Latin American Liberation Theology

by Joseph S. Wang

Latin American liberation theology is the recent fashionable effort of Latin American theologians to deal with the social situation of that continent. In 1950, the United Nations proclaimed the first "decade of development." Several international organizations such as the International Development Bank, International Aid for Development, and International Monetary Fund were created to help the underdeveloped countries to improve their socioeconomic situations.[1] But as early as 1960, many Latin American leaders expressed pessimism regarding development. They were of the opinion that in Latin America underdevelopment was the result of the situation of dependence of these countries upon the great metropolises, and therefore true liberation had to be won against the world capitalistic system. The idea of "liberation"[2] then came to the fore among certain Christian leaders as an answer to this situation of dependence.[3]

In August and September of 1968, 150 bishops and 100 periti of the Roman Catholic Church met in Medellín, Colombia to deal with the church in the current transformation of Latin America in the light of Vatican II. Out of the meeting 16 documents were elaborated to serve as authoritative guidelines for the church. In the months preceding the conference a preliminary draft was distributed. Although the draft attacked in strong language the oligarchies of power, the foreign-based system of capitalism and the general situation of institutional violence, it was severely criticized by the leaders of the various lay apostolate organizations throughout Latin America. They attacked its lack of focus, its failure to get at the roots of the problems of marginality and alienation, its insufficient attention to the cause of dependency and lack of autonomy. Nine hundred priests issued a document called *Latin America: A Continent of Violence* underlining the violence of

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the privileged minority against the majority of deprived, a violence of hunger, helplessness, oppression, underdevelopment and neglect.[4] The delegation at the Medellín conference was a divided group. On the one hand, there were those who proposed a sort of peaceful, progressive development according to North Atlantic models of industrialization and democracy. On the other, there were those who advocated liberation from external and internal structures of dependence. They accented the conflict of interests existing between Latin American countries and neo-colonialism, between the mass and the local oligarchies. Not without inconsistencies, however, the Medellín documents generally adopted the liberationist language and point of view.[5]

Soon after the Medellín conference, publications for this liberationist point of view began to circulate. The leading spokesmen included Roman Catholic thinkers such as Hugo Assmann, Paulo Freire, Gustavo Gutiérrez, José Miranda, Juan Luis Segundo and Protestant thinkers like Rubem Alves and José Miguez Bonino.

Rubem Alves is considered the prophet of liberation theology. His book, *A Theology of Human Hope* (Washington/Cleveland: Copus Books, 1969), is probably the first one to explain a theology of liberation[6] and marks the "wide globalization of the basic questions of a 'Theology of Liberation.' "[7]

Hugo Assmann is the apologist of liberation theology. In his book, *Opresión-Liberación: Desafío a los cristianos* (Oppression-Liberation: A Challenge to Christians, Montevideo: Tierra Nueva, 1971), he gives the roots of liberation theology, defends its theological *locus* and methodology, and launches a mounting attack on North Atlantic theologies, demolishing their vagueness and ideological presuppositions. He builds a case for liberation theology as an autochthonous political theology based on an ethic of change.[8] The most systematic presentation of liberation theory is *A Theology of Liberation, History, Politics and Salvation* by Gustavo Gutiérrez, (translated and edited by Caridad Inda and John Eagleson, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1973). This book was originally published in Spanish in Lima early in 1971. It was reprinted in Spain in 1972. Then it was translated into English, French and Italian.[9] It is considered the *magnum opus* and its author the systematic theologian of the movement.

I

In its approach, liberation theology is radically different from traditional theologies. While the traditional theologies start theologizing

with theological categories and concepts such as God, the church, and the world, liberation theology starts with the poverty-stricken, oppressed and dominated reality of Latin America. Hugo Assmann states, "The greatest merit of the 'theology of liberation' probably lies in its insistence on the historical starting point of its reflection: the dominated situation of Latin America."[10] Gustavo Gutiérrez points out that liberation theology arises from concern with a particular set of issues – economic and socio-cultural. This will "give us the solid and permanent, albeit modest, foundation for the *theology in a Latin American perspective* which is both desired and needed."[11]

Since the economic, socio-political situation in Latin America is the "starting point" and "foundation" of liberation theology, the primary tools of liberation theology are those of the social science. Gustavo Gutiérrez explicitly states that liberation theologians need to "make use of the instruments offered us by social sciences for understanding those social realities which deny the justice and brotherhood which we seek."[12]

Liberation theology is not only interested in the analyses of the social situation, it is committed to action to change the situation. In the words of Gustavo Gutiérrez, "the theology of liberation is characterized not only by its different analyses of reality and its more comprehensive and radical political options . . . . Rather it seeks to think through the faith from the starting point of the way it is lived within the commitment to liberation."[13] In another place Gutiérrez writes:

