Liberation Theology, Sustainable Development, and Postmodern Public Administration

by
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> The criteria of any theology are its practical consequences, not its theoretical assumptions.
>
> —Gustavo Gutierrez

Christianity has tended to stress acceptance of injustice and oppression as simply a side effect of political organization. Arguably, this form of "escapist theology" has legitimized suffering while reinforcing an oppressive theory of justice. From this hermeneutical vantage point, theologians, philosophers, and social scientists are now "rereading" the social context of escapist worldviews (Gutierrez, 1999; 1973; Sobrino, 1993; Miranda, 1981; Metz, 1969; Derrida, 1962). This development is dramatically new, since Latin America and the Third World continue to be the focus of revolutionary change based on the continued struggle for justice in response to the continued disparity between rich and poor nations (Gutierrez, 1984a; 1993a; 1993b; Dussel, 1985; Boff, 1984; Miranda, 1974).

Progressive Christians and Marxists have pointed to international capital and oppressive social and political structures as the main culprits in this disparity. Christianity's use of Marxist praxis in what is known as the "theology of liberation" has heavily influenced the ongoing discourse on resistance to global hunger, injustice, and oppression (Sobrino, 1994; Schillebeeckx, 1987; Boff and Boff, 1985; Gutierrez, 1984b; Tamez, 1982). Theologians, philosophers, and social scientists in both the First and Third Worlds have increasingly turned to Marxist social analysis for greater clarity in their reflections regarding this ongoing discourse (Gutierrez, 1993a; 1993b; Sobrino, 1984; Moltmann, 1984; McGovern, 1980; Segundo, 1976). Moreover, liberation theologians argue that contemporary Christianity is challenged as it confronts Marxist interpretations of increasing poverty and inequality throughout the world (Brown, 1997; Boff and Boff, 1987; Gutierrez, 1973). Largely because of Marxist influence, theologians have

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begun to reflect on the nature of this challenge and the means for transforming social structures and institutions that perpetuate poverty and oppression through what has become known as "globalization" (Lorentzen et al., 2001).

This challenge serves theological reflection in its efforts to understand "the faith received from the historical praxis of man in history as well as what its own reflection might mean for the transformation of the world" (Gutierrez, 1973: 9–10). The seeds of this transformation date to the century before Marx (Brown, 1993; Maduro, 1987; Kung, 1974). In what amounts to the beginning of liberal Protestant thought, Friedrich Schleiermacher recognized the importance for Christianity of a reexamination of its mission in relationship to the world (Schleiermacher, 1969[1768–1834]: 208):

> Religion must be social if it is to exist at all. It is man's nature to be social. . . . Fellowship and mutual dependency with others of this kind are indispensable to man . . . religion is not a servant to morality but its indispensable friend. The same is true of the relation of religion to all else that can be an object of human affairs. Even more: religion is their peerless advocate before all humanity. . . . Religion is no kind of slavery, no kind of captivity.

Schleiermacher perceived the need for Christianity, in particular, to free itself from distortions and inauthentic interpretations of its character and meaning. Modern theologians such as Schillebeeckx (1970: 9) argue for a similar reexamination of Christianity: "It is evident that thought is also necessary for action. But the Church has for centuries devoted her attention to formulating truths and meanwhile did almost nothing to better the world. In other words the Church focused on orthodoxy and left orthopraxis in the hands of nonmembers and nonbelievers."

THE EMERGENCE OF LIBERATION THEOLOGY

One of the primary instigators of this new discourse of resistance to poverty and oppression has been the Peruvian Catholic theologian Gustavo Gutierrez (1991; 1976). The Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) argued that followers of Christ can never condone injustice, pointing especially to that which is perpetuated by Western capitalism (Gutierrez, 1973; Boff and Boff, 1984; Brown, 1981). More than 60 years of Catholic social teaching, conscious of social and economic injustice in the world, had preceded this announcement. For Gutierrez and other liberation theologians, this new awareness of the Church's concern for the oppressed constituted a "pre-theological" assumption that was the starting point for theological reflection and social

analysis. However, what was imperative for Gutierrez was not the adherence to strict theological principles but a complete commitment to eradicating injustice through direct action on behalf of the poor: "When I discovered that poverty was something to be fought against, that poverty was structural, that poor people were a class [and could organize], it became crystal- clear that in order to serve the poor, one had to move into political action" (1976: 276). Moreover, for Gutierrez advancing the needs of the poor and eradicating injustice were themselves revolutionary actions. Consequently, the agenda was solidarity with the poor, which implied a commitment to transforming or abolishing the social structures that perpetuated injustice (1987). Gutierrez and others argued that this meant promoting public policies grounded in human solidarity (Gutierrez, 1990; Moltmann, 1984; Torres and Eagleson, 1976; Baum, 1975).

