

Preface 14

Ecclesiastes 12:12

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Ronald Nash's LIBERATION THEOLOGY

by David Chilton

It's tough being a prophet. Coming up with brilliant, **in-cisive** observations is the easy part. Then you have to sit on pins and needles waiting for the world to catch up and fulfill your dire **prédctions**. It can be nerve-wracking, so I usually try to suppress the **gift**.

Every once in a while, though, a prophecy just slips out, and before I know it, it's **in** print. That happened with *Productive Christians In an Age of Guilt-Manipulators* (ICE: 2nd ed., 1982, \$4.95). **In** Chapter 15 ("Preparing the Church for **Slavery**"), I declared that Ronald **Sider's** doctrines were preparing the way for the establishment of a totalitarian slate. Of course, once the cat was out of (he **bag**, there was nothing I could do but wait for **Sider** to gel moving on the **project**. I'll say one thing for the guy: give him an idea and he runs with it. He raced into print with Nuclear *Holocaust and Christian Hope: A Book for Christian Peacemakers* (IVP, 1982), **in** which he and co-author Richard Taylor give their plan for achieving world peace.

The strategy is known, **in** military **terms**, as **Defeat**. (Strangely, **Sider** does not use this precise terminology; perhaps he considered it too technical.) It's **pretty** simple, **really**. First, you disarm and render the nation **utterly** defenseless. Then comes the fun part: We believe that such an action could very likely result **in** a Soviet invasion" (p. 274). **Sider** and Taylor both attended Yale, so **it** didn't take them long to figure that one out. Of course; they don't intend to take this lying down. They've come up with what they call a "**Civilian-Based** Defense." (You will think I'm making up the following quotation, but **I'm** not. **With** **Sider** and Taylor writing **great material** like this, who needs satire?) It works like this: as the Soviet troops land, **Sider** and Taylor organize a "non-violent blitzkrieg," **in** which thousands of American citizens would assemble to meet the enemy's **jumbo jets** as they land.

The landing would be peaceful. No American artillery would fire; no jets would strafe. Instead of American **soldiers** crouching behind tanks and pointing guns at them, the invaders would see tens of thousands of unarmed people **carrying** signs with messages **in** the invader's language: Go Home! We **Won't** Harm You; Don't Shoot – **We** Are Your Brothers and Sisters; Your Life Is Precious; You Are a Child of God.

Like the Czechs, Hungarians and East Germans during the Russian invasion of those countries, Americans would climb up on tanks and try to talk to soldiers: "**Why** have you come? Why are you invading a peaceful **nation** that **is not** threatening **you**?" Loudspeakers would explain that the troops are

welcome as tourists but will be opposed as invaders. . . . if members of the crowd were not able to keep discipline and **started** to threaten the soldiers, special U.S. Peace-keeping Teams would move in nonviolently to **restrain** the persons who were losing control (p. 275).

Moral Majority's **Cal** Thomas remarked to me that such a "defense" strategy just might work: the Soviet soldiers could die laughing.

If **Sider** and Taylor scare you, however, you should realize that they are just the Marshmallow Corps; their function is simply to soften us up. Their language is quite mild, compared with that of some of their associates in the "liberation theology" movement. Consider the Mexican university professor **José** Miranda, author of *Communism in the Bible* (Orbis Books, 1982)—which is, as you might expect, a very thin book, as is **Konstantin Chernenko's** *Human Rights in Soviet Society* (International Publishers, 1981). Not thin enough, though. Here are some quotes from Miranda:

It is **lma** to drop all these side issues and concentrate on the **fundamental** fact: the Bible teaches communism (pp. 6(.).

Communism is obligatory for Christians (p. 8).

The **Ananias** episode . . . means: pain of death for whoever betrays communism, Christianity's indispensable condition (p. 11).

No one can take the Bible seriously without concluding that according to it, the rich, for being rich, should be **punished** (p. 24).

A// differentiating wealth is ill-gotten . . . therefore to be rich is to be unjust (p. 32).

