

THE PROBLEM OF SOCIALISM IN LIBERATION THEOLOGY

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FROM ITS inception in the late 1960s Latin American liberation theology has been the subject of much controversy. Unquestionably one major factor in generating the heat surrounding the liberation debate has been the tendency, common to both its proponents and critics, to regard liberation theology as bound up with an unmistakably left-wing political stance. Some have gone as far as to pronounce it Marxism pure and simple. This latter claim is one I reject. Nor do I accept that liberation theology is reducible to left-wing politics, even if conceived more broadly than Marxism as such. But there is a strong case to be made that a left-wing political posture, though somewhat indeterminate, has been a marked feature of liberation theology. In particular, many liberation theologians have at various times and in various ways made explicit a preference for socialism over capitalism. In this article I will explore the possible meanings of this preference, the reasons adduced for it, and some of the criticisms made of it.

I will confine my discussion to the issue of what might be called "the socialist option," and will not examine the related but separable issues of the use in liberation theology of Marxism and of dependency theory. At first sight this might appear an unwise or unworkable separation, since Marxism is obviously a major source of inspiration for much socialist thinking, and has had some influence on liberation theology; and dependency theory played an important role in the "break" with traditional Catholic approaches to social ethics which made liberation theology stand out as a novel and distinct theological movement. I would defend the separation on several grounds: that the acceptance of socialism does not depend on a prior evaluation of the core theory in Marxism, namely historical materialism; that few if any liberation theologians appear to subscribe to that core theory in any case, at least in anything like its classical form; and that analogous remarks can be made substituting dependency theory for Marxism.

REASONS FOR THE OPTION FOR SOCIALISM

I mentioned above that liberation theology represented a break from a traditional Catholic approach to social problems. This break was due

in part to the utterly inhuman situation of massive poverty that continues to scar Latin America. Hunger, slums, high infant mortality, illiteracy, high unemployment, and low wages were typical throughout the continent when liberation theology was born. There was a strong sense that these problems were not simply due to misfortune or mere circumstance, but were the result of structural forms of exploitation and oppression. It was deeply felt that it was the *system*, in some sense, that was to blame. Given this understanding of the cause of socioeconomic misery, many Latin Americans found the standard social teaching of the Church insufficient because it seemed to call for reforms within the system, rather than a radical transformation of the political, social, and economic structures that constituted the system. Whether or not this was a fair assessment of the Church's teaching is arguable, but for the moment we may simply note that for liberation theologians the present reality cried out for profound change.

This urgent sense of the need for radical change was expressed in three characteristic ways. The first was an explicit acceptance that an authentic Christian faith would necessarily require a definite, concrete sociopolitical option for a more just society. This position was given official support at Medellín and was confirmed at Puebla: "The fact is that the need for the church's presence in the political arena flows from the very core of the Christian faith."¹

What was a little more noticeable among liberation theologians, however, was their recognition that this connection between faith and politics had to be mediated by particular, historical, sociopolitical programs and ideologies which were part of the secular world. This was due to the fact, as the International Theological Commission recognized in its 1977 Declaration on Human Development and Christian Salvation, that "theology . . . cannot deduce concrete political norms sheerly from theological principles."² But such norms were urgently required to address and remedy the enormous deprivation being experienced in Latin America. In other words, if Christians were going to engage effectively in the quest for social justice, secular political options would have to mediate their praxis. Among liberation theologians this point has been elaborated most fully by Juan Luis Segundo.³

¹ Quoted in E. L. Cleary, *Crisis and Change* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1985) 165. Similar statements were made in the document *Justice in the World* from the 1971 Bishops' Synod, and in Paul VI's encyclical *Evangelii nuntiandi* (1975).

² Quoted in A. T. Hennelly, ed., *Liberation Theology: A Documentary History* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1990) 208.

³ See esp. his books, *The Liberation of Theology* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1976), and *Faith and Ideologies* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1984).

The second characteristic of liberation theology's new approach to the social problems of Latin America was its clear identification of the system, whose unjust character it saw as the source of these problems, as capitalist. In this way capitalism practically became equated with injustice. As McGovern writes, "When Pope Leo XIII wrote his encyclical *Rerum novarum* (1891) he criticized the abuses of capitalism, but rejected socialism as false in principle. Many liberation theologians would reverse this judgment."⁴ Among the liberation writers who were most openly opposed to capitalism were José Míguez Bonino, José Porfirio Miranda, Franz Hinkelammert, and of course the Christians for Socialism group based in Chile.⁵ Indeed the very word "capitalism" tended to have negative connotations—suggesting foreign domination, exploitation, and concentration of wealth—not just for liberation theologians, but for many Latin Americans generally.⁶ Antipathy towards capitalism was evident even among members of the hierarchy as early as 1967.⁷

Identification of the system as unjust *and* capitalist was obviously fraught with major political implications. For it is important to recognize that if the injustices had been cited simply as such without the accompanying claim that the system producing them was capitalist, then much of the unease and criticism aimed at liberation theology would probably not have arisen.

Description of the Latin American political-economic system as capitalist is found quite clearly, even bluntly, in the writings of liberation theology's founding father, Gustavo Gutiérrez: "[Capitalism is] the only system that really exists in Latin America, save for Cuba."⁸ In his classic text, *A Theology of Liberation*, Gutiérrez calls for a radical transformation of the socioeconomic structure and not simply for re-

⁴ A. F. McGovern, *Liberation Theology and Its Critics* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1989) 139.

⁵ J. M. Bonino, *Christians and Marxists: The Mutual Challenge to Revolution* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976); J. P. Miranda, *Marx and the Bible: A Critique of the Philosophy of Oppression* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1974); F. J. Hinkelammert, *The Ideological Weapons of Death: A Theological Critique of Capitalism* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1986); and the "Final Document" of the Christians for Socialism 1972 Convention, printed in Hennelly, ed., *A Documentary History* 147.

⁶ See McGovern, *Liberation Theology* xviii–xix and 180.

⁷ See Third World Bishops, "A Letter to the Peoples of the Third World," in Hennelly, ed., *A Documentary History* 52; see also the Bishops of Peru, "Justice in the World," *ibid.* 129.