Socialism is generally understood as the political means by which a more just and equitable distribution of wealth and resources is administered for the common good. Its goal is a classless society (Harrington, 1992). For Marx (1964[1845]: 232), exploited workers would invariably rise up against the oppressive capitalist class that exacted an overabundance of wealth at the expense of workers. The working class is forced "to revolt against this inhumanity. It is for these reasons that the proletariat can and must emancipate itself. But it can only emancipate itself by destroying its own conditions of existence." Marx further argues that this relationship is sanctioned by the state (1964[1846]: 65): "Consequently, every revolutionary struggle is directed against the class which has so far been dominant." Hence, the desired outcome of class struggle according to Marxist and socialist theory is a new classless society "in place of the old bourgeois society . . . in which the free development of each is the condition of the free development of all" (Marx and Engels, 1978[1848]: 34).

In order to implement just social policies, Gutierrez argues, "subversive action" must transform the old international capitalist order and replace it with a new socialist agenda that prioritizes basic human needs on a domestic and global scale. He considers this socialist agenda best analyzed in terms of the difference between international economic "development" and "liberation." Neoliberal development schemes have provided for rich nations to aid poor ones through various forms of loans brokered through the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank (Petras, 1997; Arrighi, 1994; Frank, 1990; Cardoso and Faletto, 1979; Sen, 1973; 1964). The UN's Decade of Development in the 1960s sought to accelerate economic growth and investment activities in the Third World, but by the end of it the gap between rich and poor nations had increased disproportionately (Arrighi, 1979; George, 1977). This gap has continued to increase (Humefeldt, 1997; Amin, 1991).

Liberationists and Marxists maintain that development policies are based on leveraged economic relationships that perpetuate this disparity. In fact, these theorists, echoing the classical Marxist analysis of capital, would argue that the structural design of monopoly and international capital further alienates and exploits the poor on a global scale (Figueroa, 1993; Zeitlin and Ratcliff, 1988). Here world-systems theorists would agree with Marx's (1964[1847]: 187) classical assertions:

> The domination of capital created the common situation and common interests of this class. Thus this mass is already a class in relation to capital, but not yet a class for itself. In the struggle, of which we have only indicated a few phases, this mass unites and forms itself into a class for itself. The interests, which it defends, become class interests. But the struggle between classes is a political struggle. . . . If the original aim of resistance was that of maintaining wages, to the extent that the capitalists, in their turn, unite with the aim of repressive measures, the combinations, at first isolated, become organized into groups, and in the face of the unity of capitalists, the maintenance of the combination becomes more important than upholding the level of wages. . . . In this struggle—a veritable war—all the elements for a future battle are brought together and developed. Once arrived at this point the association takes on a political character.

Neoliberal economic theory holds that labor secures its fair share of wealth when workers' wages equal their contribution to the product, with the balance of profits going to management and capital in proportion to the contribution of each (Arrighi, 1990; Wallerstein, 1975). The neoliberal rationale is that global markets fueled by aggressive competition will yield sufficient wealth for the greatest number of people on a global scale. Marxist theory rejects this notion, claiming that "social relations are intimately connected with the forces of production" (Marx, 1964[1847]: 95) and that the wealth derived from capital by workers is unjustly expropriated by the capitalist class. Moreover, neoliberal designs have benefited only a small number of investors at the expense of the poor (Wallerstein, 1997; Petras, 1997).

Liberation theologians such as Gutierrez, Sobrino, Boff, and Miranda agree with the Marxist world-systems critique of development and global capital. Indeed, Gutierrez asserts that Christians have a unique role to play in identifying with the exploited and oppressed in order to resist this injustice. He claims that "many Christians . . . poor or rich . . . have deliberately and explicitly identified with the oppressed on our continent. . . . This is the major fact in the recent life of the Christian community in Latin America" (1976: 227). Elsewhere he says, "Within a society where social classes conflict we are true to God when we side with the poor, the working classes, the despised races, the marginal cultures" (1977d: 15), and he argues that the "develop-

ment" model—with respect to the poor in the Third World—has created more problems than it has solved (1973; Boff, 1991; Wallerstein, 1997; 1992).

