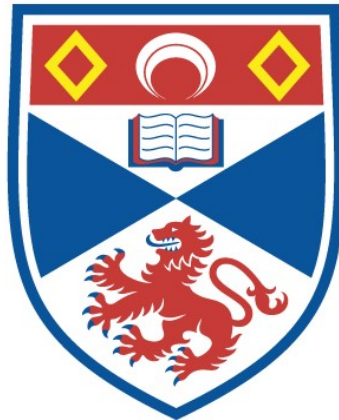


CHURCH AND POLITICS IN THE THEOLOGY OF
JOSÉ MIGUEZ-BONINO AND ALLAN BOESAK

James C. Poit

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD
at the
University of St Andrews



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Ph.D.

University of St. Andrews
St. Andrews, Scotland

30 September, 1996

*Dedicated to my wife, Linda; our son, Adam;
and to my parents, Carl and Mary Jane;
for all their encouragement, patience, and love.*

Acknowledgements:

I wish to thank Steven G. Mackie, my supervisor at St. Mary's College, University of St. Andrews, for his guidance and direction and for giving me a love of Liberation Theology.

I also wish to thank Cynthia Freeman for reading the manuscript.

DECLARATIONS

I, James Poit, hereby certify that this thesis, which is approximately 100,000 words in length, has been written by me, that it is the record of work carried out by me and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree.

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ABSTRACT

Since the early 1970s, many Christians have come to the realisation that the churches world-wide have a profound impact on the shaping of a nation's socio-economic and political agenda. Issues and debates within the Church are shaped by the interplay between intra-Church theological and ecclesiastical concerns and national/international ideological and institutional patterns to which churches must adapt. Newly emerging socio-political situations, such as the emergence of democracy in South Africa, complicate the Church's continued search for its prophetic voice: What does it mean to have a concern for social justice, peace, and to maintain a "preferential option for the poor" when the world's political order is continually in transition?

This thesis explores the debates that surround the Church's relationship to politics by focusing on the contemporary theological movement known as "liberation theology" and objections that have been raised by its more conservative and liberal opponents. It specifically examines and compares the way José Míguez-Bonino from Latin America and Allan Boesak from South Africa, have responded to the theological challenges set by their surrounding social realities and how they have answered the criticisms from Europe and North America. We argue that the theology of these two men offers a more adequate understanding of the relationship between Church, theology, and politics than their critics because of the importance Míguez-Bonino and Boesak give to a praxis that reflects the needs of the poor and oppressed.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AACC	All Africa Conference of Churches
ABRECSA	Alliance of Black Reformed Christians in Southern Africa
AGEM	WCC Advisory Group on Economic Matters
ANC	African National Congress
AZAPO	Azanian Peoples Organisation
BC	Black Consciousness
BCM	Black Consciousness Movement
CCLA	Committee on Co-operation in Latin America
CEB	Christian Base Communities
CELA	Latin American Evangelical Conference
CFS	Christians for Socialism
CL	Christian League of South Africa
CLASC	Latin American Committee of Christian Trade Unions
CP	Conservative Party (South Africa)
DRC	Dutch Reformed Church
EATWOT	Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians
GDL	Gospel Defence League
IMC	International Missionary Council
ISAL	Office of Church and Society in Latin America
LDC	Less Developed Countries
MEC	Movimiento Estudiantil Cristiano, the SCM Latin American branch
NGK	Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk
NGKA	Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk in Afrika
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NGSK	Nederduitse Gereformeerde Sendingkerk
NP	National Party (South Africa)
NUSAS	National Union of South African Students
PAC	Pan African Congress
PCR	Programme to Combat Racism
RC	Roman Catholic Church
RDP	Right Doctrine Protestantism
SACC	South African Council of Churches
SADF	South African Defence Force
SASO	South African Student Organisation
SCM	Student Christian Movement
SPROCAS	Study Project on Christians in Apartheid Society
SSC	State Security Council
UCM	University Christian Movement
UDF	United Democratic Front
ULAJE	Union of Latin American Evangelical Youth
UNELAM	Provisional Committee on Christian Unity in Latin America
WARC	World Alliance of Reformed Churches
WCC	World Council of Churches
WSCF	World Student Christian Federation

1.0 THE CHURCH AND POLITICS DEBATE

Over the last decade the political relevance of Christianity has become more evident because of a new global refashioning of the relation religious concepts and symbols have to emerging political movements. For example, within the United States, a broad religious spectrum exists that includes on one end the New Christian Right, which flourished in the early 1980s and has yet to find its peak, and on the other end the more progressive churches which have adopted statements urging governments to play a more responsible role in correcting the injustices of the world's political and economic systems.¹ In the United Kingdom, Margaret Thatcher had insisted that the Church should keep to spiritual pursuits and not get involved in politics. Recent criticisms of that government's foreign policy and neglect of inner cities has strained relations between the conservative party and the Anglican establishment as well as with the Church of Scotland.² In South Africa the churches struggle with what it means to retain a prophetic voice in a society that is experiencing rapid and sweeping changes but continues to be plagued by violence. In Latin America, the phenomenal rise of liberation theology has challenged and changed the face of the Roman Catholic church which was generally considered to be a monolithic pillar of the established social order.

The reason for this global refashioning over the past decade, according to Daniel Levine of Princeton University, is that both "religion" and "politics" have undergone considerable rethinking in recent years. In the past, the tendency was either to make the ultimate goals of religion and politics virtually indistinguishable, allowing churches to give theological justification of the status quo; or the complete opposite tendency to separate religion and politics in order to make distinct and relatively autonomous spheres of competence for

¹Presbyterian Church (USA), *Christian Faith and Economic Justice*, 1984. United Church of Christ (UCC), *Christian Faith and Economic Life*, 1987.

²Montefiore, *Christianity and Politics*, 1990, 76-80.

each. Thus, a duality has existed concerning religion and politics that has downgraded the importance of the secular world but simultaneously treated the world as “a stage on which eternal principles are played out in preparation for salvation.”³ Both tendencies have caused disputes to arise between religious and secular authorities throughout the history of the Church concerning who should control and orient the totality of life. The Church and political movements have been for each other something that needed to be dealt with and controlled. Disputes have arisen either because the politicians have intruded into areas traditionally left to the Church, such as registry, education and marriage, or the Church has wanted a greater role in society.⁴

Since the 1950s and 60s, Christians—conservative, liberal, and radical alike—have begun to expand their “pastoral role” in the world given the biblical charge of stewardship, and have insisted that their faith have something to say about culture, economics, environmental issues, and political decisions concerning foreign and domestic policy. Traditionally, care for the world by Christians has been conventionally centred on charity, moral suasion, and taking care of the sick and lonely. But recently Christians from all parts of the religious spectrum have begun to define their pastoral role in the world with a more political character that includes lobbying and protests for political causes. The scope of actions considered “political” has also expanded. Traditionally, “politics” was identified implicitly with government and its agencies. However, “politics” is now more widely to be taken to include mass activities (and their repression) in new and hitherto non-political settings.⁵

The expansion of what is considered religious or political has created a new environment in which the Church must function. The tension or dialectic that Augustine held is being questioned and to some degree is being threatened. Within the past few decades, Christians have begun, for the most part, to accept

³Levine, *Religion and Politics in Latin America*, 1981, 20-21.

⁴*Ibid.*, 20-23.

⁵*Ibid.*, 19.

that their choices in society, for either neutrality or activism, are equally political. “Neutrality, in effect commits one to work within the status quo; activism may require a commitment to change. But both are political positions.”⁶

Speaking in general terms and while still recognising that every country, 5 region, and geographical area of the world has its own way of debating this issue, for the sake of discussion it is helpful to construct a typology that reflects the vast, complex reality of the relation the Christian faith has to politics. The typology we propose is a continuum which spreads from what we will call “conservative Christianity” on the right to “progressive Christianity” on the 10 left, with “reformist or neoliberal Christianity” somewhere in the middle.

Traditional Conservative Christianity

Traditionalists believe that they are preserving the old line of separation between the Church’s religious mission and the political agendas of popular political movements especially antithetical to the Church’s mandate to minister 15 to the entire human community. Moreover, they argue that identification with particular political movements or positions ties the institutional authority of the Church to the rise and fall of partisan fortunes. If the Church is linked in any way to politics it will become divisive and fragmented. Therefore, conservatives argue in favour of the separation of Church and politics, however their position 20 promotes, more often than not, the socio-economic status quo and conservative political movements.