⁸ G. Gutiérrez, *The Power of the Poor in History* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1983) 113. Gutiérrez traces capitalism in Latin America back to the 16th century, but Otto Maduro sees it arising only in the latter part of the 19th century; see his *Religion and Social Conflicts* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1982) 60.

forms that leave capitalism in place.⁹ In the same book Gutiérrez claims that Latin American development is not viable given the existing structures of international capitalism,¹⁰ and that a truly liberated society cannot be reached by capitalist means.¹¹ This opposition to the capitalist order is reiterated in Gutiérrez's *The Power of the Poor in History*.¹² Again, his view is stated quite bluntly: "Capitalist development is of its very nature detrimental to the masses."¹³

A similar view is taken by Enrique Dussel, who blames capitalism for the exploitation and alienation of workers and for the domination of poor countries by rich ones.¹⁴ Strong opposition to capitalism is found even in some liberation theologians who are not usually noted for their treatment of specifically socioeconomic matters. Thus Leonardo and Clodovis Boff criticized the U.S. Bishops' Pastoral Letter on the Economy, *Economic Justice For All*, because it failed in their view to call into question capitalism as such:

Capitalism can be more or less *immoral*; it can never be more or less *moral*. You do not eliminate the ferocity of the wolf by filing down its teeth . . . It is just as impossible to create a moral market system as it is to build a Christian brothel.¹⁵

This criticism is all the more significant coming as it does from theologians who have distanced themselves from dependency theory.¹⁶ Even noted conservative opponents of liberation theology in Latin America have had little good to say about capitalism. Archbishop López Trujillo has said, "We are convinced that capitalism is a human failure." And Roger Vekemans, S.J. has advocated a "Christian socialism" as preferable to either capitalism or Marxism.¹⁷ Hence McGovern is surely right when he says that

One reason liberation theologians opt for socialism stands out above all others: their abhorrence of the prevailing capitalist system. If, as many liberation theologians stress, capitalism cannot be reformed to meet the basic needs of the poor or to give them true participation in society, then socialism would seem to be the only real option.¹⁸

⁹ G. Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1988; originally published 1971) 65.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* 88.

¹¹ *Ibid.* 127.

¹² Gutiérrez, *Power of the Poor* 133.

¹³ *Ibid.* 85.

¹⁴ E. Dussel, *Ethics and Community* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1988) chaps. 12–13.

¹⁵ Quoted in McGovern, *Liberation Theology* 139.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* 136–37.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* xix.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* 178.

Liberation theologians spend little time arguing that Latin America is capitalist; they simply assume that it is, and that it is unjust. In this they appear to reflect an attitude that is pervasive in Latin America generally.¹⁹

The third characteristic expression of liberation theology's new and distinctive approach to the socioethical evaluation of Latin American problems was its eschewal of *tercerismo* or Third Way strategies. It had not been uncommon among Catholic social ethicists before the middle 1960s to interpret the social doctrine of the Church as pointing to a middle approach to socioeconomic matters which would retain the benefits and shed the defects of both capitalism and socialism. But as the 1960s progressed many in the Latin American Church (and not only there) became disenchanted with the practical results of this approach. This was especially true in Chile where the Christian Democratic government failed to meet the expectations of many Christians committed to social justice. The example of the Cuban revolution also inspired many Latin Americans to believe that a far more radical (i.e. more socialist) strategy was required to bring about the fundamental changes they regarded as necessary. Liberation theology reflected and contributed to this shift of perspective.

As military dictatorships came to power in several Latin countries, and repressive measures became more widespread and systematic, for example in Brazil after the 1964 coup and in Chile after its 1973 coup, the adoption of a middle-of-the-road position seemed to many to be a form of appeasement of evil, and therefore totally unacceptable. Meanwhile, economic growth was apparently failing to benefit the majority of poor Latin Americans. Reformism seemed not only a failure as far as social justice was concerned, but an ideological weapon of the ruling classes to keep the oppressed in a quiescent state politically. Thus Gutiérrez called for socialism, and not simply "the modernization of the existing system."²⁰ He criticized the "socio-Christian" search for a middle way between capitalism and socialism, which he saw as based on an outmoded and anti-historical "distinction of planes" approach to the relation between faith and social action.²¹ Segundo judged the search for Third Ways as fundamentally misconceived:

I think that the whole phenomenon of adopting "third ways" presents a profound methodological challenge to liberation, and represents the ultimate con-

¹⁹ See M. Falcoff, "Political Systems and Economic Growth: The Case of Latin America," in M. Novak, ed., *Liberation Theology and the Liberal Society* (Washington D.C.: American Enterprise Institute, 1987) 195.

²⁰ Gutiérrez, *Power of the Poor* 45.

²¹ *Ibid.* 40, 198.

sequence of an erroneous way of formulating the whole problem of the relationship between theology and politics.²²

Dussel simply avers that "a concrete, positive Christian economic-political project does not exist."²³

It now seems that the official magisterium of the Church does not regard or invite others to regard its social teaching as a Third Way either, given John Paul II's disclaimer to this effect in his encyclical *Sollicitudo rei socialis*.²⁴ By this disclaimer I think is meant above all that Catholic social doctrine is a moral theological guide that must be applied to, but cannot substitute for, specific political options and proposals. In this light Catholics should not disdain entering into the secular arena and making definite, albeit provisional commitments to particular political programs. There seems to be no reason in principle why such a commitment should not extend to embrace programs that customarily are identified as socialist in a broad sense (notwithstanding verbal injunctions to the contrary, especially in the early social encyclicals).²⁵

We have seen, then, three reasons why liberation theology was led to embrace a broadly left-wing political agenda. First, there was a strongly felt need to concretize the faith-inspired quest for social justice in specific political options. Since revelation and theology were incapable by themselves of selecting one such option, the use of a mediating political ideology drawn from the secular realm was deemed both legitimate and inescapable. Second, confronted with the facts of systemic injustice, an almost unanimous identification was made that characterized the system in question as capitalist, and so justified a desire not merely to see changes within capitalism, but to replace it with a different kind of socioeconomic system altogether. Third, since traditional Third Way approaches were judged to be accommodating of the capitalist system, and therefore incapable of the radical transfor-

²² Segundo, *The Liberation of Theology* 91.

²³ Dussel, *Ethics and Community* 193.

²⁴ See *Sollicitudo rei socialis* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Catholic Conference, 1987) no. 41.

²⁵ In *Centesimus annus* John Paul II seems more or less to equate "socialism" with the Stalinist regimes of the erstwhile Soviet bloc (though he also calls it "state capitalism"); and he gives a qualified verbal approval of "capitalism"; see *Centesimus annus*, nos. 35 and 42 (printed in *National Catholic Reporter*, 24 May 1991, 17-30). Western socialists will recall, however, that in his earlier social encyclicals the pope distinguishes between authentic and inauthentic forms of socialized property, which seems to chime well with their calls for the radical democratization of the ownership and control of capital; see *Laborem exercens*, no. 14; printed in G. Baum, *The Priority of Labor* (New York: Paulist, 1982); and *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, nos. 15 and 21.

mation that was thought to be necessary, the only real alternative appeared to be an unabashed option for socialism. The clearest example of such a position was that of the Christians for Socialism movement in Chile. But, with perhaps less emphasis on the use of Marxist language, most liberation theologians adopted a similar stance.