> The theology of liberation offers not so much a new theme for reflection as a *new way* to do theology. Theology as critical reflection on historical praxis is a liberating theology, a theology of the liberating transformation of the history of mankind and also therefore that part of mankind – gathered into *ecclesia* – which openly confesses Christ. This is a theology which does not stop with reflecting on the world, but rather tries to be part of the process through which the world is transformed. It is a theology which is open – in the protest against trampled human dignity, in the struggle against the plunder of the vast majority of people, in liberating love, and in the building of a new, just and fraternal society . . . .[14]

The situation in Latin America is desperate. According to a report of the United Nations in 1952, two thirds of the Latin American popu-

lation is physically undernourished to the point of starvation in some regions. One-half of the Latin American population is suffering from infectious or deficiency diseases. About one-third of the Latin American working population continues to remain outside the economic, social, and cultural pale of the Latin American community. An overwhelming majority of the Latin American agricultural population is landless. Two-thirds, if not more, of the agricultural, forest, and livestock resources of Latin America is owned or controlled by a handful of native landlords and foreign corporations. Most of the extractive industries in Latin America are owned or controlled by foreign corporate investment, a considerable portion of the profits being taken out of the various countries. Living conditions for the bulk of the Latin American population are particularly unstable, being dependent on the fluctuations of the foreign market. Intra- and inter-Latin American trade is largely underdeveloped.[15]

A book published in 1971 states that in Colombia, there is only one doctor for every 2,500 inhabitants. Three percent of the population owns 70 percent of the land. One out of two adults cannot read or write and 38 percent of the school-age children have no school to go to. The population is 75 percent rural, and only 20 percent of the gross national product comes from industry. Four percent of the population enjoys 40 percent of the national revenue.[16]

Surely something has to be done to change this desperate situation. The God of the Bible is interested in both the physical and spiritual welfare of persons. The Lord is concerned about social justice. The liberation theologians are to be commended for their concern for the situation in Latin America and their attempts to change that situation. Their efforts are very relevant.

In their endeavor to bring about liberation, Latin American liberation theologians are deeply influenced by Marxism. In the analysis of the situation in Latin America as the basis of their action, the liberation theologians reject the North American functionalistic sociological analysis,[17] since it represents a commitment to developmental theory. Instead, they adopt "structuralistic" methodology. Sociological structuralism questions the system from the perspective of the poverty-stricken masses. It analyzes the situation as one of economic, social, political, and cultural dependence and sets forth the necessity of deep structural changes as a condition for advance.[18] Denis Goulet points out that, like Marxists, Latin American liberationists "accept class struggle both as an undeniable fact and as a starting point for devising

strategies of change."[19]

Liberation theology maintains the primacy of praxis. Assmann rejects "any *logos* which is not the *logos of a praxis.*"[20] Gutiérrez attacks "epistemological split." To the liberationists "there is no truth outside or beyond the concrete historical events in which men are involved as agents. There is, therefore, no knowledge except in action itself, in the process of transforming the world through participation in history."[21] With them "action is itself the truth. Truth is at the level of history, not in the realm of ideas."[22] This kind of epistemology, and this primacy of praxis are those of Marx and his followers. The theses of Marx include, "In practice [praxis] man must prove the truth" (second thesis). "Social life is essentially practical. All mysteries which mislead theory into mysticism find their rational solution in human practice and in the understanding of this practice" (eighth thesis). "Philosophers have only interpreted the world differently. The point, however, is to change" (eleventh thesis). Mao-Tse-Tung states, "Truth has to be discovered and confirmed by practice and should be developed also by practice ("On Praxis").[23]

In April 1972 the leading liberation theologians along with 450 delegates from all of Latin America had a meeting of "Christians for Socialism" in Santiago, Chile. In the meeting there was a general rejection of a "third way" between capitalism and socialism, and an acceptance of Marxism as an analytical and revolutionary method.[24]

Miguez Bonino acknowledges that the thought of liberationists

> . . . is characterized by a strict scientific-ideological analysis, avowedly Marxist. This is clearly seen in their way of relating praxis and theory and in their insistence on the rationality, conflict, and radicality of the political realm. It can also be seen in the recognition of class struggle. This assumption of Marxism – which is not tantamount to an uncritical acceptance of all its philosophy – is decisive for the theological task and indicates, as Guilio Girardi has said, 'a qualitative leap' from the humanist or spiritualist inspiration of the 'social concern' to an engagement mediated through scientific (Marxist) analysis.[25]

Gutiérrez appreciates the influence of Marxism upon his theology.[26]

These liberationists, however, cannot be charged with adopting Marxism uncritically.[27] They have done some evaluative thinking and weighing of the issues involved. They reject the total embracing of