The Religious Right and Reformist, Neoliberal Christianity

The Religious Right in United States is a complex coalition of media ministries, political lobbies and missionary groups active in domestic and 25 foreign political affairs. Its historical roots draw upon a long tradition of mixing religion and politics with its underlying conviction that human beings are inevitably political and religious creatures. Prior to the 1980s those who called

⁶Ibid., 27.

themselves evangelicals and fundamentalists⁷ were not likely to be politically involved, but in the late 1970s and early 1980s there was a distinct shift in the political movements of conservative Christians due to the considerable efforts made by Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority to register evangelicals to vote.⁸ The
 5 Moral Majority, and other organisations such as Pat Robertson's Christian Broadcasting Network, originated out of a "Politics of Moralism" movement.⁹ Leaders recognised that certain issues, such as abortion, could mobilise millions of conservative Americans who had never before participated in politics. It could unite Protestants and Catholics across denominational lines. Falwell and
 10 others made it their objective to target liberal Congressional members and attempt to elect conservative candidates into government positions.

The religious right has expanded its scope from the late 1970s from primarily being concerned with abortion to other socio-economic issues. They reject social services and governmental interference in social and economic
 15 affairs while advocating laissez-faire capitalism, military spending, and they are characterised as economic libertarians, social traditionalists, and militant anti-Communists.¹⁰ They also closely link God and country, thus becoming an expression of religious nationalism or American civil religion.

The religious right phenomenon is not particular to the United States
 20 alone; strands of the movement can also be found in Great Britain, Latin America, and South Africa. Alistair Kee has identified the New Right in Great Britain explaining the ideological development of Thatcherism. In calling for a new

⁷Although in the United States the terms 'fundamentalist' and 'evangelical' are often used interchangeably, evangelicals are those who "insist that the Bible is their one spiritual guide and authority, and that their salvation comes through belief in Jesus Christ and a personal adult conversion experience. . . . Fundamentalists are essentially evangelicals whose attitude and behaviour stamp them as more hard-line." Gifford, *The New Crusaders: Christianity and the New Right in Southern Africa*, 1991, 3. Both evangelicalism and fundamentalism share a common rejection of political and religious liberalism and secular humanism.

⁸Smidt, "Evangelical Voting Patterns: 1977-1988," in Cromartie, ed., *No Longer Exiles: The Religious New Right in American Politics*, 1992, 93.

⁹Lienesch, *Redeeming America: Piety and Politics in the New Christian Right*, 1993, 11.

¹⁰Himmelstein, "The New Right", in Liebman and Wuthnow, eds., *The Christian Right: Mobilisation and Legitimation*, 1983, 15.

defence of capitalism, 'neo-conservatives' transformed economics into a moral issue and a matter of faith. They presented capitalism as a moral system, borrowing from Adam Smith's idea that "the profit motive requires that the entrepreneur serves others in the market place." Therefore it is morally
5 justifiable to pursue self-interest, which will benefit both the individual and the rest of society.¹¹ Success becomes synonymous with wealth, and poverty is described as punishment, frequently deserved by a dint of moral and spiritual failings.

In Latin America, Rubem Alves has identified what he calls Right Doctrine
10 Protestantism (RDP). The RDP's central feature is "the fact that it stresses agreement with a series of doctrinal affirmations, which are regarded as expressions of truth and which must be affirmed without any shadow of doubt, as the precondition for participation in the ecclesial community."¹² To enter the RDP one must be "saved" by adjusting "their consciousness completely to that of
15 the community. The collective consciousness is a sacred absolute." There can be no disagreement within the faith community. Disagreement and questioning is understood as a threat to the entire foundation of the community. The individual must be "converted" through the spoken repetition of the community's statements of "truth". Converts do not begin upon a quest of faith and doubt.
20 Instead they inherit a highly rational world view from which the contradictions of actual experience are eliminated as if they were heresies.¹³ Thus, the RDP is highly resistant to innovation, or anything that challenges the status quo. Experience is never the criterion for thinking, instead one's thinking and knowledge of the tradition is the criterion to judge experience.

25 Sin in the RDP community is seen as individual and thus there is a obvious lack of response to the social teaching of Jesus. This response is not a matter of

¹¹Kee, *Domination or Liberation: The Place of Religion in Social Conflict*, 1986, 112-116.

¹² Alves, *Protestantism and Repression*, 1979, 8.

¹³ See Kee's discussion, *Domination or Liberation: The Place of Religion in Social Conflict*, 1986, 90-96.

mere neglect but rather a deliberate ignoring because of the RDP's ideological world-view. God has already saved the world through Christ, so the status quo is God's will. If people would only understand this, and work to preserve the tradition that exists, then the world's problems will be solved. "A social ethic has
 5 no essential place in the RDP universe. A Protestant believer could say everything that ought to be said without once alluding to the necessity of transforming the world."¹⁴ Members of the RDP believe that everyone receives the same message from God, there is no distinction what Jesus said to the rich or to the poor. Whether one is poor or not, the only important matter is one's
 10 spiritual posture throughout one's life. The proper attitudes are thus humility understood as resignation, submission, gratitude, and the certainty that all things work together for the good.¹⁵

In South Africa, the *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, has published a special edition on the religious right. One contributing author, Alan
 15 Brews, tells us that the neo-conservative perspective, found in many of South Africa's mainline or institutional churches, "seeks to obscure socio-political issues by concentrating on the 'spiritual' tasks of the Church, such as the salvation of the individual."¹⁶ Any tradition that has protested and rejected the status quo is regarded to be beyond the scope of the gospel. The Word of God, it is
 20 contended, is apolitical and above socio-political struggles of ideology. Yet, Brews insists, behind their religious and pious language is an ideological determination to support the prevailing political order through secular means. Defining its ideological character, Brews explains that the religious right is "defined by its negative character" which "opposes everything that threatens
 25 the *status quo*. At the level of ideas this means undermining . . . all strategies which apply pressure for radical change in society."¹⁷ Under the old apartheid

¹⁴ Alves, *Protestantism and Repression*, 1979, 152.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 156-157.

¹⁶ Brews, "Vulnerable to the Right: the English-speaking Churches," in *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, 1989, 42.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

system, the right-wing was anxious to support the government, baptise the state of emergency, sanction the use of violence by the state against its opponents, approve the alleged reform programmes, and it legitimised the practices of the free market economy.

5 In recent years the New Right has become loosely associated with Neoliberal Christianity, which has provided the Religious Right with the ability to cloth its conservative ideology in a concern for the poor. Neoliberalism insists that it acknowledges the conditions of poverty and oppression around the world as well as tacitly recognises the religious validity of the notion of liberation. But
10 the neoliberal position is also rooted in conservative propositions: that economic decisions are best determined by free-market mechanisms; that political and economic power should be completely separate; that policy makers should place greater emphasis on wealth creation and development than on fair redistribution; and that government regulation should be eliminated.
15 Neoliberalism's primary goal is the protection of individual rights and the protection of the right of each individual to make choices in the marketplace without interference from outside agencies. According to Neoliberalism, the protection of the poor and oppressed in society should be left to volunteer organisations or Non-governmental organisations (NGO).¹⁸ Unfortunately,
20 neoliberalism lacks critical analysis of social reality and its sympathy for the poor easily turns into a "comfortable compassion" which fails to be converted into any real amelioration of the situation of the poor.

This new conservatism, which has been linked with liberalism, has become popular in many parts of the world. In Europe, Pope John Paul II does
25 not fit neatly into conservative-liberal political categories because he insists that "the Church's mission is not political" and that Jesus should not be presented as a revolutionary, and yet speaks sharply on social issues.¹⁹ His

¹⁸Sherman, *Preferential Option: A Christian and Neoliberal Strategy for Latin America's Poor*, 1992, 1-10.