WHICH SOCIALISM?

Despite the apparent clarity of this option initially, the question at once arises, what does one mean by socialism? As McGovern writes, with some justification,

[L]iberation theologians and dependency theorists, while quite articulate about what they oppose, can appear vague and utopian about what they favor ("a system that truly represents the vast majority of the people"; "a socialism without the deficiencies of existing socialist countries").²⁶

Segundo did attempt to give a direct answer to the question as to what he means by "socialism" in his 1974 essay, "Capitalism versus Socialism: *Crux Theologica*":

By "socialism" I do not mean a complete long-term social project—hence one that is endowed with a particular ideology or philosophy. I simply mean a political regime in which ownership of the means of production is taken away from individuals and handed over to higher institutions whose main concern is the common good. By "capitalism" I mean a political regime in which the ownership of the goods of production is left open to economic competition.²⁷

Segundo went on to admit that this was not a very fully specified definition of socialism. But he argued that the urgent, immediate question in his own Latin American situation concerned the private ownership of the means of production, and he said that he was neither willing nor able to prognosticate further about what socialism would mean beyond that.

Referring to "new insights into history" (presumably from Marx), Gutiérrez commented sympathetically on

the change from the capitalistic mode of production to the socialistic mode; that is to say, to one oriented towards a society in which persons can begin to live freely and humanly. They will have controlled nature, created the conditions for a socialized production of wealth, done away with the private acquisition of excessive wealth, and established socialism.²⁸

²⁶ McGovern, *Liberation Theology* 124.

²⁷ Quoted in P. Berryman, *Liberation Theology* (New York: Pantheon, 1986) 91.

²⁸ Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation* 20.

In the same book Gutiérrez describes socialism in terms of the social as against private ownership of the means of production as a necessary precondition for the realization of such values as equality, solidarity, and participation.²⁹ He refers to the Peruvian Marxist Mariátegui as an "outstanding" figure in the search for a creative and indigenous socialism, one that is loyal both to "the central intuitions of Marx" and to "a unique historical reality."³⁰ Gutiérrez makes room for greater modifications in the socialist tradition than envisaged "by those who sought refuge in easy solutions or in the excommunication of those who did not accept their pat answers, schematizations, and uncritical attitudes towards the historical expressions of socialism."³¹ Clearly the target here is Stalinism. He also warns against a "monolithic orientation,"³² and "politico-religious messianism."³³ But he favors the use of utopian thinking as a guide to praxis, and quotes Che Guevara to the effect that socialism involves not just a new economic structure, but a new kind of human being and a new kind of social consciousness.³⁴ In *The Power of the Poor in History* Gutiérrez argues that the elimination of private ownership of the means of production is required because such ownership deprives workers of the full fruits of their labor, and creates an exploitative, class-divided society. He notes with approval the call for a society in which, by appropriating the means of production, "the masses appropriate their own political management" and "their definitive freedom," thus creating a new social consciousness.³⁵

To summarize, Gutiérrez's use of the concept of socialism involves the following: the abolition of private ownership of the means of production, which will permit the realization of fraternal and cooperative values, and will help to engender a new social consciousness that stresses solidarity and participation for all. But such a socialism is always provisional, always corrigible. It should therefore be flexible and nondogmatic, as well as culturally and historically sensitive. Gutiérrez also seems to envisage that the control of productive capital will be exercised by the masses themselves, and not by a state bureaucracy or "vanguard" party. That is to say, the people as a whole should become genuine *subjects* of economic and political power, rather than objects to be manipulated by some revolutionary elite.

The Christians for Socialism group, at its 1972 Convention in Santiago, was briefer in its description of the future socialist society, a society "without oppressors or oppressed, in which everyone will have

²⁹ *Ibid.* 66–67.

³¹ *Ibid.* 56.

³³ *Ibid.* 38.

³⁵ Gutiérrez, *Power of the Poor* 37–38.

³⁰ *Ibid.* 56.

³² *Ibid.* 55.

³⁴ *Ibid.* 39.

the same possibilities for human fulfillment," though it too called specifically for an end to private ownership of capital.³⁶ José Míguez Bonino described what socialism meant for him: it meant a break with Northern domination; a transformation of Latin America's social structure; a genuinely Latin American socialism, not a mere copy of existing socialist models; and a process leading to a new humanity. He went on to stress the need for democratic political participation, respect for cultural freedoms, and the need for a mechanism of self-correction.³⁷

Philip Berryman says that liberation theologians do not spell out what they mean by socialism in detail, nor do they feel obliged to do so; and from the material presented here that appears to be a fair comment. But he identifies several common characteristics which liberationists usually include in their notions of socialism: a socialist system will meet the basic needs of all; in it citizens will be active participants in the development of their society; it will be genuinely sensitive to the host culture (Latin American) and not simply an imitation of previously existing socialisms; and it will exclude all forms of exploitation and luxurious consumption based on monopolistic private ownership.³⁸

Arthur McGovern has helpfully reconstructed what he thinks liberation theologians would generally regard as a desirable form of socialism for a country like Nicaragua.³⁹ It would include the distribution of land to landless peasants; an expansion and diversification of exports to reduce dependency on a single sector or commodity; a nonaligned foreign policy; a mixed economy comprising state, collective, and private enterprises; a high priority on meeting basic needs for all, especially in the areas of food, medical care, and education; full political democracy, with free labor unions, a free press, and a freedom of religion. Something like this mix of policies is what McGovern thinks most liberation theologians have in mind as a preferable alternative to "capitalism." It should be noted that this program is quite similar to that outlined by the Nicaraguan bishops in 1979 when they distinguished between acceptable and unacceptable forms of socialism. The bishops spoke favorably about workers' participation in the fruits of their labor, a transfer of power to the "popular classes," and a cultural awakening of the dignity of the masses. It is not surprising that they considered a dictatorial regime which denies religious and other per-

³⁶ Quoted in Hennelly, ed., *A Documentary History* 149.

³⁷ Reported by McGovern, *Liberation Theology* 147.

³⁸ See Berryman, *Liberation Theology* 92 f.

