherbok does not neglect to mention both pre- and post-Christian persecution, it is Christians who crucified Jews and who, for that reason, occupy him most. To Jews, let it be said, it was Christians who perpetrated the *Shoah*. Thus, the book is overwhelmingly a chronicle of the failure of Christian compassion as well as of Christian comprehension: the former may proceed from the latter. When antisemitic slogans are on walls everywhere - from Golders Green to Pruszkow; when antisemitic pamphlets come through the mail; when antisemitic mythology proliferates rather than contracts; when the new Germany looks much like the old; when the Arab World seems to have become as antisemitic as it is anti-Zionist; when discrimination continues to feature as largely as it ever did in English public and political life; then one cannot have too many straightforward and unsensational chronicles like this one. It is a chronicle. There is an argument, but not analysis. This compact, direct, unadorned, and terrible account should reach more than a handful. Christians have to face the facts. The gospels do deliberately misrepresent First-Century Judaism. The rhetoric of the Church Fathers (whatever its context) did lead (whatever the route) to demolished synagogues, diminished lives, and to death. The best hearts as well as the best minds in European history failed the litmus test. Augustine, Erasmus, Voltaire, Rousseau, Kant, Marx, among so many others, regarded the Jews as the enemy within. Much might be made of that - psychologically speaking; historically, what was made of it is set out in this sombre and sober book. It is also sobering to confront the fact that our heritage is, as Bob Moore has termed it, that of a 'persecuting society'.

John W. de Gruchy, *Liberating Reformed Theology: A South African Contribution to an Ecumenical Debate*, Herdmans, Grand Rapids, 1991, xviii + 291pp, ISBN 0-8028-0536-1.

calvin (or Calvinism) has been blamed for many evils, not least in South Africa where the doctrine of election was shackled to the idea of the 'chosen people' as the theological basis for apartheid. But Calvin's theology cannot be disowned without jettisoning the major historical impulse of Protestantism in the western world, and especially its English-speaking part. John de Gruchy, Professor of Christian Studies in the University of Cape Town, who has himself gained a reputation as a formidable theological opponent of apartheid, sets out not just to redeem Calvin's reputation, but to open up an understanding of how the Reformed tradition can become a dynamic and creative force for social justice in the world today. To speak of 'liberating Reformed theology' is thus deliberately ambiguous: such theology itself needs liberating from historical distortions and perversions, some at least of which Calvin would not have recognized as his own work, and such theology can itself be a liberating force for a church committed to justice and peace.

De Gruchy's glance is therefore two-way - looking back to what Calvin himself taught, and then sideways at what the liberation theologians of Latin America and elsewhere in the Third World are saying today. There is no simplistic attempt to argue that they are essentially saying the same thing, but enough connections are drawn to facilitate a dialogue. Calvin himself, as his sermons particularly demonstrate, believed in social righteousness as a gospel imperative, and pointed out that often it was the poor who understood the gospel more immediately than the secure and comfortable. The emphasis of the liberation theologians, too, on contemporary history, with its claims of justice and the call to *praxis* as the point where God is encountered, rings true to Calvin's teaching on the dynamic nature of God's Word which lays its claim upon us in justification and *sanctification* here and now. The doctrine of election (as Karl Barth also interpreted Calvin) is not a theology of the privileged chosen ones, but a glorification of the God who chooses, and therefore the freedom of grace. This supplies the cutting edge for all prophetic criticism of society - and the even more necessary self-criticism of the church. It also saves us from exhaustingly fruitless activism.

There are many Baptists who would profit from this excellent book: those who are embarrassed by the Calvinistic element in their heritage and, equally, those who would worship a Calvin strait-jacketed in a narrow, static and other-worldly interpretation of his *Institutes*. Both kinds of reader will be surprised and, one hopes, liberated.

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K. Hylson-Smith, *Evangelicals in the Church of England, 1734-1984*, 1989, T & T Clark, 411pp, £19-95 [now pb £14.95].

An update and extension to Balleine's standard work, Hylson-Smith's synthesis of much subsequent writing, is basically chronological, biographical and episodic in approach. Its dependence on the work of other authors is clear and accordingly the book has something of the quality of an encyclopedia about it in its neat summaries of its sources, which are sometimes rather indiscriminately both ancient and modern, though always usefully footnoted. This encyclopedic quality is its major strength.

When so much has been read and summarized it seems perverse to ask for more; however, there are significant omissions: for example, Parson Bull and the Yorkshire Evangelicals have disappeared from view. The Evangelical Alliance gets little more than a reference and there is no indication of the controversy concerning Professor T. R. Birks, sometime its Secretary, who certainly appears here, and his rejection of traditional views on hell. This is important since against common opinion this was a debate within evangelicalism as much as an evangelical criticism of liberal theologians. The different sections are uneven: many are well done, especially those concerned with the early twentieth century, but some, such as that on Victorian hymnody, are decidedly insubstantial.

This is essentially a book offering information rather than arguments - the arguments that do appear are most often those of other authors, which are described but not critically engaged. The book boasts a good set of indexes but regrettably a number of these prove inaccurate in use.

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PETER CHAMBERLEN

An interesting article recently appeared in the *Huntingdon Library Quarterly*, Vol.53.4 (Autumn 1990), pp.281-309: 'Peter Chamberlen's Case of Conscience' by Michael Adams of Albright College. The article provides an introduction to a Peter Chamberlen manuscript from 1661, with a transcript and notes of the MS itself. Peter Chamberlen is usually thought of, by those who know him at all, as an amiable eccentric on the far edges of Dissent. Nevertheless this piece shows him as a reasonable person in difficult circumstances who made some useful points on behalf of the Nonconformists of his time.

B. R. WHITE

(For earlier articles on Peter Chamberlen, see *Transactions of the Baptist Historical Society*, II, pp.9-30, 110-17, 129-60, 190-92, 245-47, III 176-89).