and work of Jesus of Nazareth. This book is especially intended for Christian readers interested in dialogue. For them an important need is an understanding of the opinions Muslims hold in good faith about Christian beliefs and practices. Many of these opinions will surprise the reader, but the pages containing them (pp. 77-83) are among the most important in the whole book.

Dialogue of course is a risky venture. Each of the two religions considers itself to be universal. Muslims like to recall one of their Traditions, “No one is truly a believer who does not love for others that which he loves for himself.” Should Muslims be forbidden the desire to see their Christian friends become Muslims? Should Christians not have the right to wish that their Muslim neighbors accept the Christian Faith? Neither should be denied that hope however God wishes to fulfill it.

Some today feel that religious dialogue of any kind has exhausted its possibilities. But in reality organized dialogue is still in its beginnings. It should not be expected to have achieved all its aims in one or two decades. An appendix warns readers against introducing too many subjects on the same occasion. Many believe that actual dialogue would accomplish more if Christian and Muslim public opinion were first sensitized by large conferences on a few simple and concrete topics, like needed areas of human cooperation. More difficult subjects like potential religious convergence would better be kept for small, permanently constituted groups of friends well known to one another.

The statement (p. 17) that Arab Muslims are twenty per cent of the Islamic world is questionable. Native speakers of Arabic among them might be closer to seven per cent and not all of these would be of Arab stock. Also the connection made between “mother” and “community” (pp. 17 and 59) is not admissible. (H. Gibb and J. Kramers, Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam [Ithaca, N.Y., 1974], s.v. Umma: “umma is not to be derived from the Arabic root ‘mm.’” See also Arthur Jefferey, The Foreign Vocabulary of the Quran [Baroda, 1938] 69, s.v. Umma.)

Thomas J. O'Shaughnessy, S.J.


No feast in our Christian calendar is so closely related to the natural elements of the cosmos as Easter. Its date each year is determined by the confluence of several cosmic or time elements such as spring, equinox,
full moon, and Sunday. It is celebrated in rites and language which tap
the rich symbolism of these elements in a powerful proclamation of the
Lord’s death and resurrection. Its theology too has so often been woven
from threads of insight stimulated by these same cosmic elements.

Yet questions arise. Is Easter not a “spiritual feast,” transcending the
cosmic context which it inherited from the Jewish Passover and main-
tained through the centuries? How meaningful to contemporary Chris-
tians can such cosmic symbolism really be? Does an inculturated cele-
bration of this central Christian feast — for example, in the southern
hemisphere — call for its separation from such cosmic underpinnings?

These are some of the questions that the eminent liturgical scholar
Anscar Chupungco has in mind in this expanded and revised version of
an earlier work. (The original volume, The Cosmic Elements of the
Christian Passover, appeared in Studia Anselmiana in 1977 but has been
out of print since 1985.) In his revision, Chupungco has added a new
chapter and rewritten the old material. An updated bibliography and
special attention to the question of inculturation make this study a virtu-
ally new book.

A principal aim of the author is to contribute towards a rediscovery of
the sacramental character of nature. Though Easter is indeed Christianity’s
most spiritual feast, its cosmic elements enhance rather than obscure its
spiritual character. “Nature,” says Chupungco, “is one of the eloquent
symbols of the presence in our world of Christ’s suffering, death, and
resurrection” (p. vii). Such cosmic elements as spring, spring equinox,
and full moon have greatly influenced the theology and liturgy of Easter.
Despite the obstacles posed by science and a materialistic outlook,
Chupungco hopes that modern people can be led to recapture an appreci-
cation of nature and time not only as “signs of God’s dealings with
people [but as] symbols that embodied, manifested and brought along
his salvation” (p. 17). In a world becoming more and more sensitive to
environmental and ecological issues, such a hope is not without founda-

An initial chapter on “The Meaning of Easter” reviews the understand-
ing of this feast which has become familiar to Catholics since Vatican II.
Both the relationship of Easter to the Jewish feast of Passover and the
unity of the Paschal Mystery are emphasized. Particularly enlightening is
Chupungco’s discussion of whether the documents of liturgical reform
give pride of place in the liturgical year to Sunday or the Easter Triduum.
An apparent imbalance in the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (cf. the
contrast between arts. 102 and 106) was remedied by the General Norms
for the Liturgical Year and the Calendar which stated that “the solemnity
of Easter has the same kind of preeminence in the liturgical year that
Sunday has for the week” (art. 18).

The succeeding chapters treat in turn the relationship of Easter to spring, the spring equinox, the spring full moon, the evening hours of Easter, and the Easter night. Chupungco’s scholarly discussion of these themes is steeped in his own thorough knowledge of the history of Christian worship and the rich spiritual teaching of the patristic period. In a smooth and precise style the author leads his reader into an ever-deepening appreciation of how a symbolic appreciation of these cosmic elements has shaped the Easter feast through the centuries.

Shaping the Easter Feast is an information and up-to-date study of the relationship between Easter and the cosmic elements. It should surely deepen the Easter faith of every Christian and encourage all in liturgical ministry towards a more effective celebration of the mystery of the Lord’s death and resurrection.

James T. Meehan, S.J.

OPTION FOR THE POOR: A HUNDRED YEARS OF CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING.

Donal Dorr, an Irish missionary priest of the Saint Patrick Society (Kiltegan), writes from a wide range of academic and ministerial experience in Europe, Africa and Brazil. From the perspectives of academia and pastoral involvement, Dorr surveys the documents of the century-long corpus of Catholic social teaching.

The central focus of the book is devoted to analytically tracing the history and development of the Church’s solidarity with the poor. Dorr skillfully walks the reader through papal teaching, beginning with Leo XIII and concluding with John Paul II. Significant stops are made to discuss the Roman Synods of 1971 and 1974 as well as the contributions of the Conference of Latin American Bishops at Medellín and Puebla. An integrated, composite picture of Church social teaching emerges.

The phrase “option for the poor” is of relatively recent vintage; its meaning has been a source of controversy. Some view it with hostility, identifying it with a Marxist ideology. Others welcome it enthusiastically as anchored in the Bible and Jesus’ vision of the poor. Dorr carefully teases out the true meaning of the phrase and its significance in Catholic social justice literature.