³⁹ A. F. McGovern, "Latin America and 'Dependency' Theory," in Novak, ed., *Liberation Theology and the Liberal Society* 124.

sonal rights as unacceptable, though interestingly they described such a regime as "false socialism."⁴⁰

Much of the content of the notion of socialism in liberation thinking is expressed in ideal and utopian terms. It is not surprising, then, that liberationists have also been critical of de facto socialist regimes. We have already seen how they speak of their own socialism as flexible, democratic, participative, respectful of culture, and original to Latin America. Enrique Dussel is perhaps most explicit in his acknowledgement of the failures of (what used to be called) "really existing socialism":

We read of the violence, the absence of democracy, the bureaucratism, the totalitarianism, and the out-and-out brutality of the "eastern bloc" or "iron curtain" countries. At all events, for some Christians at least, Christianity and socialism *as practiced today* are intrinsically incompatible. Christianity and socialism are as different as night and day.⁴¹

He notes that the Soviet system, far from emancipating workers, ended up by dehumanizing work itself. He argues that genuine socialism must maximize conscious participation and control by the workers, whereas under Stalinist regimes they have been turned into objects to be instrumentalized by an unaccountable bureaucracy. He quotes with approval from John Paul II's encyclical *Laborem exercens* on what is required for true socialization:

One must keep account of the fact that the simple withdrawal of those means of production from the hands of their private owners is not sufficient to socialize them in a satisfactory fashion. . . . The group responsible for direction may fulfill its commission in a satisfactory manner. . . . But then again it may fulfill its commission in an unsatisfactory manner, by reserving to itself a monopoly over the administration and disposition of the means of production. . . . And so the mere transfer of the means of production to the ownership of the state, within the collectivistic system, is certainly *not equivalent* to the socialization of property.⁴²

These passages indicate that there may be authentic, and even desirable forms of the socialization of property, as Dussel and others have noted.

Dussel also discusses the relationship between socialism and markets. While he admits some role for the market, he also argues that democratic forms of "approximative" economic planning, combined

⁴⁰ Quoted in Hennelly, ed., *A Documentary History* 285–86.

⁴¹ Dussel, *Ethics and Community* 181.

⁴² *Ibid.* quoted at 187 (Dussel's emphasis).

with worker-controlled enterprises that are autonomously managed at the operational level, represent a better alternative than free-market capitalism.⁴³

Other liberationists have been critical of Stalinist-style regimes too. José Comblin includes them in his denunciation of the ideology of the "national security state."⁴⁴ Arturo Fontaine quotes theologian Ronaldo Muñoz's insistence on a socialism that is not "Russian collectivism," but popular, democratic, original, nondogmatic, nontotalitarian, and nonbureaucratic.⁴⁵ Juan Luis Segundo has chastised "state socialism" as inhuman, bureaucratic, and lacking in ethical norms for rule.⁴⁶

So it seems clear that when liberation theologians speak favorably of socialism, they do not have in mind the now discredited regimes of the erstwhile Soviet bloc. However, I would hazard that at least in the early years of liberation theology there was much more tolerance and even in some cases admiration for the socialist policies of Cuba and the People's Republic of China, though it is harder to find much evidence of similar attitudes now, probably because the flaws in human rights and civil liberties under those regimes seem much more serious and visible than they did then.

Hence there has been a noticeable shift within the liberation-theology movement. While I would judge liberationists still to be basically anticapitalist and strongly sympathetic to "socialist values," there now seems to be much more caution than before in espousing a specific socialist political and economic program. As McGovern puts it, "Socialism no longer remains an unqualified paradigm for liberation aspirations."⁴⁷ He reports that Gutiérrez now favors a mixed economy with state, collective, and private ownership, though McGovern maintains that he has not found any liberation theologian who does not favor some form of socialism.⁴⁸

CRITIQUE OF LIBERATION THEOLOGY'S "SOCIALIST OPTION"

Having examined how the concept of socialism is used by the liberationists, we can see that it is clearly distinguished from the "false

⁴³ Ibid. 183–85 and 189–93.

⁴⁴ J. Comblin, *The Church and the National Security State* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1979) 132.

⁴⁵ A. Fontaine, "It Is Not Easy to Argue with Liberation Theologians," in Novak, ed., *Liberation Theology and the Liberal Society* 164–5.

⁴⁶ Segundo, *Faith and Ideologies* 254, 262, 300, 318–19.

⁴⁷ McGovern, *Liberation Theology* 230; see also 180, 185.

⁴⁸ Ibid. 148. The mixed system of ownership discussed here is also favored by Ricardo Antoncich; see his *Christians in the Face of Injustice* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1987) chap. 8.

socialism" of doctrinaire, dictatorial Communism. We can also discern, I think, a certain clustering of notions concerning values and ideals. They are not all expressed identically; different themes are given different weight at different times and by different authors. But it seems as if, in general, we are being presented with a fairly "natural" or "spontaneous" series of images and ideas selected precisely to depict the good and just society. At times the vision is highly utopian. But, and here is the difficulty, we are not furnished with much information about which *institutions* are being proposed concretely to provide for "basic needs," "participation for all," or "equal opportunity for human fulfillment," or even about why we should believe that the necessary institutions, whatever they are, should be thought of as characteristically socialist. Liberation theologians' vagueness on these points has drawn upon them serious criticism by some of their opponents on three specific and related counts.

First, it is claimed that they are very weak when it comes to providing empirical descriptions of the actual structures, both political and economic, they wish to put in place of the current ones. Second, they are charged with a failure to use empirical economic analysis to discover which policies are really the most effective in practice for raising the living standards of the poor. Third, they are chided for their insistence on describing the prevailing socioeconomic system of Latin America as capitalist.

An example of the first criticism is stated, in rather severe terms, by Arturo Fontaine: "The cognitive value of [liberation theologians'] writings on political, economic and ethico-philosophical matters related to political and economic institutions is close to nil."⁴⁹ A similar charge has been made repeatedly by Michael Novak.⁵⁰ That is, for all their supposed attachment to social analysis as a necessary handmaiden to theology, liberation theologians have provided little by way of a detailed account of the socioeconomic and political arrangements they regard as necessary for ensuring social justice. Even on the level of pure theory, none of them has come close to providing the kind of systematic account of justice typified in the Anglo-American tradition by John Rawls's magisterial work *A Theory of Justice*. Even their use of Marxist analysis is comparatively meagre and unsystematic. This is all the more surprising when we recall that one of liberation theology's distinguishing marks was its urgent demand that authentic Christian faith be concretized in a specific political commitment. The fact of commitment, however, seems to have been given much more attention

⁴⁹ Fontaine, in Novak, ed., *Liberation Theology and the Liberal Society* 176.

⁵⁰ See esp. Novak, *Will It Liberate?* (New York: Paulist, 1986).

than the object of commitment. To speak of political engagement as having to be "specific," "historical," "concrete," and so forth still turns out to be a purely formal way of talking about political engagement, if the institutional forms by which social values are to be realized are left undefined and undecided.