Miranda goes on to argue that **all** the "wealthy" – those who have "differentiating wealth" (any possessions above the lowest common denominator), which means all members of society above the poverty level—are guilty (indirectly, but really) of the murder of millions. Then, citing the biblical commands for capital punishment of murderers, he calls for the mass execution of the "**wealthy**" at the hands of a mob. "This is violence; and **it** is not only permitted, it is commanded, by the one true God. The human community has to defend itself from its attackers" (p. 74).

This is more than abstract Marxist economics. This is more than social welfare programs. This is a specific policy of revolution and tyranny. **In** the name of Jesus Christ, the advocates of liberation theology are preaching envy, theft, and mass extermination. Even **Sider** and Taylor admit that a likely **result** of their policies would be that "hundreds of thousands, perhaps even millions, might die" (*op. cit.*, p. 281). Liberation theology is a theology of mass murder. Yet it is taught, in some form, as part of the official curriculum of almost every evangelical seminary in the United States

(usually in the Missions department, and especially, for some reason, if the title of the department is in the singular: Mission). It is astounding that this "theology" is given a serious hearing in any competent Christian institution; unfortunately, most **Christian** leaders are so ignorant of the Bible that they are either swayed by liberation rhetoric or, at least, unable to answer it. Most of the answers 10 date, in fact, have come from Roman Catholic authors. Now Christian philosopher Ronald Nash has put together a generally **excellent** volume of responses to liberation theology from ten Christian scholars, **most** of them Protestants. (The more familiar names among them are Harold O. J. Brown, Michael Novak, Clark Pinnock, Carl Henry, and Richard John Neuhaus.) It is a most welcome **addition** to a woefully small body of literature dealing with the subject. Anyone wishing to gain a solid understanding of the history, philosophy, and goals of the movement should certainly begin with Nash's work.

Playing **Footsie** on the Edge of the Abyss

Harold O. J. Brown **starts** off the collection with a short essay purporting to explain liberation theology for us Well-known for his 1977 work, *The Reconstruction of the Republic*, Brown has since sold his soul 10 Doubleday & Company, Inc., publisher of his **latest** book, *Heresies* – in which (p. 438) he vigorously affirms that Karl Barth is "the modern defender of **Chalcedonian** orthodoxy." Someone said of politicians that "when our friends get into office, they **aren't** our friends anymore"; the same must be true of the **theologians** Ah, well. When Brown goes 10 his eternal reward, perhaps he and Barth will have a chance to sit down and share a mess of pottage together In any case, one would not expect a man of Dr. Brown's newly formed opinions to be exactly rigorous in castigating **liberation** theology Naturally, Brown engages in the usual scholarly **politenesses**, at the beginning and the end of his article: "Liberation theology, then, is in large measure a quest in **hermeneutics**, in the interpretation of biblical revelation, or more generally, of the Christian message" (p. 6); moreover, "as a corrective 10 the smug self-sufficiency of bourgeois Christianity its value may be significant" (p. 15).

In between these two mindless remarks, Brown gingerly approaches the target without **quite** hitting it. He observes that liberation theology has some linguistic **validity**, since "the biblical language of salvation indeed has a 'liberation' aspect – the deliverance of captive and oppressed peoples from degrading servitude (p. 9) I could hope that Brown is **just** being **polite** again; but, I fear, he really means **ibis**. As I showed in *Productive Christians* (see pp. 95 ff.), the Exodus was **not** a "liberation" of "oppressed peoples" in general. It was not some grand, cosmic statement that God is eternally opposed to slavery. (Otherwise, why did He give the liberated Israelites specific instructions about the enslavement of heathen peoples? And why, for example, **didn't** He deliver the Minoans from the **Mycenaeans**, or the **Hittites** from the Assyrians?) The Exodus was Gods salvation of His holy covenant people, His elect nation. This is all rather basic stuff, material which should be mastered in the **Primary** department of one's Sunday School. It is astonishing that the distinguished Professor of Biblical and Systematic Theology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School seems unaware of these facts. All he can muster up for an answer is that, while liberation of the oppressed **is** an 'aspect of biblical salvation: it is not "the fundamental aspect" (p. 9). **That's** telling them. Give 'em hell, Harry,