Gutierrez identifies three major aspects of the failure of neoliberal development strategies in the Third World. First, development is a form of tokenism and does not fundamentally change a system that ultimately prioritizes profits over impoverished people. Secondly, development is exploitative in that it directs finances and resources to dependent countries, often with antidemocratic regimes. These countries then use their resources to ensure "stability"—that is, to implement repressive policies that limit political and human rights (Chomsky, 1988; LaFeber, 1984; Omang and Neier, 1985). The First World rationale behind this "social order," according to Gutierrez, is that the Third World is a venue for increased investment, profitability, cheap labor, and natural resources. Thirdly, development is paternalistic. Decisions about what is good for Latin America and the Third World are made not from the "periphery" or by the poor themselves but by elites in New York, London, or Bonn. Gutierrez concludes that resistance to neoliberal development policy is a Christian duty that demands a profound conversion. Thus the poor play a vital evangelical role as interlocutors in converting their former colonizers and oppressors (Gutierrez, 1973).

Gutierrez points to the importance of restructuring a world economic system that addresses the needs of the poor by "making history from below . . . a subversive history . . . struggling against the capitalist system" (Gutierrez, 1977b: 92–93). Commitment to the poor thus entails action against an economic system that perpetuates injustice and violence (1974: 60):

> Solidarity cannot limit itself to just saying no to the way things are arranged. . . . It must be an effort to forge a society in which the worker is not subordinate to the owner of the means of production, a society in which the assumption of social responsibility for political affairs will include social responsibility for the real liberty and will lead to the emergence of a new social consciousness. . . . Solidarity with the poor implies the transformation of the existing social order.

MARX, CHRISTIANITY, AND RESISTANCE DISCOURSE

Marx categorically rejected any transcendent religious belief: "The criticism of religion is the premise of all criticism. . . . This state, this society, produce religion which is an inverted world consciousness" (Marx, 1964[1843]: 43). Marx viewed religion as a form of "false consciousness" or self- deception

that was used by the powerful to maintain dominance over the working class: "Man makes religion; religion does not make man" (Marx, 1964[1843]: 43). Influenced by Feuerbach's *The Essence of Christianity*, Marx contended that in religion the person projected human characteristics onto religious institutional structures and transcendent values. He argued that this allowed the capitalist class to create a "theodicy" and a "plausibility structure" that precluded any critical perspective on religion (see Carnegie, 1962: 14–49, 134–165; Berger, 1967). Religion reflects this contrived reality and consequently reinforces a "false consciousness" in people.

Theologians such as Reinhold Niebuhr concur with Marx that "the absolute claim is used as a weapon for various historically relative, and usually established, social and political forces. In religion we have the final claim to absolute truth; Marx and Engels are social scientists, interested empirically in the way that the claim of the absolute is used as a screen for particular competitive historical interests" (Niebuhr, 1964: vii). The result of "false consciousness" in turn reinforces the exploitation of others (see Weber, 1958; Wrong, 1970). Consequently, Marx argues, "religious suffering is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the sentiment of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people" (Marx, 1964[1843]: 43–44). For Marx, true human freedom and liberation emerged when religion was understood as an "illusion" that had diverted the attention of oppressed peoples from the social and economic causes of their oppression (52):

> The criticism of religion ends . . . with the categorical imperative to overthrow all those conditions in which man is an abased, enslaved, abandoned, contemptible being—conditions which can hardly be better described than in the exclamation of a Frenchman on the occasion of a proposed tax upon dogs: "Wretched dogs! They want to treat you like men!"

In *The Jewish Question*, Marx argued that any emancipation from religion should result in the separation of church and state similar to that which was official policy in the United States: "The state emancipates itself from religion . . . by emancipating itself from the state religion; that is to say, by giving recognition to no religion and affirming itself purely and simply as a state" (1964[1844]: 9–10). Moreover, authentic religion, he argued, should no longer be represented by the state as the "spirit of the state" but assigned to its "proper place" as a private matter. He asserted that "political emancipation does not abolish, and does not even strive to abolish, man's real religiosity" (1964[1844]: 15–16). He sought to relegate religion to a private function and make the state neutral or "atheistic" in its approach to any particular religion (16–17):

> The perfected Christian state is not the so-called Christian state which acknowledges Christianity as its basis, as the state religion . . . it is, rather, the atheistic state, the democratic state, the state which relegates religion among other elements of civil society. . . . The democratic state, the real state, does not need religion for its political consummation. On the contrary, it can dispense with religion, because in this case the human core of religion is realized in a profane manner.