¹⁹McGovern, *Liberation Theology and Its Critics*, 1989, 14. Pope John Paul II, "Selections

intention to restore traditional moral doctrines of the pre-Vatican II era represents a conservative shift in the Roman Catholic church, and yet, he appears to champion the struggles of many oppressed people. John Paul II opposes the definition of the church as “people of God” and has supported a traditionally hierarchical definition of the church “in which laity worked under the direction of priests and bishops to achieve the ‘truth’ of a life lived in faith.”²⁰ His policies have been consistent with this view since he became Pope. This has placed him at odds with Latin American progressives who support the Christian Base Communities (CEB).

10 John Paul has made some conciliatory gestures to progressives in Latin America. On his trip to Latin America 1985 he stressed the need to speak out against injustice and to speak for the poor.²¹ But on his trip to Peru in May 1988, John Paul spoke against the dangers of certain brands of liberation theology. He made no effort to point out the positive side of liberation theology. The contrast
15 between the two visits demonstrates that there has been a shift in the Roman Catholic church in Latin America. John Paul has filled the majority of vacancies in the Latin American hierarchies with conservatives and traditionalist Vatican supporters.²² Conservatives have now achieved a majority in the national Episcopal Conference.²³

20 *Progressive Christianity*

Progressive Christianity argues that reformist political strategies fail to bring fundamental change to existing power arrangements and they accomplish

from ‘Opening Address at the Puebla Conference,’ 1979, in Hennelly, ed., *Liberation Theology: A Documentary History*, 1990, 225.

²⁰Stewart-Gambino, “Introduction: New Game, New Rules,” in Clearly, *Conflict and Competition*, 1992, 4.

²¹Klaiber, “The Church in Peru: Between Terrorism and Conservative Restraints,” in *Ibid.*, 89.

²²Stewart-Gambino, “Introduction: New Game, New Rules,” in *Ibid.*, 8. Riding, “Pope Shifts Brazilian Church to Right” 1988, in Hennelly, ed., *Liberation Theology: A Documentary History*, 1990, 529-531.

²³Klaiber, “The Church in Peru: Between Terrorism and Conservative Restraints,” in *Ibid.*, 88.

little more than to preserve the status quo. Progressive Christians differ on many important issues, but they agree that if the gospel is to be good news to the poor, the Church will have to be political, meaning that it will have to imitate its Lord in visibly taking sides with the victims of social injustice. Thus, they insist
 5 upon a preferential option for the poor and that the Church cannot remain neutral in the historical struggles for liberation from structures of oppression. For some proponents of liberation theology a preferential option for the poor must be understood in light of a Marxist social analysis. For others it means a dismantling of racial discrimination and prejudice.

10 *Theological Pluralism*

We have already argued that since the early 1970s, many Christians—conservative, liberal, and progressive—have come to the realisation that the churches world-wide have a profound impact on the shaping of a nation's socio-economic and political agenda. Issues and debates within the Church are shaped
 15 by the interplay between intra-Church theological and ecclesiastical concerns and national/international ideological and institutional patterns to which churches must adapt. Newly emerging socio-political situations, such as the emergence of democracy in South Africa, complicate the Church's continued search for its prophetic voice: What does it mean to have a concern for social
 20 justice, peace, and to maintain a "preferential option for the poor" when the world's political order is continually in transition?

These new situations raise the question of theological pluralism with extreme urgency.²⁴ Clearly the conservative, liberal, and progressive models represent different understandings and interpretations not only of the Christian
 25 tradition, but also of theological method and analyses of the social and political context. People are naturally fearful in the face of such pluralism. There is the perceived danger that we shall lose something of real value if a dialogue is built

²⁴ Peterson, "Theological and Religious Pluralism" in De Gruchy and Villa-Vicencio, *Doing Theology in Context*, 1994, 219-228.

and maintained. The temptation is strong to escape this pluralism or to dismiss it by seeking fault with the other models in order to discredit them. We find ourselves wondering about the nature and status of this pluralism. Is it something to be celebrated or to be overcome? What are the limits of such pluralism? On what grounds can one, or should one, make a choice between the models? Do the models make competing claims, or are they complementary to each other? If competing, then by what norms could one possibly assess these competing claims?

In this paper we shall attempt to answer these questions with respect to the church and politics debates. However, because of the immensity and complexity of how Christians, in various parts of the world today, relate their faith to politics we will examine the debates that surround the theological models outlined above by focusing on the contemporary theological movement known as “liberation theology” and objections that have been raised by its more conservative and liberal opponents. We have chosen to study this subject in this way because “liberation theology” has emerged as one of the most exciting developments in progressive theology in the second half of this century. Plus, criticisms of this theological phenomenon have arisen just as quickly as the movement developed.

There are several theologies of liberation: Latin American liberation theology, North American black theology, South African black theology, Feminist theology, Minjung theology; but our focus will be on Latin American and South African theologies of liberation and more specifically the theology of José Míguez-Bonino²⁵ and Allan Boesak. We will look at and compare the way these men have responded to the theological challenges set by their surrounding social realities and how they have answered the criticisms from Europe and North America. We have chosen them to compare and contrast with critics of

²⁵ For José Míguez Bonino we will refer to him as Míguez-Bonino. In Latin America it is common to use the mother’s name after the father’s name because it helps differentiate between people with the same patronymic, in a society where there are few surnames in use.

liberation theology because of the exposure they have had in their own countries and in the north-western hemisphere. Both have served as ministers, and through their work they have shown prominence in the Latin American and South African Church. They both have served in international Church organisations; Míguez-Bonino served as president of the World Council of Churches, and Boesak served as president of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches. They both have written many books and articles on liberation theology with the ecumenical Church in mind and in response to Western reactions to their work and the work of their colleagues. Because of their exposure, Míguez-Bonino has been described as the most prolific Protestant liberation theologian in Latin America and Boesak has been described as one who has brought the attention of the world to the struggles of the South African people. Their popularity has caused many critics of Latin American and South African liberation theology to cite the theology of these two men in their constant struggle against liberation theology.

But more importantly we have chosen Míguez-Bonino and Boesak for this study because of the commitment they give to a praxis that reflects the needs of the poor and oppressed and how that commitment works its way into the importance they give to politics. Both men share the progressive concept that the task of the Church is to empower the poor and oppressed people to become theological and pastoral actors in the political struggles of their countries. This may explain why both men have also become politicians. Míguez-Bonino was elected to Argentina's Constituent Assembly in April of 1994. In an open letter to Argentina's Protestant community explaining his decision to take up a political role, Míguez-Bonino wrote, "As Christians, we are the inheritors of ethical convictions on justice, on liberty, on human rights, which we must proclaim and uphold. As members of Evangelical churches, we demand the right to liberty and equality which the present constitution neither recognises nor guarantees."²⁶

²⁶ *One World*, May 1994, 21.

Boesak serves as Western Cape regional ANC chairman. Although he has had a varied and controversial political career, it does not invalidate his theological writings or his prophetic leadership in the 1980s.²⁷ We wish to focus on his and Míguez-Bonino's theological work and their understanding of the relationship
5 between Church and politics. Therefore, we will focus on the theological writings of these two men while they were still involved in church leadership; that is, the period before they took political office. We will not discuss their political careers nor the political careers of their critics.

In this study we will first examine the work of Míguez-Bonino and his
10 reply to those who are critical of Latin American liberation theology. Then we will turn our attention to Boesak and do the same. In the final chapter we will compare the work of these two men and most importantly see how they have answered the questions of pluralism that were asked above.

²⁷ Boesak was dismissed from the World Alliance of Reformed Churches leadership in 1990 amid a sex scandal involving a television producer who is now his wife. In February 1995, Boesak withdrew his nomination to be South Africa's ambassador to the UN in Geneva. He was accused of misusing foreign contributions to his Foundation for Peace and Justice. Wishing not to dismiss Boesak's important contributions as a church leader in the struggle against apartheid, upon hearing the accusations against Boesak, Archbishop Desmond Tutu said "He's a very gifted person and that is why my devastation and distress are so great. Dr. Boesak has played a tremendous role in our struggle and I ... would want to see him cleared. I hope it will happen." *Reuters*, Cape Town, 10 February, 1995.

2.1 CAPITALISM, DEMOCRATIC LIBERALISM, AND THE CHURCH'S HISTORICAL RESPONSE

As a child, Míguez-Bonino attended a small Methodist church in Rosario, Argentina, with his parents, who had converted from Catholicism. The Methodists had begun theological training of their ministers in Uruguay (1884), which later developed into the Facultad Evangélica de Teología and eventually
5 became the Instituto Superior Evangélico de Estudios Teológicos. Míguez-Bonino received a licentiate in theology from this institution in 1948 and served as a Methodist minister in the parishes in Bolivia, Mendoza and Buenos Aires.