One exception to this may be thought to lie in the call for social versus private ownership of the means of production, a call made by many liberationists. But as any student of socialist theory and practice will testify, what "social ownership" means in institutional practice has been one of the thorniest problems in the history of the socialist movement. Simple to say, "Not the Soviet model" only invites the further question, "Well, which model then?" Some liberationists like Gutiérrez have indicated some form of direct workers' control, or a mixed system of state, worker, and private ownership. But again one must ask, what does workers' control mean in institutional practice, and how much of each form of ownership? This is not to suggest that meaningful and ultimately fruitful answers cannot be given to these questions;⁵¹ only that it would have been helpful if liberationists had gone some way to provide those answers.

Liberation theologians can and have replied, "Don't ask us; we are theologians, not economists or political scientists." But one wonders whether this is a fair or consistent response. That is, it does not seem right repeatedly to call for a radical transformation of society, if one is not prepared to say with at least some degree of concrete detail what new structures should be substituted for the present ones. And secondly, it is not clear that this reply is compatible with how liberation

⁵¹ For those interested in institutionally specific models of feasible socialism, grounded in cogent economic analysis and argument, I would recommend the following works: J. Vanek, *The General Theory of Labor-Managed Market Economies* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ., 1970); *idem*, *The Labor-Managed Economy* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ., 1977); D. Schweickart, *Capitalism or Worker Control?* (New York: Praeger, 1980); B. Horvat, *The Political Economy of Socialism* (Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 1982); A. Nove, *The Economics of Feasible Socialism* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1983); O. Sik, *For A Humane Economic Democracy* (New York: Praeger, 1985); P. Devine, *Democracy and Economic Planning* (Cambridge: Polity, 1988); and D. Miller, *Market, State and Community* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989). Well-argued philosophical justifications for democratic socialism can also be found in B. Horvat, M. Markovic, and R. Supek, eds., *Self-Governing Socialism*, 2 vols. (White Plains, N.Y.: International Arts and Sciences, 1975); A. Levine, *Arguing for Socialism: Theoretical Considerations* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984); P. Green, *Retrieving Democracy* (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman & Allanheld, 1985); S. Bowles and H. Gintis, *Democracy and Capitalism: Property, Community and the Contradictions of Modern Social Thought* (New York: Basic, 1986); C. Gould, *Rethinking Democracy: Freedom and Cooperation in Politics, Economy and Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ., 1989); and R. G. Peffer, *Marxism, Morality and Social Justice* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ., 1990).

theologians have usually described their own methodology, one that starts from a social analysis of secular experience. If theology really does require an essential input from the secular inquiries of sociology, economics, and political science, it should show up somewhere in the results. Hence the charge that liberation theologians have only utopian ideas about socialism: "They do not spell out the institutions needed to establish justice and freedom."⁵²

The second criticism is succinctly stated by Fontaine: "The style of most classical liberation theology precludes rational and cool analysis of socioeconomic matters as well as their connection with the ethical questions at stake."⁵³ Fontaine argues that a lack of empirical socioeconomic analysis leads to the result that "vague concepts and sweeping statements conspire against clear intellectual persuasion and efficient political action."⁵⁴ He suggests, for example, more than half a dozen different possible empirical meanings for the phrase "the rich are always richer at the expense of the poor who are always poorer," none of which is clearly invoked or designated as that intended by liberationists themselves when they use this or similar formulas.⁵⁵ This lack of a rigorous use of empirical social science has been stressed repeatedly by Michael Novak. His argument is that, had such use been made by liberation theologians, they would see that capitalism is far superior to socialism in benefiting the poor. Hence a true option for the poor would involve the advocacy of a free-enterprise, private-ownership system along North American lines.⁵⁶ Whether the evidence really does point in this direction is, I would suggest, highly debatable, and much of Novak's case is seriously flawed, as I shall argue presently. But Novak does have a strong point when he says that one must examine the empirical evidence about what works and what doesn't, both in terms of general economic success, and specifically in helping the poor.

Pottenger describes liberationists as energetic in offering a moral critique of capitalism, but says they have failed to buttress their case with a rigorous critique of the theoretical justifications for free-market economics. He suggests that this is due to the difficulty of translating between the language of moral philosophy and the language of economics.⁵⁷ Yet this, I feel, is a poor excuse, for it ignores the vast literature from Adam Smith and Karl Marx onward which has done just

⁵² McGovern, *Liberation Theology* 59.

⁵³ Fontaine, in Novak, ed., *Liberation Theology and the Liberal Society* 164.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* 174.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* 172.

⁵⁶ Novak, *Will It Liberate?* 6, 73.

⁵⁷ J. R. Pottenger, *The Political Theory of Liberation Theology* (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY, 1989) 123.

that, i.e., which has sought an ethical evaluation of competing theories of political economy.⁵⁸

The third aspect of this form of criticism centers on liberation theology's ubiquitous anticapitalism. Specifically it has been argued, most notably by Novak,⁵⁹ that capitalism is a straw man in this context. Liberation theologians are quite mistaken, Novak claims, in believing that the prevailing system in Latin America is capitalist. Naturally, it follows, if Novak is right, that abandoning the capitalist system will not be any part of the solution. (Further argument, though, is needed to show that adopting capitalism is part of the solution. This Novak also attempts to provide). Instead Novak characterizes Latin American economies as essentially state-controlled, lacking in free enterprise, overregulated, and generally throttled by bureaucracy; at all events, a far cry from the private ownership and free markets essential to capitalism.⁶⁰ He traces many of these problems to the Spanish-Portuguese colonial culture which he sees as antienterprise and noninnovative, unlike North American culture.⁶¹ And he points to the economic successes of East Asian countries like Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, and Hong Kong as capitalist models for Latin American development.⁶²

THE CRITIQUE CRITIQUED

Clearly these criticisms raise serious questions about the meaning and advisability of a "socialist option." However, I wish to distinguish between the criticisms levelled at the lack of institutional specificity and the need for empirical arguments to ground political options on the one hand, and the claims, especially by Novak, that Latin America isn't really capitalist and that capitalism is what it needs most on the other. The former criticisms strike me as valid; the latter do not.

Novak's arguments are in fact flawed in many respects. First, he paints a negative stereotype of Latin American economies as essentially comprising statist-populist regimes that bolster consumption for political reasons, and which by obstructing private enterprise have caused their own economic problems.⁶³ And he gives the impression that most enterprises are state owned.⁶⁴ In fact, however, comparative

⁵⁸ One excellent example of this genre from a left-wing perspective is Schweickart, *Capitalism or Worker Control?* A famous right-wing example is M. Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom* (Chicago and London: Univ. of Chicago, 1962).

⁵⁹ Novak, *Will It Liberate?* 85.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* 22.

⁶¹ *Ibid.* 3-6, 136.