Brown does get tougher **later** on. He points out that In presupposing "that God is **par excellence** 'the God of the oppressed,'" the liberation theologians have submitted to a source of revelation other than the Bible: "the **nonbiblical** atheistic ideology of Marxism" specifically as that is expressed in "the consciousness and experience of the op-

pressed classes," more **specifically** (quoting a famous liberation theologian now) "the experiences of men and women committed to the process of liberation in the oppressed and exploited land of Latin America" (pp. 10f.). In other words, the Standard of Truth for Latin American Liberation Theologians is not the Bible at all, but (by happy coincidence) the experience of Latin American Liberation Theologians, charter members in the Church of What's Happening Now. As one of their prophets put it, "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. . . ." (José Míguez Bonino, *Doing Theology in a Revolutionary Situation* (Fortress Press, 1975, p. 88). By way of balance, **Miguez** adds that

Christian obedience, understood to be sure as a historical praxis, and therefore incarnate in a historical (rational, concrete) mediation does, nevertheless, incorporate a dimension which, using christological language, can never be separated from but neither can it be confused with the historical mediation (*ibid.*, p. 98).

(Reading it out loud **doesn't** help. That's the way practically all liberation theologians write. The theory seems 10 be that since **God** is on the side of the poor, He is likely to be on the side of those who **write** poorly, too. Apparently, all the oppressed masses have to do is imbibe a few quarts of **ibis** stuff and they can take over the government. If **Reconstructionists** could ever get the hang of writing stirring passages like that, we might really amount to something.)

Much of the rhetoric defending this nonsense is based on the charge that traditional Christian thought (which holds to the priority of Scripture) is "Western," and thus **one-sided** and wrong Brown is a bit squishy here, too, as are many **guilty** Western evangelicals. Actually, they are quite right to feel guilty—not for their Western heritage, but for failing to understand it and live up to it. Let's ask a daring, naughty little question at this point: **What does "Western" mean?** What made the West "Western"? Why isn't the East "Western"? What **essentially** is the difference? The answer (as those same kids in Primary class should know) is that **the West is Christian, and the East is not**. I do not mean that the West has been thoroughly Christianized, or that the East is thoroughly pagan. But what has made the West "Western" in outlook (for instance, in its views of law, causation, linear history, and—I might add, for what it's worth—a **relative absence of political tyranny**) is **Christianity, and only Christianity**. What the liberationists of both hemispheres resent is Christianity, and the abundant blessings which it has **brought**, even in its diluted form. Which is to say that what the liberation theologians hate is God. Brown attempts to say something like that, but trips all over himself trying to be polite, We can perceive the dim outlines of some real insights **through** all the haze, **but** the basic message of his essay seems to be that Dr. Harold O. J. Brown is a Nice Guy, for a Conservative. The barbarians are at the gates, and this is what we get to defend us. Someday, awakening from his **antidogmatic** slumbers, Dr. Brown may hear a faint whisper: "**The Philistine** be upon thee, **Samson!**" He will open his eyes, and there will be kindly old Karl Barth, outfitted in harem pants and a bikini top, replacing the scissors in the drawer.

Latin America and the Protestant Ethic

Most of the other chapters are quite good. The only serious exception is the chapter by Richard John **Neuhaus**, which is mildly informative, but almost completely lacking in the ability to go beyond very tentative remarks. it almost seems as if **Neuhaus** is afraid he might change his mind tomorrow, so he doesn't want to tell us what he thinks today. I'm sure he has a position, but it's difficult to tell what it is with the blanket pulled over his head. If I maybe allowed another

prediction, I prophesy that Neuhaus's essay will not affect anyone's position on anything (except to convince us that Neuhaus is not worth reading).