The Methodist Church in Argentina is recognised for its ecumenical spirit and social awareness. High on its agenda are evangelisation and church growth,
10 and the struggle for social justice and human rights. It is this characteristic that has made a lasting impression upon Míguez-Bonino. The local church he attended as a youth was composed of dock workers and lower class peasants who were very socially conscious. He vividly remembers discussions on social and political issues that were sponsored by his church. He once recalled: "I think
15 that this strange mixture of working class conditions, strong piety and social awareness have remained with me—mixed and organised or disorganised in different ways at different moments—throughout all my life."²⁸

After receiving a M.A. degree from Emory University in 1952, Míguez-Bonino returned to Argentina and his Alma Mater. He accepted the position of
20 professor of theology and ethics at the Facultad Evangélica de Teología in 1954.²⁹ The country he returned to faced economic devastation under the politically corrupt government of Juan Perón. Although Perón organised the labour unions and brought the working class more wealth than it had ever seen before, he was a dictator who squandered the country's gold and currency reserves and

²⁸Ferm, *Profiles in Liberation: 36 Portraits of Third World Theologians*, 1988, 130.

²⁹The Facultad Evangélica de Teología changes its name to the Protestant Institute for Higher Theological Education in 1969. Míguez-Bonino retains his position until 1985.

diverted capital investment from industries. He ruined the country's economy by stunting industrialisation and promoting inflation. Of course, these policies affected the poorest people of the country, sending them deeper into poverty.³⁰

5 Míguez-Bonino had committed himself several years earlier, when he was a student at university, to opposition forces that advocated democratic social reform. At university he had come under the influence of some non-Marxist socialist professors who wanted changes in Argentina. When Perón was finally overthrown with the active support of the Catholic church, a year after Míguez-Bonino became a professor at the Facultad Evangélica de Teología, Míguez-Bonino
10 hoped that Argentina's future would be better. But these hopes were soon dashed as one military dictatorship after another succeeded. It was at this time that Míguez-Bonino began to turn his attention to the social and economic sciences to understand why the poor never seemed to emerge from poverty.³¹

A Problem with Capitalism and Liberalism

15 To most Christians today, a suggestion that capitalism and liberalism somehow conflict with Christian principles and values appears to be outdated and very questionable, if not out-right wrong. Specially considering the recent developments in Eastern Europe where more and more countries are adopting "market economies," "free trade laws" and a "liberal" style of government that is
20 characteristic of Western countries.

Throughout the 1970s, however, it was common for most liberation theologians from Latin America to judge capitalism and liberalism as anti-Christian; calling it an "evil system," or "the system of death." One does not have to search hard for examples of this rejection in Míguez-Bonino's work. In his
25 book *Christians and Marxists* (1976), he refers to W. A. Visser 't Hooft's suggestion, which was made in the late 1940s while Visser 't Hooft was general

³⁰Poneman, *Argentina: Democracy on Trial*, 1987, 69. Poneman argues that Perón was both a "hero and a scoundrel." He was a hero to the working class because he gave them political representation, and under his programs workers salaries increased from 30 to 50 percent.

³¹Ferm, *Profiles in Liberation: 36 Portraits of Third World Theologians*, 1988, 130-131.

secretary of the WCC, that any “strategic alliance” between Christianity and capitalism is impossible.³² Míguez-Bonino states that “the basic ethos of capitalism is *definitely* anti-Christian” because

5 it is the maximising of economic gain, the raising of man's grasping impulse, the idolising of the strong, the subordination of man to the economic production. Humanisation is for capitalism an unintended by-product, . . . solidarity is for capitalism accidental, . . . Christianity must criticise capitalism radically in its fundamental intention. . .³³

10 Among liberation theologians, Míguez-Bonino certainly does not stand alone in his assessment (though many do not go as far as labelling capitalism “anti-Christian”). Franz Hinkelammert dismisses capitalism as a system that “has committed mass murder among the working classes,”³⁴ Leonardo and Clodovis Boff reject it as “immoral,”³⁵ and Gustavo Gutiérrez rejects capitalism on the

15 basis that it creates poverty, injustice, exploitation, and the “sinful situation” of underdevelopment. Where we find these “by-products of capitalist development,” argues Gutiérrez (using the language of Medellín), “we will find the rejection of the peace of the Lord.”³⁶ To understand how and why Míguez-Bonino and others rejected capitalism in the 1970s, and for the most part still do

20 today, we have to put their anti-capitalist statements into context. We must consider them with regard to the way Latin America's political and economic turmoil was perceived in the 1960s and early '70s.

 Míguez-Bonino, like other liberation theologians, believes that capitalism and liberalism can only be examined in relation to the broad social formation of

25 the “western capitalist-liberal society.”³⁷ One cannot separate the formation of capitalism and liberalism in Latin America from how it took shape in the Western hemisphere as a whole. After all, western societies developed by

³²Míguez-Bonino, *Christians and Marxists*, 1976, 115.

³³*Ibid.*

³⁴Hinkelammert, *The Ideological Weapons of Death: A Theological Critique of Capitalism*, 1986, 75.

³⁵McGovern, *Liberation Theology and Its Critics*, 1990, 139.

³⁶Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 1988, 64.

³⁷Míguez-Bonino, “Human and the System,” 1978, 17.

mutually determining “each other’s internal structures and relationships, culture and styles of living.”³⁸

According to Míguez-Bonino, Western capitalism developed in three stages: mercantilist, industrial, and consumer capitalism. Each new stage reinforces the economic principles of the previous stage while adopting new practices that correspond to new historical situations. The first stage, mercantilist capitalism, corresponds to the age of colonial expansion. Many sociologists and theologians from Latin America are cautious to speak of a “colonial ‘capitalist’ period,” because capitalism is usually associated with a mode of production characterised by industrialisation in privately owned factories that employ wage labourers. Míguez-Bonino himself admits that it is difficult to decide whether the Spanish conquest should be seen as a feudal or a capitalist enterprise.³⁹ However, he argues that the capital generated through trade with Spain ended in the capitalist nations of the north, thus introducing Latin America into the industrial-capitalist “circuit.”⁴⁰ The colonial trade practices established a two-class society, tying the higher “land-owner” class to foreign markets and imports. This class used the labour of the lower class to extract gold

³⁸Míguez-Bonino, *Doing Theology in a Revolutionary Situation*, 1975, 30.

³⁹Míguez-Bonino, *Toward a Christian Political Ethics*, 1983, 56. Latin Americans cannot agree upon the role of feudalism and capitalism in Latin America’s early social formation. André Gunder Frank’s thesis that Latin America has been subject to mercantilist capitalism at its conception (*Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America*, New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1967), was rejected by Dos Santos, who prefers to speak of “precapitalist” means of production in “Capitalismo colonial según A.G. Frank,” (*Monthly Review*, November 1968). See also Ronald H. Chilcote, “Issues of Theory in Dependency and Marxism,” *Latin American Perspectives*, Summer-Fall 1981 (n. 30-31), 4, on Marxist critics of Frank’s thesis.

⁴⁰Similar arguments can be found elsewhere. For example, the “Christians for Socialism” meeting of 1972 in Santiago, Chile, concluded: “This unjust society is objectively grounded on the capitalist production-centred relationships, which necessarily give rise to a class based society.” (Eagleson, John, ed., *Christians and Socialism*, 1975, 164.) Gutiérrez speaks of the initial sixteenth-century conquerors of Latin America as “the first representatives of capitalism” (Gutiérrez, *The Power of the Poor*, 1983, 185). And Pablo Richard believes that Latin America constituted a capitalist society from the outset: “The position I adopt here is that Latin America was inserted into the expanding world-wide capitalist trading system ever since the Spanish and Portuguese conquest. From the very beginning, starting with its discovery and conquest, Latin America has developed with a capitalist social pattern.” (Pablo Richard, *Death of Christendoms*, 1987, 23. See chapter one, “A Colonial Christendom Within a Capitalist Society”).

and silver from mines and to grow agricultural products that the higher class could use to get more refined products from Spain, thus furnishing their European lifestyles. The desire of the higher class to transport Spanish aristocratic life to Latin America resulted in Latin America's economic, political, and cultural dependency on Europe. Thus, the colonial period decisively influenced the linkage of domination and dependency that is so characteristic of capitalist development. Julio de Santa Ana describes this development as follows:

The present situation of the poor in the world is related to the process of the modern world since the eighteenth century. In this evolution, particular structures have been imposed by dominant powers on whole societies. With this socio-economic structure there developed a new relationship between people, and also between humanity and nature, aimed at the appropriation of economic surplus and accumulation of wealth for those who handle and control the mechanism of power, to the detriment of the powerless. This is what has been called "capitalism."⁴¹

Colonialism, Santa Ana observes, "was the means by which the law of the market was enforced and certain regions were made dependent."⁴² Latin America had a "dependent" economy because its people were dependent upon what they could export to Spain (gold, silver and a few agricultural products). They were thus at the mercy of Spain's desires.