Marxist ideology as contrary to Christian faith.[28] They maintain that they accept Marxism merely as a scientific analysis of the way in which socio-economic-political reality functions, which is "projected into an hypothesis concerning the relation of human history (and all its achievements) to the process of producing material goods."[29] Gutiérrez claims that Marxism is science and Christianity is faith.[30]

Can one really accept a Marxist analysis of historical reality without being influenced by Marxist metaphysics? Can one really follow Marxist praxis without embracing Marxist philosophy? After his attempt to argue that Christians can follow Marxist analysis of historical reality and Marxist praxis without betraying their Christian faith, Miguez Bonino concedes that "Admittedly, Marxism does not behave as the cool rational entity we have described. It is frequently possessed by an apostolic zeal, a dogmatic certainty and a messianic fervor . . . ."[31] In the similar context, Miguez Bonino admits:

> If it be true that every form of praxis articulates – consciously or unconsciously – a view of reality and a projection of it, an analysis and an ideology, this means that reflection on this praxis must necessarily raise the question of the rightness or inadequacy of such analysis and ideology. This is a complex problem to which we cannot expect to find an unobjectionable answer. But the question is unavoidable.[32]

Since the liberation theologians concentrate almost exclusively, if not, in fact exclusively on socio-economic-political issues, they empty the Christian message of its spiritual dimension.[33] They operate as if there were no spiritual dimension in human life. In effect, this amounts to the Marxist materialistic view of human life.

II

Liberation theology with its insistence on praxis and the sociopolitical context as privileged theological *data*, gives to the historical circumstances the determinative weight in theology.[34] Liberation theologians are committed to restructuring the society along the line of socialism. The Bible messages are reinterpreted to support this praxis.[35] This is well illustrated in their treatment of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Rubem Alves writes:

> The word resurrection, in the universe of discourse of the community of faith, does not describe, therefore an organic process. It does not indicate either that a dead body was brought to life again or how it happened. The One who was dead was experienced by the community of faith as alive again. But nothing is said about the "how," about what came in between. Resurrection, like creation, was an expression of freedom's power to create *ex nihilo*, to give life to the dead and to call into existence the things that do not exist (Rom. 4:17). The word was borrowed from Jewish apocalypticism to express the community's experience that the One who had been crucified was alive in history, as a power of liberation . . . . Resurrection, hence, is the language of the ongoing politics of God in history. It is the language of hope . . . . This is why no historical research is able to "verify" the resurrection. . . . The field of the verification of hope is not, therefore, the past, but the future. Hope is verified to the extent to which man is made open for the future, the structures of oppression are broken, and the future is made open for man. And each of these events is a new celebration of hope, a new enjoying of the "aperitif" of liberation.[36]

Miguez Bonino asks the rhetorical question, "Is it altogether absurd to reread the resurrection today as the death of monopolies, the liberation from hunger, or a solidary form of ownership?"[37]

Under this kind of eisegetical operation of liberation theologians, many important Biblical doctrines have been transmuted and emptied of the original Biblical message.

Gutiérrez affirms that salvation is the central theme of Christian mystery. On the basis of "the historical and liberating experience of Exodus," salvation and creation are linked together.[38] "Yahweh's historical actions on behalf of his people are considered creative. The God who frees Israel is the Creator of the world."[39] Yahweh is at one and the same time Creator and Redeemer. Accordingly creation is seen as the first salvific act. It

> . . . initiates history, the human struggle, and the salvific adventure of Yahweh. Faith in creation does away with its mythical and supernatural character. It is the work of a God who saves and acts in history; since man is the center

> of creation, it is integrated into the history which is being built by man's efforts.[40]

Thus, salvation is linked with the history which is being built by man's efforts. Further, since the Exodus experience is a political act, in which Israel was liberated from the bondage of oppression, salvation has to be understood in terms of political liberation. This political liberation is to be understood as the "self-creation of man."[41] Israel is liberated to build a just nation and to witness to the whole world about God's liberating concern for all humanity. Therefore, the Exodus becomes a paradigm for the political liberation of man.

Gutiérrez maintains that the "work of Christ forms a part of this movement and brings it to complete fulfillment."[42] The paradigm of the liberation of man found in the Exodus experience of Israel finds its fulfillment in Christ. In Christ, God liberates all men to continue their creative vocation, to work and transform this world.