Marx's view of religion as the "opium of the people" may therefore need clarification, since religion can be used as a catalyst for social change to promote human rights. Moreover, his exhortation that religion be a private affair does not diminish the activist role that religion can play in promoting greater justice in society. In fact, religion can play a vital part in social change and resistance. Past examples include the abolition movement prior to and during the Civil War, the Social Gospel movement led by Walter Rauschenbusch at the turn of the twentieth century, the Confessing Church of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Rudolf Bultmann, which organized underground resistance to the Third Reich, and the civil rights movement of Martin Luther King Jr., which successfully ended legal segregation in the South (Zinn, 1992; Cone, 1969). Thus religious beliefs, specifically Christian ones, have provided a moral standard against which existing social arrangements may be judged and perhaps found wanting.

Religion for Marx had a material base located in the conditions in which people reside and in this sense was an ideological expression of their real needs. In his *Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Marx differentiated between conflicting material forces and the actual processes of change. He also identified the ideological basis on which people became engaged in conflicts through self-reflective processes (Marx, 1964[1859]). The emergence of liberation theology in no way undermines Marx's dialectical analysis. Rather, it demonstrates that, under unique historical situations, people are likely to engage in class struggle on the basis of a particular religious consciousness. Religion has no inherent revolutionary character, but it can acquire one under particular historical conditions. At the same time it can be used by the oppressive class to maintain the status quo (Engels, 1955[1850]).

Challenges to the dominant religious system are rarely mounted by people within the establishment. Instead, challenges tend to come from religious movements near the "fringes" of society or from dissident groups within the dominant religion. This has usually been the case in Latin America, where the Catholic Church has traditionally been associated with the military and social elite (Kennedy, 1989). Yet in the past 30 years this religious

predisposition has begun to erode. Many Latin American Christians have come to embrace a new theological orientation influenced by the faith reflections of the poor and oppressed: liberation theology. Within this new theological emphasis as it relates to the evangelical mission of the Church, Marxist categories are used in attempting to understand the causes and effects of class alienation and exploitation. Similarly, liberation theology has persistently critiqued the international economic order relative to Latin America and the Third World. It is precisely in liberation theology's critique of international economic development in the Third World that Marxists and Christians find common ground in what has become known as an ongoing "discourse of resistance" (Gutierrez, 1973; 1999; Sobrino, 2001; Boff, 1997; 1995; 1988).

MARX AND GUTIERREZ

Gutierrez's use of Marxist social analysis in liberation theology involved incorporation of the neo-Marxist works of Fromm, Marcuse, and Habermas. Rather than interpret Marx dogmatically, these intellectuals advocated "critical awareness" or "praxis" within an interdisciplinary approach. According to this approach, assessing phenomena such as social alienation and class exploitation no longer demanded strict adherence to rigid Marxist categories and dogma. Instead, social analysis encouraged an enlightened and flexible application of Marxist principles in multiple venues, whether capitalist, socialist, or Marxist. In applying the critical-theory approach to theological reflection, Gutierrez was able to assess the root causes of oppression and injustice while simultaneously introducing Christianity to revolutionary action on behalf of the poor (1973: 174):

> There is also a situation . . . of misery and despoliation of the fruit of man's work, the result of the exploitation of man by man; there is a confrontation between social classes and, therefore, a struggle for liberation from oppressive structures which hinder man from living with dignity and assuming his own destiny. . . . In the underdeveloped countries one starts with a rejection of the existing situation, considered as fundamentally unjust and dehumanizing. Although this is a negative vision, it is nevertheless the only one which allows us to go to the root of the problems and to create without compromises a new social order, based on justice and brotherhood. This rejection does not produce an escapist attitude, but rather a will to revolution.

Marx (1978[1848]: 16–17) embraced similar understandings of exploitation and oppression:

> The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles. . . . Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guildmaster and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open to fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary re-construction of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes.

From Gutierrez's viewpoint (1984b: 20), "what is new is not wretchedness and repression and premature death, for these, unfortunately, are ancient realities in these countries. What is new is that the people are beginning to grasp the causes of their situation of injustice and are seeking to release themselves from it. Likewise new and important is the role which faith in God who liberates is playing in the process."