⁶² *Ibid.* 2, 26, 46, 59, 89-90.

⁶³ *Ibid.* 5, 22, 85.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* 28. Novak quotes some figures on the public sector in Latin America, but these figures relate to the percentage of GNP generated by state activities, not to the percent-

international statistics show clearly that most output and investment in Latin America is not accounted for by state enterprises, and that in most Latin American countries the share of output and investment represented by such enterprises is typically similar to or lower than in several advanced Western capitalist nations.⁶⁵ Given this wide scope for private ownership and investment, Novak's claim that Latin America is not really capitalist is unconvincing. Most significantly, the figures demonstrate that the share of total investment represented by state enterprises is considerably lower in Latin America than in Taiwan or South Korea, two countries which Novak cites as superior, *capitalist* models of economic development which Latin countries ought to emulate!

As for the "excessive consumption" claim, this will be news to most Latin Americans. In fact a majority of Latin American economies have generally had higher rates of domestic investment (and therefore less of a share for consumption) than the U.S.⁶⁶ In the years when state ownership and nationalizations were very much in vogue in Latin America, the 1960s and 1970s, economic growth rates for the continent averaged 5–7% per annum. In the 1980s, by contrast, the years of IMF-imposed "liberalization" and privatization programs, practically every Latin country registered an absolute fall in real per capita income.⁶⁷ Also, the procapitalist critics tend to argue *against* the dependency theorists' claim that the poor were getting poorer in the "development" years of the 1960s and 1970s; well, they can't have it both ways, arguing simultaneously that the system really does benefit the poor *and* that the system isn't really capitalist (and so capitalism cannot

age of corporations owned by the state (ibid. 259 n. 44). These just show that the public sector *produces* relatively more in some, though by no means all Latin countries, than in the U.S. This is often due to the state being responsible for major revenue-producing sectors, for example oil in Mexico and Venezuela. However this does not mean that the state sector in Latin America is larger than the private sector in the sense of there being more state-owned than privately-owned corporations. Analogously, in the U.S. less than 200 corporations generate more than 50% of GNP. But of course these 200 corporations constitute a tiny fraction of the total number of U.S. businesses.

In 1972 the state's share of the manufacturing assets represented by the largest 300 corporations in Brazil and in Mexico was well under 20%. Over 50% of these assets were owned by private foreign investors; see P. Evans, *Dependent Development* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ., 1979) 302.

⁶⁵ See appendix below.

⁶⁶ See D. Beckman in the discussion section of Novak, ed., *Liberation Theology and the Liberal Society* 201–2.

⁶⁷ See McGovern, *Liberation Theology* 166 f; see also table 4.6: "Impact of Adjustment," in B. Balassa et al., *Toward Renewed Economic Growth in Latin America* (Washington D.C.: Institute for International Economics, 1986) 151.

be blamed for the massive poverty)—at least not if they wish to prevent the charge of an ideological reading of the evidence from rebounding on them.⁶⁸

The state in the East Asian “tigers” to which Novak points approvingly, as well as in Japan, is famous for its extensive involvement in strategic industrial planning and for protecting domestic industries from foreign competition.⁶⁹ South Korea and Taiwan had major U.S. sponsored land reforms imposed on them in the postwar years for geopolitical reasons, i.e. to nip Communism in the bud.⁷⁰ Compare U.S. policy during the same period towards, say, Guatemala. Also, Novak completely smooths over the extremely active role played by the state in Scandinavian and other West European countries, where the standard of living is comparable to that of the U.S.⁷¹ So a large public sector and a proactive state cannot be equated with economic failure *empirically*. The postwar economic history of Western Europe makes this clear, and students of East Asian economies would find the implication that they are paradigms of laissez-faire wildly off-target. Novak’s only alternative, it seems to me, is to say that these countries are not capitalist either, but then he would have to admit that capitalism is not necessary for economic success. Moreover, one should not forget that even the “failed” economies of Communist Eastern Europe had per capita incomes 2 to 5 times higher than the Latin American average, and Communist Cuba has had better statistics on infant mortal-

⁶⁸ Novak himself admits that “fairness requires mention of how much progress has been made since, say, 1945 or even 1960. Seldom in history have nations made as much progress as Latin America has during the past forty years in raising the gross national product, moving millions upward into the middle class, increasing the numbers of youths with university degrees, expanding secondary school enrollments, raising literacy levels, lengthening the average lifetimes of its citizens, bringing down infant mortality and the like.” All this in a continent in which Novak does “not see a single capitalist economy” (*Will It Liberate?* 85–86.)

⁶⁹ See W. G. Beasley, *The Rise of Modern Japan* (New York: St. Martin’s, 1990); B. C. Koh, *Japan’s Administrative Elite* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of Calif., 1989); A. Amsden, *Asia’s Next Giant: South Korea and Late Industrialization* (New York: Oxford Univ., 1989); T. Gold, *State and Society in the Taiwan Miracle* (Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 1986); S. Haggard, *Pathways from the Periphery: The Politics of Growth in the Newly Industrializing Countries* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ., 1990); and S. Sesser, “A Reporter at Large (Singapore),” *The New Yorker*, 13 January 1992, 37–68. On the need for strong forms of strategic economic planning generally, as against a purely “market-oriented” approach, see R. Kuttner, *The End of Laissez-Faire: National Purpose and the Global Economy after the Cold War* (New York: Knopf, 1991).

⁷⁰ S. Haggard, “Markets, Poverty Alleviation, and Income Distribution: An Assessment of Neoliberal Claims,” *Ethics and International Affairs* 5 (1991) 185.

⁷¹ Novak, *Will It Liberate?* 45.

ity, life expectancy, and literacy than practically any other Latin country for some time.⁷²

Novak appears to have a very idealized view of the U.S.A. He often laments the fact that Latin America is not more like his own country.⁷³ But even in the vastly richer U.S. 20 million people suffer from malnourishment.⁷⁴ Millions more are below the official poverty line, and lack adequate health insurance. Homelessness, racism, crime, and drug abuse are clearly serious problems. American workers have seen a significant decline in their real hourly earnings since 1973.⁷⁵ The gap between rich and poor has widened considerably during the 1980s.⁷⁶ The nation is burdened with massive fiscal and trade deficits, and it is widely observed that the country's public-school system and its physical infrastructure are deteriorating. If a country as wealthy as the U.S. is confronted with such problems, are we really to believe that following a similar set of socioeconomic policies as a pattern of development will solve the glut of social problems in impoverished nations like Peru, Bolivia, or El Salvador?