Therefore, salvation is to be understood as "the inner force and fullness of this movement of man's self generation which was initiated by the work of creation."[43] Thus to "work, to transform this world, is to become a man and to build the human community; it is also to save."[44] Juan Segundo states, "In the domain of time, then, salvation is a 'political' maturity. It is the maturity of 'political being' that every human being is."[45]

Gutiérrez advocates the replacement of a quantitative and extensive approach by a qualitative and intensive approach to salvation. The former, which is to be discarded, has to do with "the problem of the number of persons saved, the possibility of being saved, and the role which the Church plays in this process."[46] The latter has to do with "the value of human existence" in history. Therefore

> . . . man is saved if he opens himself to God and to others, even if he is not clearly aware that he is doing so. This is valid for Christians and non-Christians alike – for all people. To speak about the presence of grace – whether accepted or rejected – in all people implies, on the other hand, to value from a Christian standpoint the very roots of human activity.[47]

In the Bible, however, salvation is holistic. It has both theological and social dimensions. It is concerned with both this world and the other world. It has to be accepted individually by faith. Yet the liberation theologians do away with its theological dimension, and remove its

other-worldly significance. The universalism of liberation theology regarding salvation does away with the necessity of individual faith and removes the mandate for evangelization.

In liberation theology, Christ and God are to be understood preeminently in historical categories. In Christ, God has become man. Christ is the historization of God. In Christ,

> . . . in his personal uniqueness, the particular is transcended and the universal becomes concrete. In him, in his Incarnation, what is personal and internal becomes visible. Henceforth, this will be true, in one way or another of every man.[48]

"Since God has become man, humanity, every man, history is the living temple of God." Therefore "we meet God in our encounter with men; we encounter him in the commitment to the historical process of mankind."[49]

Since Christ is the neighbor, conversion to Christ is conversion to the neighbor. The neighbor, however,

> . . . is not only man viewed individually. The term refers also to man considered in the fabric of social relationships, to man situated in his economic, social, cultural, and racial coordinates. It likewise refers to the exploited social class, the dominated people, and the marginated race.[50]

Therefore conversion means

> . . . a radical transformation of ourselves; it means thinking, feeling, and living as Christ-present in exploited and alienated man. To be converted is to commit oneself to the process of the liberation of the poor and oppressed, to commit oneself lucidly, realistically, and concretely. It means to commit oneself not only generously, but also with an analysis of the situation and a strategy of action . . . . Our conversion process is affected by the socioeconomic, political, cultural, and human environment in which it occurs. Without a change in these structures, there is no authentic conversion.[51]

Assmann writes:

> The conversion to the God of the Kingdom has to be materialized in the conversion of the historical human process . . . . to be converted, to God and the perspectives of his

> Kingdom, it is necessary to be converted, here and now, to man and his history. It is in the struggle for the liberation of man that the love of God is materialized (cf. Mt. 25).[52]

In harmony with these, Gutiérrez understands the Church as the community, not of those who have been reconciled to God through faith in Jesus Christ, but rather all those who are willing to participate in the struggle for liberation. "The Church is not a non-world; it is humanity itself attentive to the Word. It is the people of God which lives in history and is orientated toward the future promised by the Lord."[53] Gutiérrez sees the Church as a sacrament of salvation, a visible sign that points beyond herself to what salvation is all about. "As a sign of the liberation of man and history, the Church itself in its concrete existence ought to be a place of liberation."[54] The Church has the obligation to manifest in its visible structures the message it bears.

> Since the Church is not an end in itself, it finds its meaning in its capacity to signify the reality in function of which it exists. Outside of this reality the Church is nothing; because of it the Church is always provisional; and it is towards the fulfillment of this reality that the Church is oriented: this reality is the Kingdom of God which has already begun in history.[55]

Since the Kingdom of God, for Gutiérrez, is a just society in which there is no oppression, servitude or alienated work,[56] the Church, therefore, is mission, a responsive community to God's action, pointing to the reality of a just society in history. This mission of the Church takes at least three forms; namely, celebration, denunciation, and annunciation.

Through Eucharist, the Church celebrates with joy the gift of salvific action of God in humanity. This celebration becomes a vivid dramatization of what has been achieved in Christ, namely human liberation and brotherhood.[57] By denunciation the Church has to take a stance against the present state of social injustice. This is the necessary confrontation which must take place wherever the Gospel is proclaimed. This denunciation "should be backed up by clear actions and commitments."[58] The denunciation, however, "is achieved by confronting a given situation with reality which is announced"[59] – the Gospel. The Gospel is the good news of the presence of God's love "in the historical becoming of mankind."

To preach the Good News is for the Church to be a sacra-

> ment of history, to fulfill its role as community – a sign of the convocation of all men by God. It is to announce the coming of the Kingdom. The Gospel message reveals, without any evasions, what is at the root of social injustice: the rupture of the brotherhood which is based on our sonship before the Father; the Gospel reveals the fundamental alienation which lies below every other human alienation.[60]

Consequently evangelization is a political activity. "Evangelization is a powerful factor in personalization" of the Gospel.[61] The personalization stimulated by the annunciation of the Gospel can take on very particular and demanding forms.