As Northern capitalism developed into other stages — industrial (in Britain) and then later consumer capitalism (in the United States) — the state of Latin America's economic dependence continued. Though many of its countries found political independence, the fact is that Latin America's dependence on foreign trade grew worse. As European and North American countries expanded their industrial output, Latin Americans became the suppliers of raw materials and cheap labour and provided a market for Northern products. The Northern countries imported raw materials from Latin America, turned these materials

⁴¹de Santa Ana, ed., *Towards a Church of the Poor*, 1979, 35.

⁴²*Ibid.*, 36. de Santa Ana bases his argument on Celso Furtado's analysis of Fernand Brandel, Werner Sombart and Max Weber, in *Prefacio a nova economia política*, 37: "So, capitalism must be understood as a socio-political organisation, that is, as a power structure which imposes a certain kind of social relationship in which the surplus is more easily transformed into capital."

into finished products and then sold them back to Latin America. Simply stated, Europe was to be the factory of the world and America was to be Europe's farmland.⁴³

One example of how this relationship worked is Míguez-Bonino's homeland of Argentina. That country gave priority to agricultural products that it could sell to Europe. It allowed Britain to invest in its railway system, "not in order to serve internal or Latin American communications but as a mechanism in order to pump the production of the country into the large chosen port and to pump it out to the overseas metropolis."⁴⁴ Argentina's total dependence on foreign trade and investment was proven during the two World Wars. The wars underlined the vulnerability of Argentina's economy, which depended almost entirely on foreign supplies of manufactured goods and industrial imports. When both wars stopped the supply line to Argentina, then and only then did it consider the possibility of industrialisation.⁴⁵

Míguez-Bonino believes that the height of capitalist economic dependency of Latin America was reached in the 1950s and 1960s when great hope was given to Latin America through a United Nations proclamation. In 1950 that organisation declared the first "decade for development." With the support of many economists, sociologists and government administrations from the wealthy countries, the United Nations proposed that Northern countries invest more heavily in Latin America so that Latin America's economies would "take off." The United States became a leading contributor in this United Nations effort. The Kennedy administration launched the Alliance of Progress, which was aimed at helping the socio-economic development of Latin America by combining private investments; development aid for public works, agriculture, and education from

⁴³Míguez-Bonino, *Doing Theology in a Revolutionary Situation*, 1975, 14. Quoting a British Prime Minister around 1870.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*

⁴⁵Beeson and Pearce, *A Vision of Hope*, 1984, 103-104.

the United States government; and an upgrading of armies and police to meet the threat of insurgency.⁴⁶

However, in reality the intervention by the United States in the 1960s only seemed to make matters worse. Soon after the Alliance was launched, Míguez-
5 Bonino observes, the failure of the project was already visible.

Foreign investment has taken out of Latin America far more than it has invested. The process of production, distribution, and finance has been almost totally transferred to outside agents (international monopolies). The terms of trade continue to be unfavourable. . . .
10 Consequently, social unrest is rampant on the continent, and populist regimes have been replaced, with the aid and support of the U.S.A., by military, repressive governments which can guarantee the stable conditions required by foreign investment.⁴⁷

The failure of the Alliance was due to the failure of regimes in Brazil, Argentina
15 and Peru; conflict with the United States government over the Alliance's administration; the use of much of the United States foreign aid to service previous debts rather than to finance new, productive investments; and the failure of Latin American governments to make agreed-to structural changes, such as land and tax reforms. Despite this failure, however, the United States
20 government felt it necessary to protect its investments from the perceived threat of communist expansion, totalitarianism and atheistic aggression. In response to these threats it developed the doctrine of "national security" and it created the National Security Act, National Security Council, CIA and the National War
College. Míguez-Bonino and other liberation theologians believe that it was
25 under this supposed doctrine of "protection" that helped the United States justify its determination to manipulate the internal affairs of other countries.

Míguez-Bonino explains how when a Third World country attempted to break out of the dependency pattern and "escape economic occupation," it immediately faced sanctions and the possibility of "direct military intervention."
30 Míguez-Bonino explains how American agencies like the CIA and the State

⁴⁶Smith outlines the program's objectives as stated in the Alliance's Charter of Punta del Este, 111-112.

⁴⁷Míguez-Bonino, *Doing Theology in a Revolutionary Situation*, 1975, 25.

Department supported Latin American military coups “which might restore conditions favourable to American investments.”⁴⁸ This, de Santa Ana points out, is reminiscent of the colonial period in both China and Latin America when and if countries refused to trade with hegemonistic countries. Any refusal of trade was sufficient reason to declare war.⁴⁹ In essence, then, the modern concept of national security was a way of continuing the colonial structures of capitalist economic domination and dependency of Western societies.

Failure of the Alliance of Progress and proof of the “national security” doctrine became clear to many when the United States invaded the Dominican Republic under President Johnson in 1965. The failure caused many Latin Americans to lose hope and become disillusioned because they realised the betrayal of the United States. Míguez-Bonino recounts:

The modernisation model culminated in the conscience of Latin America in the great hope of Kennedy’s Alliance for Progress. People placed a lot of hope in this, a lot of hope. Kennedy was seen as a great hope. Then there was a crisis. The populist regimes had failed and now the Alliance came tumbling down. It was a fact; they had failed. It was clearly seen [then] that it was an alliance with the same power elites that had always controlled the economic life of Latin America, that there was a lot of corruption on both sides.⁵⁰

Míguez-Bonino explains the political expression these economic and military factors take on in the Western capitalist society. They form the backbone of the liberal democratic state. The purpose of the democratic state is to defend freedom, justice and order; however, the freedom and order referred to are conceived and operate in relation to the economic order of things. It is not human individual freedom that the liberal democratic state supports but rather

⁴⁸Ibid., 29. See also Robert McAfee Brown, *Saying Yes and Saying No: On Rendering to God and Caesar*, 1986, for descriptions of United States military interventions from a theological perspective.

⁴⁹de Santa Ana, *Towards a Church of the Poor*, 1979, 37-38. Examples would be the Opium Wars in China (1839-1842) and the war of the “Triple Alliance,” where Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay (supported by European powers, mainly Britain) fought against Paraguay (1865-1870).

⁵⁰Smith, *The Emergence Liberation Theology*, 1991, 114. The United States Subcommittee on Inter-American Affairs recognized the *fact* of the Alliance’s failure.

the freedom of the market. Míguez-Bonino explains the relation between freedom and the economic order:

5 The emergence of the political rights of the “citizen” is clearly related historically to the economic significance of the emerging bourgeoisie. The original relation of property to the political rights is clear enough in this respect. The extension of “rights” to other sectors closely follows the weight that those sectors of society acquire in the productive process.⁵¹

10 Thus, Míguez-Bonino concludes that the liberal democratic states serve the economic order “by guaranteeing its unhindered development through non-intervention or by preserving the social conditions indispensable for the functioning and expansion of the economic system.”⁵² If that order is threatened in any way, then steps should be taken to preserve it, and no sacrifice is too great.