In striking contrast to these is Michael Novak's essay, excerpted from his defense of the free market, *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism* (Simon and Schuster, 1982). The version presented in *Liberation Theology* is slightly milder than the original, but still very good. Novak, a Roman Catholic, is generally much more willing to talk about the historical role of the Protestant Ethic than some of his Protestant colleagues are. Referring to Brazilian Archbishop Dom Helder Camara's melancholy complaint that 80% of the world's resources are at the disposal of 20% of the population, Novak responds: "Material remains inert until its secrets are discovered and a technology for bending it 10 human purposes is invented. The word 'resources,' therefore, includes within its meaning the factor of culture, of which discovery and invention are expressions. Protestant European culture, in particular, has been exceedingly fertile in the discovery of such resources and in the invention of such technologies. Among Nobel prize winners in science, Protestants have been conspicuously prominent.

"Thus Archbishop Camara might have observed in fairness: 'It is a marvelous fact that 80 percent—maybe even 90 percent—of the world's resources have been discovered and put to use during the past century by one of the smaller cultures on the planet.' . . .

"Nothing prevented Brazilians from inventing the combustion engine, the radio, the airplane, penicillin, and other technologies which give resources their utility. Although Brazil is apparently one of the most richly endowed of all nations in material resources, neither Brazil nor other Latin American nations have so far provided a system favorable to invention and discovery. So, in a sense, the archbishop's observation is merely a truism: Those cultures which value the intelligent and inventive use of God's creation are far better off than those which do not. He cannot mean to imply that intelligence and invention on the part of some obstruct intelligence and invention on the part of others, for that would be absurd. Latin America is responsible for its own condition. It had beginnings very like those of North America" (pp. 29f.).

While Novak stops short of recommending wholesale conversion to Protestantism, he does call for a theology and an ethics, as well as congenial and non-tyrannical political systems, which will promote both stability and productivity. Remarking on the considerable confusion about economics that exists among liberation theologians, he criticizes them for their complete lack of positive proposals about what should be done in order to raise the standard of living. In keeping with the general outlook of socialism—a philosophy of envy and destruction—the liberation theologians have not begun to think about rebuilding society, about the need for resource development and technology, about what to do after they have finished slaughtering their middle-class neighbors.

Novak's pointed analysis of the Latin American situation and his sound economic reasoning, both in the present work and in his other books, provide a much-needed basis for solving the problems afflicting that region. Those familiar with the ICE position will be aware of the serious and substantial differences between our perspective and his; but Michael Novak must be commended for his forthright attempts to develop a Christian approach to social and economic questions. He has accomplished a great deal in many areas, and has done much toward educating one of the most abysmally ignorant segments of the American population: the Protestant clergy.

The chapter dealing with the economics of capitalism and socialism was appropriately written by editor Ronald Nash, one of the best Christian expositors of the free

market. His 1983 volume, *Social Justice and the Christian Church* (Mott Media), is a model of clarity and forceful argumentation. His chapter in *Liberation Theology* deals with a number of issues in short order, beginning with various fallacies of socialism and going on to defend the morality of capitalism as "a system of voluntary relationships within a framework of laws which protect people's rights against force, fraud, theft, and violations of contracts" (p. 52).

Nash points out that one of the most crucial aspects of the market economy—which a socialist "economy" can never provide—is its function as a transmitter of information (this is a fundamental thesis in Thomas Sowell's masterful *Knowledge and Decisions*). When the market is functioning freely, without interference from gangsters or bureaucrats, its prices accurately reflect the real wants of the people. This gives entrepreneurs and producers the information they need to allocate resources in the most efficient manner, in order to serve people's needs most effectively.