> If a situation of injustice and exploitation is incompatible with the coming of the Kingdom, the Word which announces this coming ought normally to point out this incompatibility. This means that the people who hear this message and live in these conditions by the mere fact of hearing it should perceive themselves as oppressed and feel impelled to seek their own liberation . . . . The annunciation of the Gospel thus has a conscienticizing function, or in other words, a politicizing function. But this is made real and meaningful only by living and announcing the Gospel from within a commitment to liberation, only in concrete, effective solidarity with people and exploited social classes.[62]

Liberation theology understands the Kingdom of God in a political sense. Alves claims that when Jesus announced the Kingdom of God He announced

> . . . the immediacy of that political reality of power in which liberation was possible and offered . . . . The Gospel is thus the annunciation of the historical reality of the ongoing politics of God, which expressed itself not as philosophical or mystical experience but rather as a power that invades history.[63]

Gutiérrez perceives the Kingdom as "the end of domination of man over man; it is a Kingdom of contradiction to the established powers and on behalf of man."[64] The Kingdom is realized in a society of brotherhood and justice. It is political in nature.[65]

Liberation theologians attempt to take into account both the present and the future aspects of the Kingdom. On the one hand, the Kingdom

materializes in the concrete historical struggles for liberation. On the other, "the horizon must be kept open toward the ultimate and definite Kingdom."[66] Assmann understands this future Kingdom as "a horizon always open before us."[67] Alves explains the present and future in this way.

> But that present had something special. It was not the presence of the eternal now, a present that exhausted itself. The future did not become present in an eternal now as in realized eschatology. Nor did it remain an isolated dogmatic idea, independent from and not related to the now, as a future that comes down from the heavens, as with consistent eschatology. The now was the time when a liberating activity that pushed toward the future was going on. Already and not yet were not, therefore, abstract points in the chronology of objective time. The not yet was what qualified and determined the present. It was not primarily the point of arrival but rather that which was being engendered in the womb of the present. In the now we have the presence of the future made historical through God's action. God is thus neither the "eternal present" or the "absolute future" for the community of faith. It came to see, from its historical experience, that what God's action does is to create an explosiveness that is both present and negates the present.[68]

Gutiérrez understands the presence of future, eschatology as "an intrahistorical reality. The grace-sin conflict, the coming of the Kingdom, and the expectation of the parousia are also necessarily and inevitably historical, temporal, earthly, social, and material realities."[69]

In their treatment of the Kingdom of God, these liberation theologians seem to put the cart before the horse. The Biblical data indicate and the majority of exegetes agree that the central meaning of the Kingdom of God is the reign of God.[70] This effective reign of God will result in a society of brotherhood and justice among men. Yet the liberationists perceive the Kingdom in terms of a utopian society of brotherhood, love and justice without considering its cause – the reign of God. The liberationists talk about the Kingdom of God without God. They want to build a utopian society of brotherhood and justice with human efforts without God. According to the New Testament while the "present" of the Kingdom is already in existence, the "future"

of the Kingdom, namely, the consummation of the Kingdom, will be brought about by God Himself. The liberation theologians' interpretation of future Kingdom as that which keeps history open, always full of new possibilities, and the hope that arises out of the struggles of the present cannot be squared with the Bible. Their interpretation does away with the glorious eschatology which is a very important Bible message. Similar weaknesses can be found in their interpretation of other major Biblical doctrines treated above.

The effect of this exclusive concentration on politics by liberation theology is to rule out all religion in the traditional sense. In fact, these liberationists consider traditional religious activities detrimental to their cause and advocate radical secularization or desacralization. Alves writes:

> See how people close their eyes when they pray. They do not know why. It has become an automatic reflex. But the reason is that they believe God begins where the body ends. The act of closing one's eyes is an act of refusal of the body and of rejection of the world.[71]

He claims that:

> The language of theology and of the Church, the language of many hymns, liturgies, and sermons sounds to the secular man like the voice of an alien and remote sphere. This is one of the reasons why a growing number of people are leaving the churches and opting for a totally secular humanism.[72]

Therefore Alves advocates total secularization.