15 The lengthy discussion of the last seven pages can be summarised with a few simple remarks. Míguez-Bonino believes that Latin America is in the midst of a struggle against Third World poverty. The condition, he insists, “is neither an accident nor a mystery. It is the inevitable and quite normal result of a total situation determined by the laws, goals and structures of the economic system
20 that we have developed.”⁵³ It is the result of the way production and distribution of goods, human relations and the goals and values of human life have been constructed. It is the result of capitalism, which causes the economic dependency of the Third World; and democratic liberalism, which justifies the capitalist economic order, using the doctrine of the national security state. He
25 believes that these “structures of poverty” present a challenge to the Christian faith and must be addressed by both individual Christians and churches.

The Historical Response of the Churches

What has been the historical response of the churches to the Latin American situation? Míguez-Bonino argues that the Roman Catholic Church and

⁵¹Míguez-Bonino, “Human and the System,” 1978, 18.

⁵²Ibid.

⁵³Míguez-Bonino, “Liberation and Social Change,” 1977, 120.

Protestant churches have responded to the situation differently because they build their social ethics on two different bases. We shall summarise the Church's response to poverty from those two different perspectives.

The Roman Catholic Church

5 Míguez-Bonino argues that from the third and fourth centuries onward the Roman Catholic (RC) Church has adopted the premise that there is a universal, rational order that pervades everything in this world and everyone must work to preserve the good which is found in this universal order. This premise, Míguez-Bonino insists, is based on Augustine's position concerning
10 order in society. Summarising Augustine's argument, Míguez-Bonino writes:

The basis of Augustine's position in these cases appears quite clearly: peace, understood as order. The suppression of conflict or tumult is the chief purpose of the organisation of society. Changes or the respect for personal freedom might endanger such order.
15 Whenever an alternative emerges, therefore, the Christian ought to work for the best possible solution, the most just and generous one, *short of endangering the existing order.*⁵⁴

Míguez-Bonino believes that this premise appears often in the RC Church's social ethics and particularly in what he calls "Christian right-wing
20 rhetoric." The premise usually takes the following form: "The will of God is identified with order, which in turn is identified with the prevailing, though threatened, order of things. To resist the threat is to obey God."⁵⁵

Over the years, the RC Church's fundamental duty has been the preservation of the public order. Míguez-Bonino explains how the RC Church
25 sacralised the existing order by trying to "humanise it, to curb its abuses, to Christianise it." But the Church refused to challenge the socio-political and economic order. For the Church "social change appears as the threatening onslaught of chaos and has to be resisted."⁵⁶ The Church's basic questions concerning poverty were: "What degree of change in the conditions in which
30 the poor live is compatible with the preservation of the existing order?" In

⁵⁴Ibid.

⁵⁵Míguez-Bonino, "Violence—A Theological Reflection," 1973, 46.

⁵⁶Míguez-Bonino, "Liberation and Social Change," 1977, 123.

other words, how much can we change the condition in which the poor live without disturbing the present order of society — the status quo.

In the history of the RC Church in Latin America, the preservation of order has traditionally meant the alignment of the Church with the ruling form
5 of government. During the colonial period, the Church was tied to the colonial structure. Religion was used to sacralise the colonial enterprise and was used as a tool of domination to preserve the natural order of things — the social, political, and economic order - that had been created by God.⁵⁷ During Latin America's revolutionary period (1810-1870), the Church considered any rebellious
10 activities against the state as a threat because such activities disturbed the order that the Church worked so hard and carefully to protect. The fact that Spain was no longer in power meant that the Church no longer had at its disposal all the channels of organised society — legislation, education, access to authority and power. This left the Church in a state of confusion and disorganisation. The
15 Church responded to this period of anarchy by seeking the support of groups and parties which offered the possibility of extending the traditional forms of influence; it became both dependent on and allied with the conservative parties made up of the rich landowners and the old Spanish aristocracy.⁵⁸ By the end of the nineteenth century, the Church had fallen into a sense of “tragic
20 hopelessness.”⁵⁹ Thus, the people of Latin America began to accept the Church as nothing more than a relic of their Spanish cultural heritage and as a mechanism that justified the interests of the wealthy landowners, an institution merely interested in its own political survival.⁶⁰ This impression would last well into the twentieth century.

25 Since independence, the Roman Catholic hierarchy in Argentina has often given the impression that it is willing to work with any form of

⁵⁷Míguez-Bonino, *Doing Theology in a Revolutionary Situation*, 1975, 7.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*, 9.

⁵⁹Dussel, *A History of the Church*, 1981, 105.

⁶⁰Míguez-Bonino, “Witness in a de-Christianised Continent,” 1961, 98-99.

government. It looked favourably upon Perón's administration as well as the military regimes which controlled the country until 1983.

5 In March 1982, on the sixth anniversary of the military regime, the senior military chaplain, Bishop Victorio Bonamín, celebrated Mass for a gathering of high-ranking officers and told them in his sermon that the coup had been "an act of divine providence . . . it was the work of God."⁶¹

10 In the 1970s, even after eight priests (who were members of the radical Third World Priest movement working to overthrow the government) had been killed by security forces and another twenty had disappeared, the Church hierarchy said nothing against the government.⁶² The Church's silence prompted Nobel Peace Prize winner Adolfo Pérez Esquivel to say, "A Church that refuses to recognise its own martyrs is a Church that has lost its soul."⁶³

15 The willingness of the Catholic hierarchy to align itself with the landed aristocracy and their conservative governments, as well as its dedication to military dictatorships, Míguez-Bonino argues, presented a crisis for the Church. Out of a protest against the Church, an alternative popular Catholic faith developed amongst the poorer people in Latin America. This faith ignored the socio-political motivations and ambitions of the Church hierarchy and became
20 "cosmological, psychological, eschatological and individual" in nature.⁶⁴ Unfortunately, Míguez-Bonino argues, these characteristic elements of popular Catholicism toned down the protest to such a degree that it lost all its power to transform the individual and society.

25 The believer encounters a supportive and sharing community and a number of ethical norms which allow him to achieve some social and economic progress. He transfers his final hope to heaven and anticipates it spiritually on earth in the community of the Church. He loses solidarity with the struggle of his class, is integrated into the existing social order and becomes a political dead weight.⁶⁵

⁶¹Beeson and Pearce, *A Vision of Hope*, 1984, 119.

⁶²*Ibid.*, 118ff. See also Poneman, *Argentina: Democracy on Trial*, 1987, 110ff.

⁶³Poneman, *Argentina: Democracy on Trial*, 1987, 111.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*, 149. Míguez-Bonino draws upon A. Büntig's *El Catolicismo popular en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires, 1969).

⁶⁵*Ibid.*, 151-152.

To support this argument he points to those who have investigated popular Catholicism. These people emphasise the conformist, passive attitudes which popular Catholicism engenders.

5 A research student of IPLA says: “the religiosity of poverty hardly ever transforms life”. The director of EPLA comments: “It is well known that a Catholicism of this kind reinforces a dualist view of reality and therefore a religious attitude which is alienated from the world”. He adds: “this popular Catholicism reinforces contradictions and oppressions”.⁶⁶

10 Míguez-Bonino believes that the most realistic summation of the situation is found in the *Semana internacional de Catéquesis* (Medellín, 1968):

15 Manifestations of popular religiosity may at times contain positive elements, but they are, in the rapid evolution of society, above all the expression of alienated groups. This, of course, means those groups whose way of life is depersonalised, conformist, uncritical and lacking any will to change society. This kind of religiosity is maintained and in part stimulated by the dominant structures, to which the Church belongs, and above all it acts as a brake on any move to change the structures of society.⁶⁷

20 Unfortunately, the positive elements of popular Catholicism have been undermined by the use of popular religiosity to prevent the masses from protesting against or from transforming socio-economic and political order. He says that in the rural areas of Latin America poverty is theologically rationalised as individual “sin” (indolence and laziness), or worse, as the will of God. People
25 who attempt to change Latin America’s social situation are branded as subversives, jeopardising the “Christian way of life.” Those who defend the status quo are understood to be protecting “Christian values” and appeal to the Christian commandment to love, which is used to pacify the people and keep them from all attempts to transform their situation. Thus, instead of “giving an

⁶⁶Ibid. The Pastoral Institute of Latin America (IPLA) was established in 1964 in Quito, Ecuador, by Manuel Larraín, president of Latin American Episcopal Conference (CELAM), and Hélder Camera, first vice-president. The institute taught courses throughout Latin America on liberation theology. Gustavo Gutiérrez, José Comblin, Juan Luis Segundo and Enrique Dussel, were all IPLA professors. The EPLA was created as the Pastoral sub-department of CELAM in 1964 of which Segundo Galilea was in charge. See Smith, *The Emergence of Liberation Theology*, 1991, 171-172. Gibellini, *Frontiers of Theology in Latin America*, 1979, 311.