The evidence of this struggle can be assessed on a global scale. According to the United Nations *Human Development Report 1995*, the wealthiest fifth of the world's population receives more than four-fifths of its income while the poorest fifth receives less than 2 percent of total world income. The outcome of this disproportionate access to wealth has been what Marx called "the war of all against all" (1964[1844]: 15). Gutierrez argues that the political agenda of the Christian must be to enter into a struggle and even resistance on the side of the poor (1984a: 98): "The praxis of the poor confirms me in this conviction—that a fertile, imaginative challenge lies in the particular form of 'contemplation in action' by which persons may transform history. For this is where we encounter God in the poor: in solidarity with the struggle of the oppressed and in a faith of hope and gladness." Consequently, for Gutierrez the convergence between Marxist social analysis and Christian scripture provides a context for a deeper critical awareness of the evangelical mission of Christ and the Church as exemplified in Luke 4:18: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed."

In *Capital*, Marx points out that the injustice that capitalism creates is not simply the injustice of a small number of individuals but the injustice of the system as a whole (1964[1867]). In other terms, capitalism itself is not unjust simply because of the moral depravity of elites who frequently leverage "zero-sum" decisions in the international arena; decisions made in "good faith," even by the most well-intentioned persons, will, by the very nature of the system, produce contradictions and crisis. As a result, the inexorable drive for greater profits will invariably lead to class conflict and eventual revolution. The outcome, according to this materialist position, will be in a classless society or worker's utopia. While Gutierrez (1977e) rejects this element

of materialist Marxist thought, he distinguishes between Marxist theory and practice: "What happens is that we can't be with the poor of Latin America without calling upon social analysis using terms like injustice, exploitation, exploiting class, and class struggle to explain what is happening. To use certain notions to explain a reality does not mean agreeing with the determined philosophical positions postulated by Marxism" (p. 17).

For Gutierrez, the importance of an idea resides not in its origin but in whether it accurately depicts the reality in question, and evaluating the role of class struggle from a Marxist perspective is irrelevant to the "correctness" of this assessment. This postulate also applies when a religious insight regarding the rights of the poor is discovered in the Hebrew or Christian scriptures; its "secular" presence in Marx does not invalidate its presence in biblical literature. The fact that Marx advocated liberty for the oppressed does not render suspect Jesus', Isaiah's, or Moses' declaration of the same truth or the similar declaration of radical and progressive Christians. Jesus, Isaiah, and Moses preached liberty for the oppressed; it can hardly be interpreted as "communist-inspired."

There is a revolutionary dimension within the Christian tradition, submerged for centuries, that does not reject class struggle. Theologians in the first centuries of the early Church argued "that if persons are in extreme need, they have the right to take from the abundance of others what they themselves need. This is a very revolutionary attitude. . . . This is a classical, not a Marxist idea" (Gutierrez, 1977a). Consequently Gutierrez criticizes, interprets, and applies Marxist social analysis specifically to Latin Americans and "gospel-inspired" class struggle (1977a):

> External dependence and internal domination characterize the social structure of Latin America. This is why only a class analysis will permit us to see what is really at play in the opposition of oppressed countries and dominating countries. . . . All this will lead us to understand the social formation of Latin America as a dependent capitalism and to foresee the necessary strategy to get out of that situation. . . . Only the transcending of a society divided into classes, a political power at the service of the great popular majorities, and the elimination of private appropriation of wealth produced by human work can give us the foundations of a society that would be more just. It is for this reason that the elaboration in a historical project of a new society in Latin America takes more and more frequently the path of socialism.

The most common misunderstanding of liberation theology is that revolutionary Christians or liberationists "glorify violence." It is important to dispel this by pointing out that Latin Americans live in a situation that is already violent because of the North's social, political, and economic domination of the

South. Gutierrez identifies three types of violence: "The first is the institutionalized violence of the present social order; the second, the repressive violence which defends the first, keeping in power the ruling regimes; and the third, counterviolence. To me, counterviolence is the least of the "evils" (1977c). Violence is operative in the institutional power structures that perpetuate poverty and repression: As Gutierrez defines it, "the greatest violence in Latin America is not that of a man heading for the mountains with a rifle, but institutionalized injustice" (Gutierrez, 1977c).

Repressive violence has also been present in brutal Latin American dictatorships. World-systems theorists have argued that these dictatorships have survived precisely because of Western hegemony. Counterviolence becomes a right, for Gutierrez, when all peaceful means have failed to rectify the violent social structures and institutions and to refrain from it would perpetuate injustice. Similarly in *Popolorum Progressio* Pope Paul VI warns that, while revolutionary action may bring about greater injustice, counterviolence may be permitted in the case of "long-standing tyranny which would do greater damage to fundamental personal rights and dangerous harm to the common good of the country" (Paul VI, 1968: 19).