> God, thus, is not freedom for man. He is the domestication of man, the end of the "homo creator." When the death of God is proclaimed, obviously man is made free again for his world, for history, for creation. The world is desacralized. Its frozen values thaw. Nothing is final. The horizons become permission and invitation. Man is free to experimentation . . . . Religion, therefore, is to be destroyed for the sake of the earth, for the sake of man's freedom to criticize his world in order to transform it.[73]

Juan Segundo claims "Secularization is a central postulate of the Christian message . . . . Now everything is under man's dominion."[74] To this Gutiérrez adds his support: "Secularization poses a serious

challenge to the Christian community. In the future it will have to live and celebrate its faith in a *nonreligious* world, which the faith itself has helped to create."[75]

III

Latin American liberationists are committed to the restructuring of society along the line of socialism. Many engage in violent revolutionary action to achieve this. After the deaths of two guerrilla leaders, Che Guevara and Camilo Torres, the guerrilla warfare subsided somewhat. However, there still are some leaders who advocate violent revolutionary action as the means to achieve the restructuring of society.[76] Paulo Freire defends violent actions by saying "Violence is initiated by those who oppress, who exploit, who fail to recognize others as persons – not by those who are oppressed, exploited, and unrecognized."[77] Alves claims that "Man is absolved from inhumanity and brutality in the present, as the time of transition, the time which does not count."[78] Jose Miranda advocates negation of the state and the law. He writes, "Completely opposite to the defense of the status quo, the realization of justice not only subverts it, it also demands that we abolish the State and the law."[79] He also claims that "The insurrection of authentic Christianity against all law and all civilization which has ever existed in history is a subversion which knows no limits . . . ."[80] Goulet observes that "A supreme sense of moral worth pervades the subversive enterprise in Latin America."[81]

However, is it wise to resort to violent revolution in Latin America now? Is it impossible to solve the socioeconomic problems in Latin America without bloodshed? The published statement of Medellin indicates that in the present circumstances the evils that would follow in the wake of violent revolution would be greater than those it sets out to remedy. Some Latin American leaders are calling the strategy of violent revolution into question.[82]

At this point, probably the successful case of Taiwan (Republic of China) in solving her socioeconomic problem without bloodshed can provide a good example for Latin America.

During the 1940's, 56 percent of the farmland in Taiwan was owned by landlords. Seventy percent of the farmers were tenant-farmers.[83] The landlords were taking a share of more than 50 percent of the total harvest. In 1949 the government took an action to limit the rent to a

maximum of 37.5 percent of the principal crop as an initial step of land reform.[84]

In 1953 the "land-to-the-tiller" program was enforced. The government compulsorily purchased the farmlands from the absentee landlords and resold these to the farmers who were actually cultivating that particular piece of farmland. The price of a piece of farmland was set at two-and-one-half times the total amount of the annual main-crop yield. The compensation to the landlords was paid 30 percent with government industrial enterprise stocks and 70 percent with land bonds which carried an interest rate of 4 percent per annum. Both principal and interest were to be paid in equal, semiannual installments spread over a period of ten years. The farmer purchaser would pay the price of the land plus interest at the rate of 4 percent per annum in equal, semiannual installments spread over a period of ten years. The dates of installment payments were closely coordinated with the harvesting seasons. In case of crop failure, a farmer purchaser could apply to postpone the payment of that particular installment. The unpaid installments were to be made up, one after another, immediately after the ten year period was over.[85]

Though reluctantly, the landlords cooperated with the program. This was due to the following factors. First, though the purchase of land from the landlords was compulsory, it was not outright confiscation. There was due compensation which was carefully calculated and, to a great extent, justified. Second, the payment of the land price was carefully arranged and guaranteed. Third, the time was ripe to change the dependency of one's living on farm rental. It was considered an outmoded feudalistic way of life, and was rapidly being replaced by developing self-respect through independent careers in modern business. Many landlords were able to figure out that investments in industries and businesses were more profitable than investment in farmland. Fourth, in the years between 1949 and 1953 the Chinese communists took over the mainland of China and practiced cruel and inhumane atrocities on the landlords to take away farmland from them. The Chinese communists were threatening to take over Taiwan. If this should happen, the communists surely would do the same thing to the landlords in Taiwan. Many landlords in Taiwan were convinced that if they refused to cooperate with the government and thus gave opportunity for the communists to take over Taiwan, they would face the same tragedy the landlords in mainland China experienced. This fearful possibility made the landlords in Taiwan accept

the democratic and fair-play type of land reform.[86]

This democratic, peaceful land reform in Taiwan has brought many positive results. The living standards of the farmers have improved greatly. This has raised the morale of the farmers. They have ample opportunities for education. All these factors combined to boost the farm production.[87] Many former landlords switched their investments from the land to modern industries and business. Taiwan also attracted many foreign investments. In 1975, American private firms had $500 million invested in Taiwan.[88] These foreign investments helped, rather than hurt the economy of Taiwan. It has grown steadily. In 1954, the year after the land-to-the-tiller program was carried out, imports from the United States to Taiwan amounted to $93.8 million and exports from Taiwan to the United States came to $5.5 million.[89] In 1975 the gross national product was $14.4 billion. In foreign trades, imports from foreign nations were $5.3 billion, and exports to foreign nations were $5.9 billion, with a balance of payment of $300 million in favor of Taiwan.[90] In 1976 in the trade with the United States alone, there was a balance of payment of $1.4 billion in favor of Taiwan.[91] Taiwan now is America's thirteenth largest trading partner. The gross national product was up 11.8 percent in 1976 and is expected to climb by 8.5 percent in 1977, while Consumer Price Index climbed only 2.49 percent in 1976.[92] Taiwan extends technical assistance to some 30 countries throughout the world.[93]

Despite the weaknesses and even fallacies in their theology, Latin American liberation theologians are to be commended for their concerns and dedications to change and improve the desperate socioeconomic conditions in South America. Perhaps the peaceful and successful case of socioeconomic improvement in Taiwan may be a good model for Latin American liberationists to consider.