Novak has a very idealized view of capitalism too.⁷⁷ He is ceaseless in his celebration of the virtues of capitalist entrepreneurship, free competitive markets, and economic opportunity for all. But one wonders how on this view the U.S. fares as an exemplar of what Novak likes to call the spirit of capitalism. This is what Alperovitz and Faux report on the "free enterprise" American economy:

By 1979, the *Fortune* 500 firms, representing .02 percent of all individual firms, had more than 80 percent of all manufacturing sales and more than 75 percent of all profits and employees. The four top firms controlled 93 percent of automobile production. . . . The leading *Fortune* 100 firms managed about the

⁷² Strangely, Novak himself produces statistics which indicate this, but without comment (ibid. 104–5).

⁷³ Ibid. 36–43, 137.

⁷⁴ See the study carried out by U.S. physicians, reported in *Scientific American*, February 1987.

⁷⁵ Robert B. Reich, "Who Champions the Working Class?" *New York Times*, 26 May 1991, sec. E, p. 11. Reich reports that the real earnings of nonsupervisory workers, who represent two thirds of all wage earners, have fallen 12% during this period.

⁷⁶ Since 1977 the real income of the lowest 60% of households has fallen, while that of the top 20% has risen 27%. The bottom 20% had a fall of 13%, while the income of the top 1% almost doubled in real terms (Congressional Budget Office, *Green Book* [Washington, D.C., 1991] 1306).

⁷⁷ See Novak, *Will It Liberate?* especially chaps. 5 and 10. See also Novak's *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism* (New York: Simon and Schuster/American Enterprise Institute, 1982).

same fraction of manufacturing assets as the top 200 firms 30 years ago. And the manufacturing assets of the 200 largest now matched those of the top 1,000 companies in 1941.⁷⁸

The takeover and merger mania of the 1980s will have ensured a continuation of this steady trend to oligopoly and monopoly in American capitalism. Family farmers are leaving the land at an alarming rate, and their farms are being gobbled up by large agrobusinesses. Certainly Novak would disapprove of these trends, but he fails to see that the inherent dynamic of capitalist market competition is to eliminate the losers and reward the winners with a bigger share of the pie. As for equality of opportunity, the evidence is only too clear that class, race, and gender biases remain significant obstacles to genuine equality of socioeconomic opportunity in the U.S. and other "advanced" capitalist countries. Does Novak really believe that the black "welfare mom" in a Chicago housing project has the same influence in a "free" market as the CEO of General Motors? I do not suppose he does, but he fails to recognize that this state of inequality is mainly due to the way a private-enterprise, capitalist market economy works (or rather, fails to work).

Novak makes a great deal of the cultural differences between North and South America. He blames an alleged Latin cultural bias against wealth-creating enterprise and hard work for the continent's economic precariousness.⁷⁹ This bias he traces to the colonial period. Yet how is this reconcilable with the fact that as recently as 1914 Argentina had the same GNP per capita as the U.S.?⁸⁰ And that the region as a whole had a similar per capita income to the U.S. in 1850? In other words, the economic disparity between North and South America only began to appear long after the colonial period had run its course, and once industrial capitalism had begun to make its appearance. Yet one would surely expect the negative cultural attitudes stemming from the colonialist practices which Novak invokes to explain economic stagnation to have registered (relative) deleterious economic effects before these dates. Or perhaps there is more to it than Novak allows.

That Latin America is thoroughly integrated into the international capitalist economy is evidenced by the severe effects of the 1930s Depression in many Latin countries and by the frightful consequences of the debt crisis of the 1980s. This is not to deny that internal factors

⁷⁸ G. Alperovitz and J. Faux, *Rebuilding America: A Blueprint for the New Economy* (New York: Pantheon, 1984) 34.

⁷⁹ See note 61 above.

⁸⁰ See McGovern, in Novak, ed., *Liberation Theology and the Liberal Society* 149.

including political-economic mismanagement have aggravated many problems. But over many decades the political regimes responsible have often been installed under the auspices of the U.S. government, and have received all kinds of dubious military and financial backing.⁸¹ Yes, there are cultural differences, but Novak ignores the retarding effects on Latin American cultural, social, and political development of these imperialist and neo-imperialist policies. Moreover, to the extent that Latin American political economy *can* be characterized as statist, we should see this precisely as an understandable response to foreign domination and the superexploitative history of domestic economic elites, both founded on private ownership of productive wealth. In other words, it was the failures of private capital, both national and international, that produced statism, not vice-versa.⁸²

If it is open to Novak to disqualify Latin America from counting as capitalist because it fails to approximate to the good society he expects capitalism to produce, it is surely open to others to claim that the U.S.S.R., China, and other Communist states were never really socialist either. Indeed there are many texts in Marx and Engels which are clearly incompatible with *de facto* Communist reality. Engels, writing to Bernstein in 1881, has this to say about the dangers inherent in state ownership of industry when the state itself is the private property of the bureaucracy:

It is a purely self-interested falsification of the Manchester bourgeois to see every interference of the state with free competition as "socialism". . . . We should *criticize* that, not *believe* in it. This so-called socialism is, on the one hand, nothing more than a feudal reaction, and on the other, an excuse for printing money, with the secondary aim of turning as many proletarians as possible into state functionaries. They want to organize a labor army alongside the disciplined ranks of the military and bureaucratic armies. So choices will be imposed by state authorities instead of factory foremen. What a beautiful socialism!⁸³

⁸¹ Guatemala in 1954, Brazil in 1964, the Dominican Republic in 1965, Chile in 1973, Somoza's Nicaragua and El Salvador in the last 12 years are just some examples. There have been over 40 armed interventions by the U.S. in Latin America this century.

⁸² At times Novak shows himself to be aware of the responsibility of Latin America's private economic elite for the continent's troubles. He writes: "This elite invents virtually nothing, risks virtually nothing, takes virtually no initiatives. It is parasitic upon and distributes the goods and services of foreign enterprises, whose inventiveness and dynamism it does not emulate" (*Will It Liberate?* 5). But Novak avoids the conclusion that capitalism has not worked well in Latin America by qualifying this elite as "pre-capitalist." It seems that nothing is to be allowed to count as both "bad" and "capitalist."

⁸³ Quoted in M. Harrington, *Socialism* (New York: Saturday Review Press, 1972) 81-82.

This rather presciently sums up how things have stood in contemporary statified and authoritarian countries calling themselves or being called by others "socialist."

Novak's position ultimately rests upon his refusal to recognize that the historical records of capitalism and socialism have *both* been very mixed. At least the liberation theologians have shown their willingness to acknowledge the failures of "really existing socialism." That is why they do not wish to imitate it. A similar acknowledgement on Novak's part regarding "really existing capitalism" would be most welcome. The reality is that the best course for Latin America will probably not lie in a free-market "miracle" any more than in a Leninist revolution. To portray the choice in these terms, as Novak and other critics tend to do, is not only naive but dangerous.