On the other hand, when the market is hampered, the information is retarded and falsified. And if the market is abolished altogether, as in socialism, there is no information at all. "The only reason socialist economies can function at all is because their bureaucratic managers carefully monitor the pricing information available from free markets and then apply this information to set their own prices. . . . The great paradox of socialism is the fact that socialists need capitalism in order to survive" (p. 58). As Ludwig von Mises demonstrated (*Socialism: An Economic and Sociological Analysis*; Liberty Classics, [1936] 1981), a major curse of the socialist system is that *economic calculation is rendered impossible*. Without the market system of profit and loss—the mechanism by which prices are determined, through a multitude of individual economic decisions—there is absolutely no way to assess the economy. Where should energy and capital be channeled? How much do materials and products cost? Apart from the market, there is simply no way of calculating anything. (If you don't believe this, try it. It cannot be done; and this argument by Mises has never been refuted since he first put it forth in 1922. In fact, a society without market pricing and calculation is totally inconceivable: it cannot even be imagined—which is one reason why *no socialist society has ever achieved socialism*. The only thing socialism has ever been able to provide its adherents is the "guaranteed income" of Romans 6:23.)

One of the most informed and sensitive writers on liberation theology is James V. Schall, S. J., who also appears in this symposium. He has authored an impressive volume of his own on the subject: *Liberation Theology in Latin America* (Ignatius Press, 1982), containing a much longer version of his essay in Nash's book, as well as a large number of critical essays by others. Anyone wishing to pursue the subject in depth should definitely make use of Schall's work. His basic thesis, cogently argued, is "that liberation theology is, in its essential outlines, itself a cause of continued underdevelopment, that its eventual growth and success would institutionalize in Latin America a life of low-level socialist poverty enforced by a rigid party-military discipline in control of economic enterprise and the movement of peoples" (p. 87). Characterized by inflammatory, envy-ridden rhetoric and wide-ranging ignorance about basic economic principles, it bears a much closer resemblance to the excesses of the French Revolution than to anything in Scripture or Christian tradition.

Pilgrim's Progress

The most engaging chapter in the book, on a personal level, is the essay by Clark Pinnock, who chronicles what he calls his "pilgrimage in political theology." Beginning with his conservative origins, he explains how he became a part of the *Sojourners/revolutionary anabaptist* circles, influenced

by the Club of Rome's propaganda, admiring Mao, rooting for the Viet Cong, thinking of Stalin as 'an aberration in the history of socialism rather than its symbol' (p. 112).

Pinnock then underwent another transformation, explicitly repudiating socialism in favor of a much more positive program: "I anticipate Christ's enemies being put beneath his feet and his rule extending to all nations in history. He commanded us to disciple all nations, to bring them under his sway, and now I have a stronger faith this will actually be done. Like the **post-millennialists** of an earlier era, I look forward to the day when Jesus shall reign wherever the sun, as Watts puts it, and the knowledge of the Lord will cover the earth. This is, of course, the old Puritan **eschatology** and vision, and we see it undergoing a resurgence on many sides, in the recent work of **Schaeffer**, in the ministry of the New Right, and in the **Chalcedon** movement for Christian reconstruction.

"I have returned to the view that evangelical political work ought to have an institutional as well as intentional component. It is not just a question of building new community, but also of bringing society under God's law. In the case of our Western democracies, it seems plain to me now that the Christian heritage operating in them is profound and precious, and renders them worthy of critical support and redeeming efforts. The future is open, it belongs to the Lord of history who intends to reclaim the whole creation. Therefore, we ought to be hopeful and energetic in pressing the crown rights of the Redeemer" (pp. 113f).

Exploited by the West

How did liberation theology arise in Latin America? It is often represented by its spokesmen as a home-grown movement, born out of the suffering, the struggles, and the innovative reflection and deliberation of the liberation theologians. In actual fact, liberation theology was a foreign import. Edward Norman writes that "it is the foreign clergy who are everywhere noted for their radical politics and who are most forthright in expressing them. Indeed, much of what is taken by Western Christians as characteristically 'Latin American' Catholic thought turns out to be the influence of European and North American mission and staff priests. . . Apart from the foreign clergy themselves, the others most noticeable for their political radicalism are Latin Americans who have trained for the priesthood, or studied abroad—especially at the European universities, and particularly at **Louvain**, in Belgium. There they picked up versions of Marxism from the bourgeois radical circles in which they mixed" (p. 127f.).