⁶⁷Ibid., 152-153.

impetus to solidarity in the struggle for transformation, Christian love becomes an obstacle in the continuation of that struggle.”⁶⁸

Therefore, from this review of Míguez-Bonino’s analysis, we can conclude that the initial response of Roman Catholicism to Latin America’s political, social and economic situation was inadequate. In his work Míguez-Bonino has shown that because the Roman Catholic hierarchy was more concerned with preserving the political order of society and its own institutional power and order, it could not adequately address Latin America’s problems. It was too closely aligned with the aristocracy and political powers to see the needs of the poor and to be able to bring about social change. On the other hand, popular Catholicism, which separated itself from the Church hierarchy’s political ambitions, could not bring about social change either, because it distanced itself from the world altogether.

The Response of Latin America’s Protestant Churches

The Protestant tradition’s interpretation of “political duty” is not without its appeals to a theology of order and natural law; however, Míguez-Bonino does not see those appeals as the guiding principle for its socio-political ethics. Protestant ethics, he believes, is built for the most part on a “soteriological key” that stresses personal conversion and a private faith.⁶⁹ To some extent he believes that this “key” is one of Protestantism’s many strengths:

There is unmistakable emphasis on the urgent need for personal decision in response to the preaching of the gospel. Preaching, teaching, pastoral care, all centre around the personal, untransferable character of this call. Nobody can answer in my stead. Each man is confronted by his Lord, who calls him by his name. When his voice is heard, everything else — personal interests, place in society, family, plans — recedes and fades away: man is left alone face to face with the Lord.⁷⁰

By placing such a strong emphasis on personal conversion, Protestantism has been given a distinctively individualistic character. This individualism has led to some of its greatest theological affirmations, such as *sola Scriptura* — the

⁶⁸Ibid., 154.

⁶⁹Míguez-Bonino, “Human and the System,” 1978, 14.

⁷⁰Míguez-Bonino, “Witness in a de-Christianised Continent,” 1961, 102.

affirmation that nothing must be allowed to distract or come between a person and their salvation. This individualist character can be traced back to Martin Luther's doctrine of the "two kingdoms."⁷¹

Míguez-Bonino explains how Luther condemned what he saw as a fatal relationship that had developed in Germany: ecclesiastical authorities, in the name of the Church, had become rulers, while governments were claiming authority in spiritual matters.⁷² In response to this situation, Luther developed a theological understanding of Church and State, Gospel and Law, and private and public person. With regard to Church and State, Luther spoke of the relative autonomy of both and argued that the State could not be arbitrarily subject to the Church. However, this did not mean that the Christian should retreat into spiritual isolationism, forgetting his/her responsibility. Because political power was also within God's sovereignty, the Christian had to serve God in the political sphere as well as the Christian community. The Christian had to serve both law and Gospel.

It is this "private" individualism and dualistic perception of the world found in Protestantism that Míguez-Bonino believes "eventually played readily into one of the most cherished notions developed by the modern bourgeois world."⁷³ He says elsewhere:

On closer examination, we see in the impact of this process [of personal conversion] clear signs of the transition from a traditional to a modern society, from the feudal to the bourgeois person.⁷⁴

⁷¹Míguez-Bonino explains that this dualistic formulation "of two worlds" can be traced back to the second century when the "ardent expectation of the total transformation of the world and the advent of the Kingdom of God was replaced in Christianity by a spiritualized and individualistic hope for immortal, celestial life." It can also be found in Augustine's *City of God*, in his separation of the *civitas terrena* from the *civitas dei*, making the former a mere stage devoid of all eschatological significance. Míguez-Bonino, *Doing Theology in a Revolutionary Situation*, 1975, 132-136.

⁷²Míguez-Bonino, *Toward a Christian Political Ethics*, 1983, 22ff. Bornkamm, *Luther's Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms in the Context of His Theology*, 1966, 19-28. See Luther's response to Johann von Schwarzenberg, *Temporal Authority: To What Extent it Should be Obeyed*, 1523.

⁷³*Ibid.*, 23-24.

⁷⁴*Ibid.*, 60.

What are these “cherished notions” and how does Protestantism transform traditional forms of society into a modern form of society?

According to Míguez-Bonino, Protestantism cultivates a transition from traditional to a modern society in three ways. First, Protestantism promotes the idea of a “free individual.” “Persons are invited to become individually different, distinctive, to make a decision that is exclusively their own, one that uproots them from the structures to which they naturally belong, such as their family and circle of friends.”⁷⁵ They are encouraged to take hold of their own destiny and make decisions as they “stand alone before Christ.” Thus, Protestantism promises freedom and liberty for the individual in society. Secondly, Protestantism encourages subjectivity. For the most part it discourages notions of a cosmic, supernatural struggle that takes place outside the individual, a struggle which the Christian can affect by religious actions and observances. In Protestantism “the cosmic struggle of the powers has been transposed to the sphere of personal consciousness,” and thus Christians speak of “peace,” “certainty” and “experience.” Finally, Protestantism focuses on the moral realm. It emphasises the “internalisation of duty, a sense of responsibility, and the virtues of early capitalism — industry, honesty, moderation, frugality. Here is the universe of moral achievement, of self-improvement.”

Thus, Protestantism sees itself as the spirit of liberty, democracy, modernity and progress. By contrast, Catholicism is the spirit which fears liberty; as a result, it favours totalitarian solutions and opposes modernity. The development of Protestantism in Latin America serves as the proof of this assertion.

The end of Latin America’s colonial period brought victory of the modernising elites over the traditional elites. The modernising or liberal elites were attracted to Protestantism because they believed that the British free-trade

⁷⁵Ibid.

economics and the French and American revolutions were its consequences.⁷⁶ Catholicism was seen as “cause, bearer, and consequence of the feudal period, those Dark Ages that are synonymous with social and political oppression, scholastic obscurantism, ignorance, and cultural lag.”⁷⁷ It was believed that

5 Protestantism could help to break through the Catholic religious monopoly and help to shape the virtues needed for the modern world: freedom of judgement, reliability, a pioneering and enterprising spirit and moral seriousness.

There is no doubt that Protestantism entered Latin America, as it did the rest of the world, converting souls, demanding reform and overthrowing
10 traditional society by promoting liberty and personal freedom. The question, however, “is whether Protestantism has preserved its initial vision during the course of its historical evolution.”⁷⁸ Has Protestantism failed Latin America?

Míguez-Bonino answers yes to this question on two levels. On the first level he argues that Protestant individualism “privatises” faith, while
15 absolutising the distinction between the secular (outward) and the religious (inner) realms of the individual. He strongly voices his criticisms of this type of individualism in the following:

20 Have we not been in double error, leaving the world to itself or to the devil as if Christ had not already conquered the world, . . . Has not this same error been the reason why the insistence on the personal character of the gospel has become frequently corrupted into an individualism obsessed with the believer's own blessedness, and disinterested in the life of the world, and irresponsible
25 individualism, a “sacred egoism”, which is the most blatant contradiction of the gospel?⁷⁹

Míguez-Bonino argues that though Luther never intended his doctrine of the “two kingdoms” to be understood as a justification for spiritual isolationism, the doctrine failed to provide a way of conveying Luther's liberating concepts of the “religious” life into the “public” realm.⁸⁰ Luther had to compromise or “tame”

⁷⁶Míguez-Bonino, *Doing Theology in a Revolutionary Situation*, 1975, 10.

⁷⁷Míguez-Bonino, *Toward a Christian Political Ethics*, 1983, 62.

⁷⁸Alves, *Protestantism and Repression*, 1979, 14.

⁷⁹Míguez-Bonino, “Witness in a de-Christianised Continent,” 1961, 104-105.

⁸⁰Míguez-Bonino, *Toward a Christian Political Ethics*, 1983, 25.

his liberating message and “evangelical power.” As a result, the inner religious life became captive to the dominant political structures.