CONCLUSION

I have examined why liberation theology adopted a left-wing political stance, and what it understands by the concept of socialism. I have also examined some of the main criticisms that have been levelled against it in relation to these positions, and have argued that only part of the criticism is really telling. In conclusion, I wish to indicate briefly where all this leaves liberation theology in its relation to the socialist problematic.

It seems to me that liberation theology faces a dilemma, or rather a double dilemma. Baldly stated, it can either forsake socialism for "theology," or it can define socialism, and forsake "theology" for rigorous, empirically grounded sociopolitical analysis and committed political praxis. I have placed "theology" in scare-quotes here because at the heart of this dilemma lies another one, and that is how to define theology itself. This is a dilemma for liberation theology because its original challenge was precisely to raise the question of what theology really is, and how one should pursue it. It answered this question by claiming that experience, social analysis, and engagement for justice in the secular political arena were indispensable moments in the theological enterprise. Yet if it decides to forsake the radical critique of capitalist society for "theology," will it not appear that the most distinctive characteristic of liberation thought and practice has been lost, and will it not become just another academic theological school? That this may already have begun to happen has been suggested by Arturo Fontaine. He sees in more recent liberation theology "the beginning of a gradual separation from particular socioeconomic and political tenets and options." But, he goes on, "It is not easy to advance in this

direction, however, without allowing the "Latin American" peculiarities of liberation theology to become subsumed within its European counterpart, in particular, German political theology."⁸⁴

We have already seen too that important figures like Gutiérrez have said that socialism is not essential to liberation theology, and there has been a distinct distancing from the more radical political language of earlier years. As noted above, McGovern thinks that socialism (likewise Marxism and dependency theory) is no longer an unqualified paradigm for liberation thought. If this trend were to continue, then liberation theology may come more and more to resemble the kind of "reconstructed," "North American," and "theological" version of it produced by Roger Haight in his book *An Alternative Vision*.⁸⁵ Haight does not mention a socialist option.

Alternatively, liberationists might take up the challenge of people like Novak, and do the hard empirical work in economics needed to ground a (no doubt Christian) commitment to socialism as an urgent and *viable* requirement for Latin America today. They may also take up a renewed commitment to politics now that a democratic space has opened up in places like Chile, Argentina, and Brazil. The Workers' Party in Brazil, which has a lot of its roots in Christian base communities, has had a large impact in recent Brazilian politics (its presidential candidate was only narrowly defeated in the last elections). However, to opt for this line would invite further criticism, most painfully perhaps from *within* the institutional Church. Also, a concentration on practical political activity and empirical analysis of social and economic matters would probably mean less time and energy being devoted to the liberationist treatment of the great doctrinal themes of Christianity, a project which has begun to meet with some success, but which is so far incomplete. In other words, liberation theologians have to ask themselves once again what authentic theology is really like. Should they assimilate themselves to the traditional theology of the academy, albeit expounding dogma in their own particular way; or should they continue to call into question the whole edifice of theology as currently conceived in Europe and North America, recalling that the Bible does not preach theology but the real-life liberation of the poor and oppressed?

My own, perhaps too optimistic hope is that liberationists can resolve these dilemmas by advancing on all fronts simultaneously, but that as far as doctrinal theology is concerned, they will eschew a rap-

⁸⁴ Fontaine, in Novak, ed., *Liberation Theology and the Liberal Society* 175-6.

⁸⁵ R. Haight, *An Alternative Vision* (New York: Paulist, 1985).

prochement with the dominant tradition. This strikes me as precisely the response that would be characteristic of liberation theology at its best—advancing through the continuous interaction of action and reflection, challenging and even upsetting some people in the process, but with theological reflection always a “second moment.” My fear is that liberation theology will be coopted (seduced?) by the theological establishment, and have all its potential for threatening the existing order of things tamed or drained out of it in consequence. This fear will be realized much more swiftly if liberation theology ever capitulates to the current ideological hegemony of capitalism, and forsakes the search for an authentic, well-defined and feasible alternative. Then the political and ecclesiastical establishments could pronounce liberation theology “safe” for consumption, in the knowledge that the social status quo was not under any real threat. Such a fate for liberation theology would be more than merely ironic. At this crucial turning point in ideological history, to leave the poverty-stricken masses of the Latin continent to the not so tender mercies of a resurgent, triumphalistic global capitalism, and to bow before the idol of free-market economics, would be a tragic act of betrayal. It would rob liberation theology of its *raison d'être*—that doing of justice which is knowledge of God.

APPENDIX

Output and Investment Shares of Public Enterprises¹

Country ²	Output ³	Investment ⁴
Australia (1954–80)	9.1–10.5	17.8–22.7
Austria (1970–79)	14.5–15.8	19.2
Belgium (1953–79)	n.a.	10.4–16.2
Canada (1970–82)	n.a.	10.9–21.7
France (1959–74)	11.9–12.7	14.0–23.0
W. Germany (1962–79)	10.2–10.3	10.4–14.8
Italy (1967–80)	7.0–7.5	14.2–19.4
Japan (1965–81)	n.a.	9.9–13.6
Norway (1978–80)	n.a.	22.2
Spain (1974–80)	n.a.	12.3–16.6
United Kingdom (1946–82)	10.0–11.3	11.0–22.4
Argentina (1976–80)	4.6–4.8	15.4–20.7
Bolivia (1960–77)	10.2–12.1	31.1–40.9
Brazil (1968–80)	n.a.	14.0–22.8
Chile (1961–80)	13.0–15.2	10.5–20.0
Colombia (1974–80)	n.a.	8.9–10.3
Guatemala (1975–80)	n.a.	11.2–13.3
Mexico (1970–78)	n.a.	22.0–29.4
Paraguay (1970–80)	2.7–3.1	6.5–14.5

Peru (1960-79)	n.a.	5.1-22.1
Uruguay (1971-80)	n.a.	13.2-18.3
Venezuela (1968-80)	2.9-27.5	22.0-36.3
South Korea (1963-80)	6.4-7.0	21.7-31.2
Taiwan (1951-80)	11.7-14.1	27.7-38.1

¹ These figures are condensed from a larger table given by R. P. Short, "The Role of Public Enterprises: An International Statistical Comparison," in R. H. Floyd, C. S. Gray, and R. P. Short, *Public Enterprise in Mixed Economies* (Washington D.C.: International Monetary Fund, 1984) 116-22.

² The years in parentheses are the earliest and latest years for which figures are presented in either category. For some intervening years no data are available.

³ Percentage share in Gross Domestic Product at factor cost.

⁴ Percentage share in Gross Fixed Capital Formation.