FOOTNOTES

[1]José Miguez Bonino, *Doing Theology in a Revolutionary Situation* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), pp. 24-25.

[2]Gustavo Gutiérrez, a leading spokesman for liberation theology, describes "liberation" this way. "In the first place, *liberation* expresses the aspirations of oppressed peoples and social classes, emphasizing the

conflictual aspect of the economic, social, and political process which puts them at odds with wealthy nations and oppressive classes . . . . At a deeper level, *liberation* can be applied to an understanding of history. Man is seen as assuming conscious responsibility for his own destiny. This understanding provides a dynamic context and broadens the horizons of the desired social changes. In this perspective the unfolding of all of man's dimensions is demanded – a man who makes himself throughout his life and throughout history. The gradual conquest of true freedom leads to the creation of a new man and a qualitatively different society." Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation*, trans. and ed. by Sister Caridad Inda and John Eagleson (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1973), pp. 36-37. Hereafter this book is cited as *Liberation.*

[3]Adolfo Ham, "Introduction to the Theology of Liberation," *Communio Viatorum*, Vol. XVI (1973), p. 113.

[4]Francis P. Fiorenza, "Latin American Liberation Theology," *Interpretation*, Vol. XXVIII (1974), pp. 444-445.

[5]Hector Borrat, "Liberation Theology in Latin America," *Dialog*, Vol. XIII (1974), p. 173.

[6]Hans-Jurgen Prien, "Liberation and Development in Latin America," trans. from German by E. M. Evans, *Lutheran World*, Vol. XX (1973), p. 128.

[7]Hugo Assmann, *Opresión-Liberación: Desafío a los cristianos* (Montevideo: Tierra Nueva, 1971), p. 80, quoted in Orlando E. Costas, *The Church and Its Mission: A Shattering Critique From the Third World* (Wheaton: Tyndale, 1974), p. 222, n. 4.

[8]Costas, *op. cit.*, p. 223, n. 4.

[9]C. Rene Padilla, "The Theology of Liberation," *Christianity Today*, Nov. 9, 1973, p. 69.

[10]Assmann, *op. cit.*, p. 24 quoted in Costas, *op. cit.*, p. 224.

[11]Gutiérrez, *Liberation*, p. 14. Cf. p. 11.

[12]Gustavo Gutiérrez, "The Hope of Liberation," *World View*, June 1974. (Vol. XVIII), p. 36. Hereafter this article is cited as "Hope."

[13]Gutiérrez, "*Hope*," p. 36.

[14]Gutiérrez, *Liberation*, p. 15.

[15]Miguez Bonino, *op. cit.*, pp. 22-23.

[16]François Houtart and Andre Rousseau, *The Church and Revolution: From the French Revolution of 1789 to the Paris Riots of 1968; from Cuba to Southern Africa; from Vietnam to Latin America*, trans. Violet Nevile, (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1971), p. 185.

[17]Sociological functionalism takes the social system as is and seeks to discover those factors which are not functioning properly and are causing stagnation in the system. Its goal is to improve the system so that it may function properly and permit growth. Costas, *op. cit.*, p. 226.

[18]*Ibid.*, pp. 226-227.

[19]Denis Goulet, *A New Moral Order: Studies in Development Ethics and Liberation Theology* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1974), p. 124.

[20]Miguez Bonino, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

[21]*Ibid., loc. cit.*

[22]*Ibid.*, p. 72.

[23]Adolfo Ham, *op. cit.*, p. 116.

[24]Phillip E. Berryman, "Latin American Liberation Theology," *Theological Studies*, Vol. 34 (1973), p. 377. Cf. John Eagleson ed., *Christians and Socialism: Documentation of the Christians for Socialism Movement in Latin America*, trans. John Drury (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1975).

[25]Miguez Bonino, *op. cit.*, p. 71.

[26]Gutiérrez, *Liberation,* pp. 9-10.

[27]Clark H. Pinnock, "Liberation Theology: The Gains, The Gaps," *Christianity Today*, January 16, 1976, p. 14.

[28]Miguez Bonino, *op. cit.*, p. 96.

[29]*Ibid.*, p. 97.