This is an old, old story: the Missions Department of the seminary exporting revolution to the mission field. The **anti-Western** ideology is itself a product of the **West!** I came across a fascinating book some time ago called **Chinese Socialism to 1907**, by **Marfin Bernal** (Cornell University Press, 1976). The author shows that socialist ideas were introduced to Chinese intellectuals by British and American **missionaries** during the **1890s**. **Christian missionaries are ultimately responsible for the fens of millions of Chinese massacred under Communist domination.** Similarly, the **Sandinista** Revolution in Nicaragua was often hailed and promoted by Christian organizations as a model of what **liberation** theology could produce at its best. With its terrorists supported by tithes and offerings from American Christians concerned for the poor, the **Sandinista** regime set about to control the Church and direct its policies. The result has been the confiscation of churches and the vicious **persecu-**

tion, torture, and murder of faithful Christians who will not worship Caesar (see **Humberto Belli's Nicaragua: Christians Under Fire**; published in 1984 by the Puebla Institute, P.O. Box 520, Garden City, MI 48135; \$8).

Liberation theology is a Western, white, bourgeois ideology which certain Latin American demagogues have found useful for their envy-manipulating purposes. As Norman concludes: "Western Christians who listen in to the **Latin American church**, in the belief that this is the authentic voice of the Third World, hear only the echoes of their own voice" (p. 135).

The End of Heresy

The primary theological source for liberation theology is the German Marxist theologian **Jürgen Moltmann**, creator of the so-called "theology of hope." Appropriately, the most detailed and technical essay in this volume is Robert C. Walton's extensive analysis of **Moltmann's** influence on the liberationist movement. With penetrating insight, Walton reveals the numerous parallels between **Moltmann's** thought and that of the medieval heretics (for background on these movements, see **The Pursuit of the Millennium**, by Norman Cohn; **The Socialist Phenomenon**, by Igor Shafarevich; and **Preface 3**). This should not come as a complete surprise; **Friedrich Engels** wrote a book about the murderous **Thomas Müntzer** and his revolution (**The Peasant War in Germany**), pointing to the **anabaptist radicals** and mass murderers as forerunners of Marxism. As **Martin Luther** observed with regard to **Müntzer**, the tendency of all heretical movements is toward murder:

If Cain had not resorted to bloodshed . . . he might have seduced the whole world and starved a silly heresy, but God permitted him to fall into sin.

The end of all heresy is the sword. . . Satan, as Paul said, can't deny himself. He must show himself to be a liar and a murderer.

Moltmann's theology and **ecclesiology** is squarely in the heretical tradition, and is "essentially totalitarian and murderous" (p. 177). There is a direct line from **Moltmann** to **Miranda**—and to the rotting bodies of **Miskito** Indians in the jungles of Nicaragua. The call for mass murder is not an aberration of certain extremists; it is central to the "Christian socialist" heritage. **The end of all heresy is the sword.**

This is why the time for politeness is over. If this whole debate were merely an academic disputation over, say, certain **details** regarding the Christian use of wealth, we could approach it in the spirit of those **benumbing** articles which so delight subscribers to theological journals. **But we are talking to murderers.** Liberation theologians may look cute and harmless, with their preoccupied looks and professorial elbow patches, their footnotes and qualifications; but they are advocating a reign of terror. It is not as if we are not sure of their meaning and intentions. The problem is not knowledge. The problem is the common unwillingness to perceive, to discern, to judge righteous judgment.

With varying degrees of discernment, **Nash** and most of **his** fellow authors have assisted the Christian community tremendously in giving us an insightful, fact-filled work of scholarship which exposes the fraud of liberation theology and points the way to a biblical alternative. **Liberation Theology** is not the best book that could be written on the subject; but it is a very good book, and the best that **has** been written.