In this context, whether revolution will be violent or nonviolent is, according to Gutierrez, a decision that will ultimately be made by those in power. Consequently, if the elite resist sharing power and exclude the poor, then a revolutionary condition predicated upon violence is perpetuated. In this sense "subversive revolutionary action" must be viewed not as indiscriminate violence but as a legitimate right to self-defense.[1] Neo-Marxists such as Herbert Marcuse speak of analyzing the costs and benefits of counterviolence. The radical opposition must address this problem, according to Marcuse (1972: 52–53), on the basis of an "economy of violence":

> Martyrs have rarely helped a political cause, and "revolutionary suicide" remains suicide. And yet, it would be self-righteous indifference to say that the revolutionary ought to live rather than die for the revolution—an insult to the Communists of all time. . . . But then, the desperate act may have the same result—perhaps a worse result. One is thrown back to the inhuman calculus which an inhuman society imposes: weighing the number of victims and the quantity of their sacrifice against the expected (and reasonably expectable) achievements.

The critical point here is that liberation theologians and Marxists do not arbitrarily and automatically embrace militant force as an indispensable element of social change. They make a clear distinction between gratuitous and indiscriminate violence and the legitimate right to self-defense. Violence understood in the context of legitimate self-defense against the dominant class,

according to Marcuse, is a "revolutionary force which is destined to terminate this violence . . . [and] would be the action of masses or classes capable of subverting the established system in order to build a socialist society" (1972: 53).

In September 1984, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger of the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (formerly titled the Office of the Inquisition) published a 35-page document entitled "Instruction on Certain Aspects of the Theology of Liberation." While the document was intended to undermine the authoritative efforts of the liberation theologians, the warning could nonetheless be interpreted as affirming the notion that the Christian faith does indeed have a role in ending dehumanization on a global scale. According to Ratzinger (1984: 6):

> The scandal of this shocking inequality between the rich and the poor—whether between rich and poor countries, or between social classes in a single nation—is no longer tolerated. On the one hand, people have attained an unheard-of abundance which is given to waste, while on the other hand so many live in such poverty, deprived of the basic necessities, that one is hardly able even to count the victims of malnutrition.

Indeed, the development of Christian consciousness in the postmodern era is clearly revolutionary, at least in theory, according to Pope John Paul II (quoted by Ferm, 1986[1984]: 57–58):

> The needs of the poor must take priority over the desires of the rich, the rights of workers over the maximization of profits, the preservation of the environment over uncontrolled industrial expansion, production to meet social needs over production for military purposes. . . . The poor people and poor nations . . . will judge those people who take these goods away from them, amassing to themselves the imperialistic monopoly of economic and political supremacy at the expense of others.

Thus Marxist theory and liberation theology divorce themselves from ethereal notions of religion through a strategic commitment to the poor. Both seek to end the suffering of the oppressed through revolutionary action and conscientization (Freire, 1973: 19). Marcuse (1970: 10) identifies this common praxis as follows:

> While Marxian theory remains irreconcilable with Christian dogma and institutional identity, it finds an ally in those tendencies, groups, and individuals committed to the part of the Christian teaching that stands uncompromisingly against inhuman, exploitative power. In our times these radical religious tendencies have come to life in the priests and ministers who have joined the strug-

> gle against fascism in all its forms, and all those who have made common cause with liberation movements in the Third World, especially Latin America. They are part of the global anti-authoritarian struggle against the self-perpetuating power structure, east and west, which is less and less interested in human progress. This anti-authoritarian character brings to life long-forgotten or reduced anarchist, heretic tendencies.

This praxis, which acts as a revolutionary catalyst for Christianity, is neither limited to nor conditioned by its experience of authoritarianism in the West. The Marxist analysis also applies to former and current totalitarian "Marxist" regimes in the East and other regions of the world. In opposition to totalitarian Marxism, the Czechoslovak theologian Jan Lochman (1970: 22–25) states:

> There were always priests of fate, of the establishment, and of pious quietism. Yet there is also the biblical prophetic tradition, and this is very different. Certainly, the biblical vision of the Kingdom of God opens a dimension which is not simply "of this world." It transcends the potentialities of the world of man, of what can be achieved in history. It is the kingdom of God. Yet this "transcending" kingdom is seen precisely in its dynamic relationship to men in history. The biblical God does not encourage any escapism. He is not an abstract transcendence, aloof from all secular concerns. On the contrary, he is the God involved in history, opening new possibilities, the God of the open future. He is all this in a concretely articulated way: his basic revelation in the Old Testament is the Exodus—an event of human liberation. His basic revelation in the New Testament is the way of Jesus of Nazareth: his unconditional solidarity with men, particularly with those who are oppressed and poor. . . . In the perspective of hope this involvement is never in vain. It is worth while not to give up, but instead to strive, despite all possible and real difficulties, toward a change of all those conditions under which man is an oppressed, enslaved, destitute, and despised being.