[30]Berryman, *op. cit.*, p. 375.

[31]Miguez Bonino, *op. cit.*, p. 97.

[32]*Ibid.*, p. 95.

[33]See Section II.

[34]Assmann explicitly avows this. Miguez Bonino, *op. cit.*, p. 72.

[35]Assmann tries to defend this approach. Assmann, *op. cit.*, pp. 66-67, quoted in Costas, *op. cit.*, pp. 225-226, n. 9.

[36]Rubem A. Alves, *A Theology of Human Hope* (Washington/ Cleveland: Corpus, 1969), pp. 130-131. Hereafter, this book is cited as *Human Hope.*

[37]Miguez Bonino, *op. cit.*, p. 101.

[38]Gutiérrez, *Liberation*, p. 153.

[39]*Ibid.*, p. 155.

[40]*Ibid.*, p. 154.

[41]*Ibid.*, pp. 155f.

[42]*Ibid.*, p. 158.

[43]*Ibid.*, p. 159.

[44]*Ibid., loc. cit.*

[45]Juan Luis Segundo, *Our Idea of God*, trans. John Drury (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1974), p. 39.

[46]Gutiérrez, *Liberation*, p. 150.

[47]*Ibid.*, p. 151.

[48]*Ibid.*, p. 193.

[49]*Ibid.*, p. 194.

[50]*Ibid.*, p. 202.

[51]*Ibid.*, p. 205.

[52]Assmann, *op. cit.*, p. 155, quoted in Costas, *op. cit.*, p. 235.

[53]Gutiérrez, *Liberation, p. 261.*

[54]*Ibid.*, p. 261.

[55]*Ibid., loc. cit.*

[56]*Ibid.*, p. 168.

[57]*Ibid.*, pp. 262-263.

[58]*Ibid.*, p. 268.

[59]*Ibid.*, p. 268.

[60]*Ibid.*, p. 269.

[61]*Ibid., loc. cit.*

[62]*Ibid., loc. cit.*

[63]Alves, *Human Hope,* p. 92.

[64]Gutiérrez, *Liberation*, p. 231.

[65]*Ibid.*, p. 232.

[66]*Assmann, op. cit.*, p. 154, quoted in Costas, *op. cit.*, p. 236.

[67]Assmann, *op. cit.*, p. 154, quoted in Costas, *op. cit.*, p. 236.

[68]Alves, *Human Hope,* p. 95-96.

[69]Gutiérrez, *Liberation,* p. 167.

[70]George E. Ladd, *Jesus and the Kingdom* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), p. 126.

[71]Rebem A. Alves, *Tomorrow's Child: Imagination, Creativity, and the Rebirth of Culture* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), p. 159.

[72]Alves, *Human Hope,* p. 29.

[73]*Ibid.*, p. 33.

[74]Juan Luis Segundo, *Grace and the Human Condition,* trans. John Drury (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1968), p. 39.

[75]Gutiérrez, *Liberation*, p. 68.

[76]Manfred K. Bahmann, "Liberation Theology – Latin American Style," *The Lutheran Quarterly,* Vol. XXVII (1975), p. 147.

[77]Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* trans. by Myra Bergman Ramon (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970), p. 41.

[78]Alves, *Human Hope*, p. 155.

[79]José Porfirio Mirando, *Marx and the Bible: A Critique of the Philosophy of Oppression,* trans. John Eagleson (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1974), p. 38.

[80]*Ibid.*, p. 189.

[81]Goulet, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

[82]Houtart and Rousseau, *op. cit.*, pp. 221-222.

[83]Anthony Y. C. Koo, *The Role of Land Reform in Economic Development: A Case Study of Taiwan* (New York: Praeger, 1968), pp. 27-28.

[84]Martin M. C. Yang, *Socio-Economic Results of Land Reform in Taiwan* (Honolulu: East-West Centre Press, 1970), p. 9.

[85]*Ibid.*,pp. 75-80.

[86]*Ibid.*, pp. 31-34.

[87]For detailed statistical studies see Koo, *op. cit.*, and Yang, *op. cit.*

[88]*The World Almanac and Book of Facts 1977* (New York: Newspaper Enterprise Association, 1977), p. 524.

[89]*The World Almanac and Book of Facts for 1956* (New York: New York World-Telegram and Sun, 1956) p. 667.

[90]*The World Almanac and Book of Facts 1977*, p. 524.

[91]*Central Daily News, International Edition* (Taipei, Taiwan, Republic of China), March 27, 1977, p. 1.

[92]Phil Brown (Associated Press), "Taiwan Optimistic Despite Red Chinese Threat," *Sunday Herald-Leader* (Lexington, Kentucky), April 3, 1977, D-11.

[93]*The World Almanac and Book of Facts 1977*, p. 524.