This unique development has manifested itself in an ongoing dialogue regarding social equity. Conservative theologians such as Michael Novak (1986) and Juan Gutierrez[2] (1977) have dissented from this development, but their efforts have had little effect in countering this new religious perspective based on what Gutierrez describes as the "underside of history." At the same time, scholars such as Alistair Kee claim that religion, especially that which is being developed in the Third World, needs to incorporate more Marxist theory and that liberation theologians have simply "baptized" Marxist dogma. Kee (1990) further argues that liberation theologians must incorporate Marx's critique of religion not simply to understand the nature of "alienation" but also to understand and critique liberation theology itself. In response to this it would be constructive for leftists to identify and contextualize the

visceral elements of religious traditions that seek to counter the effects of monopoly capitalism. Both traditions in effect do confront, at least potentially, the causes of dehumanization and effectively secure the right to a minimum standard of living in which the goods of society will be distributed in terms of the principle "From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs!" (Marx, 1964[1875]: 258).

Suffice it to say, the notion of solidarity, in Gutierrez's view, means the elimination of injustice through the transformation of unjust social structures. Solidarity is not an entirely Christian issue; it is also a Marxist concern (McGovern, 1980; Kolakowski, 1969; Girardi, 1968). Nonetheless, this convergence of Marxist and Christian praxis constitutes a new synthesis of social analysis and theological reflection from the perspective of the poor (Gutierrez, 1999; Sobrino, 1985; Maduro, 1977).

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND POSTMODERN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

Currently, Gutierrez and other liberation theologians are directing their attention to sustainable development policies in an attempt to promote greater justice and equity in the Third World (Gutierrez, 1999; Sobrino, 2001; Boff, 1995). Liberation theologians, postmodernists, and Marxists have also argued in favor of sustainable development strategies, since the state (capitalist or socialist) has been a hindrance in providing a venue for people to meet their own needs in any comprehensive manner (Baudrillard, 1997; Jameson, 1991; Lee, 1982; 1980; Lorentzen et al., 1996). However, these theorists argue that socialist remedies—democratic control of economic relations—provide the optimal basis for the elimination of injustice and oppression. This does not necessarily rule out market measures. But if socialist policies are to be equitable, according to Gutierrez, then remedies must promote justice at a grassroots level rather than rely on the state to be in the forefront of implementing policy. One way to implement this strategy is through sustainable development models.

The doctrine of sustainable development asserts that growth and development must maintain ecological limits in the broadest sense of the term (Merchant, 1992). The concept originated in the World Conservation Strategy Report and the Brundtland Commission Report (see Solow, 1993), and it is the latest expression of a long-standing ethic with regard to the human community's interrelationship with the environment and the current generation's responsibilities to future ones. The fundamental notion of sustainable development is based on the concepts of *intergenerational equity* (fairness to

posterity) and *intragenerational equity* (fairness to contemporary persons). This explicitly means that the international community is obligated to future generations to leave them with sufficient natural resources to sustain themselves and that the current generation must not satisfy itself to the extent that it depletes the natural resources of its successors.

Sustainable development policies must confront the dilemma of balancing multiple demands on limited resources. Slowing or stabilizing growth and depletion misses the point, as Daly (1996) points out, because sustainable growth may never be achieved. This is because the resource base on which humans depend is finite, and undermining it will result in ecological disaster that nullifies any attempt to promote generational resource equity (Schnailberg and Gould, 1994; Brown, 1996).

One of the critical discussions within sustainable-development circles focuses on the neoliberal economic strategies that are seen as perpetuating the ecological disorder that is rampant in the Third World (Brown, 1996; Rifkin, 1991; Boff, 1995; Gorostiaga, 1993; Martin, 2002; Peffer, 1990; Clark, 1989). Sustainable development, in contrast, is an effort to enhance the economic and environmental status of a population without compromising that of future generations. Sustainable development policies are directed at fostering a deeper sense of community life while building partnerships and consensus among key stakeholders. Fundamental to these policies is the prioritization of fundamental human needs and rights based on the equitable distribution of economic and environmental resources on a global scale (Cairncross, 1991; Broham, 1995; Schumacher, 1973). Thus they prioritize both generational resource equity and rational carrying capacity (the maximum number of people that a given habitat can sustain for an indefinite period of time). Consequently, sustainable development can be understood as a standard of equity, rooted in cultural values, that prioritizes the right of people to use natural resources democratically and secure basic human needs (Brown, 1991; Rich, 1994), in effect, prioritizing equity over economic effectiveness and efficiency.

While the value of socialist strategies may be argued ad infinitum (and perhaps described as irrelevant in the twenty-first century), the notion of democratic popular control of resources and wealth through sustainable development strategies is being addressed through what has become known as postmodern public administration. In order to promote the ongoing discourse of resistance, Marxists, anarchists, antiglobalization activists, and liberationists are seeking to implement sustainable development policies through nonprofits and nongovernment organizations (NGOs) instead of state institutions. Postmodern public administration attempts to respond to the fundamental needs of the poor and oppressed without necessarily

addressing the complexities of political arrangements (Wamsley and Wolf, 1996; Fox and Miller, 1995; Subramanian, 1990). The liberation theologian Xabier Gorostiaga (1993: 12) identifies this phenomenon as one that "has definitively changed the region's social fabric. This experience is noticed in a new dynamic made evident through the growth of NGO's and the linkage and networking throughout Latin America of organizations formed by peasants, indigenous communities, women, environmentalists, urban dwellers, and the emerging student (particularly university) movement." The Brazilian liberation theologian Leonardo Boff (1995) argues that the use of postmodern public and private institutions is the optimal approach to securing basic human needs on an international basis.

Throughout Latin America unique examples of the implementation of sustainable methods through postmodern mechanisms can be found in the political activism of the Christian base communities. The emergence of base communities in numerous countries throughout Latin America continues to provide a venue for the poor to organize and reflect on their spiritual and social status in life. In countries such as Chile, Brazil, El Salvador, and Nicaragua, these communities have become significant with respect to pressing for justice and social change and the possibilities of direct action to remedy injustices. This form of grassroots populism seeks to promote greater democratic participation in society and simultaneously promote the welfare of its members. As a blend of early Christian communities and Rousseauian populist democracies, these highly "decentralized" communities have sought to bypass the state and international institutions in pursuing remedies for social justice and sustainable policies. In fact, they have run the gamut in seeking social equity for their communities either through direct political action (resistance to landowners and the promotion of agrarian reform, agitation along with unions for a living wage, promotion of health care and medical insurance, demonstrations against police brutality, protests of poor or nonexistent public transportation), or working through NGOs, nonprofits, coops, and the like (Sigmund, 1990). Recognizing that the vast majority of poor in Latin America are unlikely to be liberated by state and international solutions or, for that matter, by cataclysmic political transformations, Christian base communities have in essence formed postmodern networks. Through these networks they are committed to furthering social equity and meeting the needs of the poor by ensuring sustainable policies through postmodern institutions and administration. Consequently, they continue to experience "deinstitutionalized" success as agents of their own spiritual and political liberation.

In the United States, elements of postmodern public administration have manifested themselves primarily in efforts to empower women and

minorities through job training, life-skills training, supportive housing, and other endeavors (Charton and May, 1995). Postmodern public administration as a self-reflective enterprise can empower people and communities (Stivers, 1995; Greenberg, 2000). On a cross-national and cross-border level, it has resulted in numerous dialogues on the implementation of sustainable environmental policies (Saint-Germain, 1995).

While sustainable postmodern policies do not necessarily negate the devolution and privatization efforts typical of the "reinventing-government" movement (Osborne and Gaebler, 1992), they nevertheless address the greater role of government in providing a venue for empowerment of the poor on a global scale. The ongoing discourse of resistance between liberation theologians and left-leaning scholars and activists has produced a strategy that has made progress against poverty and oppression. Latin America has thus provided a vital context for discovering new approaches to revolutionary justice.

NOTES

1. In the context of the traditional "just-war" theory, the legitimate right to self-defense can also be interpreted as self-defense through violent revolution (see United States Catholic Bishops, 1983).

2. Juan Gutierrez's agenda is basically to separate social analysis from theological reflection. He also mistakenly argues that the acceptance of Marxist social analysis necessarily implies the acceptance of Marxist materialism.

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