On a second level, Míguez-Bonino believes that Protestantism has failed because of its link to “the neo-colonial-imperialist expansion of the largely Protestant countries into Latin America.”⁸¹ He believes that Latin American Protestantism claimed and assumed the role that Latin American liberal elites had assigned it in the transition from a traditional society to the modern bourgeois world.⁸² It is not difficult to find similar arguments elsewhere. James Goff, who served as a missionary in Colombia, Peru and Nicaragua, has explained how Protestant missionaries have generally been developmentalists.⁸³ Many of them, and their churches, refuse to challenge the dependent capitalism of Latin America. He explains why this is so:

In their cultural baggage the missionaries took with them a middle-class US ideology which includes a commitment to the capitalist free enterprise economic system, a suspicion of socialism, a fear of revolution and a horror of Marxism.⁸⁴

Goff argues that these missionaries inculcated these ideas into the minds of generations of Latin Americans, many who were trained for church leadership positions.

In light of this reality, Míguez-Bonino distinguishes three ‘families’ of Protestants in Latin America, distinguished by ideology rather than by confessional tradition.

1) The Charismatic Family — These people “experience a common immediacy of the Spirit, a liberating and transforming experience opening a new realm of existence, ‘the life in the Spirit’ characterised by joy, freedom and love.” Míguez-Bonino contends that their expectancy of miracles (tongues, healing, prophecy) and the signs of the communal solidarity (mutual help, care of the needy) are “not so much anticipations of the coming Kingdom, much less

⁸¹Míguez-Bonino, “The Political Attitude of Protestants in Latin America,” 1972, 4.

⁸²Míguez-Bonino, *Toward a Christian Political Ethics*, 1983, 62ff.

⁸³Goff, “Protestantism in Latin America,” 1987, 58.

⁸⁴*Ibid.*

signs of a reality which has to be extended to the whole of society; rather they are the external *rayonnement* of the spiritual life. The Church is the realm where the life becomes available and consequently the invitation to participate in the fellowship is the most significant form of service.”⁸⁵ In another article, Míguez-Bonino says that these Protestant Christians “refuse to take any responsibility for social process. To them, religion belongs to the individual, private sphere.”⁸⁶ “Every intent to relate faith and Christian doctrine to the public sphere is considered an ‘intrusion’ which violates both the ‘lay’ character of the public sphere and the ‘spiritual’ purity of the faith.”

10 2) The Revolutionary Family — These Christians “hear the Gospel as a call for justice which has to be understood in terms of the historical conditions of neo-colonial and capitalist oppression and dependence in which we live. The answer of faith must therefore take the nature of a historical commitment to the struggle for liberation.”⁸⁷ They call for the radical transformation of the social, economic and political structures of Latin America.

15 3) The Conservative Family — These Christians feel that they are “simply continuing the embodiment and depository of the ‘normative’ Christian faith, the ‘real’ Church over against the sect, group and movement.”⁸⁸ The Church, they would argue, is “charged with the preservation and transmission of a religious tradition.” They are the defenders of the institutional democracy, classical forms of freedom, socio-economic developmentalism and the Western capitalistic enterprise. For them, what is at stake is the Christian value of freedom, defined in terms of “the categories of liberal thought and translated into the common liberties of elections, press, commerce, etc.”⁸⁹ “It defines itself more evidently in its pathological form in groups such as ‘Tradition, family and

⁸⁵Míguez-Bonino, “A Latin American Attempt to Locate the Question of Unity,” 1974, 214.

⁸⁶Míguez-Bonino, “The Political Attitude of Protestants in Latin America,” 1972, 4.

⁸⁷Míguez-Bonino, “A Latin American Attempt to Locate the Question of Unity,” 1974, 214-215.

⁸⁸*Ibid.*, 215.

⁸⁹Míguez-Bonino, “The Political Attitude of Protestants in Latin America,” 1972, 6.

property', or 'Christians concerned'.⁹⁰ This group can also have a militant character about it that takes action when it believes its cultural-ideological and/or its religio-theological aspects — are challenged.

Míguez-Bonino divides Latin American Protestant into these families because they are “structurally, administratively, liturgically, theologically shaped and institutionalised by and within a certain socio-political economic system.” They have their own ideologies, their own particular ways of understanding and representing reality in relation to their colonial past. He believes that Western-capitalistic society has “distorted the Gospel beyond recognition, and that evangelism, prayer, worship, and personal devotions have been held captive to an individualistic, other-worldly, success-crazy, legalistic destruction of the Gospel.”⁹¹ For too long, he says “the Church has been seen smoothly accompanying the life of society. For too many people the Gospel and the American way of life have been synonymous. Private foreign investment, cultural influence, and foreign aid have too often been seen as closely allied to mission.”⁹²

Míguez-Bonino, therefore, believes that there is a spiritual crisis in Latin American Christianity. The Christian faith is being torn into several different and opposing directions. Some people resist an oppressive State out of Christian obedience and other people support the same State because of what they consider Christian obedience.

Christianity faces in Latin America the crisis unleashed by the collapse of the two historical projects to which it had become intimately related. Catholicism suffered the first crisis at the time of the emancipation. To the extent to which it has clung to the old, semifeudal society, it still has this crisis in front of it. This is what Father Gera was referring to when he spoke of the “minority groups, with a position of exasperated reaction prolonging the colonial religio-political monism.” “Progressive Catholicism,” updated to Vatican II, and Protestantism share the crisis of the modernistic-liberal ideology. Co-opted into the colonial and the neo-colonial systems as religious sanction and ideological

⁹⁰Míguez-Bonino, “A Latin American Attempt to Locate the Question of Unity,” 1974, 215.

⁹¹Míguez-Bonino, “The Present Crisis in Mission,” 1974, 41.

⁹²*Ibid.*, 44.

justification, Christianity faces an agonising experience of self-criticism.⁹³

The Protestant and Roman Catholic churches in Latin America are struggling to define what it means to be a Christian, and what it means to be the Church. They
5 are asking, “Which one of the above ideological families represents the Church?” or “Where is the Church?”.

10 This is the real scandal that we face and no distinction of principle and application, of dogmatics and ethics, of corporate neutrality and personal commitment can help us at this point. We are up against conflicting and mutually exclusive understandings of what it means to be a Christian in Latin America in the last third of the twentieth century!⁹⁴

⁹³Míguez-Bonino, *Doing Theology in a Revolutionary Situation*, 1975, 17.

⁹⁴Míguez-Bonino, “A Latin American Attempt to Locate the Question of Unity,” 1974, 213.

2.2 FUNDAMENTAL THEMES

The Cuban Revolution in 1959 is heralded as the most decisive event in modern Latin American history because of its impact upon social, political, economic and theological developments in that continent. Its significance lies in its stand against foreign domination and interference and its offering of new hope to those in the poorest sectors of society. It gave South America its “first authentic successful *Latin American* interpretation of Marxist theory.”⁹⁵ Cuban Marxism forced a redefinition of Marxist theory in Latin America because it was strictly interpreted in light of Cuban history and culture. This inspired many people from the whole of Latin America to re-evaluate the value of Marxism and revolutionary concepts. “The Cuban Revolution,” Míguez-Bonino recounts, “had a great impact. It was evidence to many in Latin America that there was another way, not only revolution, but socialism.”⁹⁶

These events forced Catholics and Protestants alike to re-evaluate their theology and its ability to offer solutions to Latin America’s political and social problems. Míguez-Bonino recalls: “The failure [of the Alliance of Progress] challenged us to find out more precisely what went wrong.”⁹⁷ Though both the Catholic and Protestant churches rejected what had happened in Cuba, because of Castro’s official atheist position, in the early 1960s individual theologians began to raise questions of whether Marxist theory and revolution had a theological significance, especially for the poor. Míguez-Bonino explains:

The Cuban Revolution produced two motivations which were channelled into one effect. In some it evoked hope and in others it provoked terror. Some people wanted to renew the church against socialism and others wanted to find a socialist alternative. But the practical effect of both reactions was to go and work with the poor.⁹⁸

⁹⁵Costas, *Theology of the Crossroads in Contemporary Latin America*, 1976, 64.

⁹⁶Smith, *The Emergence of Liberation Theology*, 1991, 109.

⁹⁷Ibid.

⁹⁸Ibid., 110.

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s in every Latin American country, a growing number of progressive Roman Catholic and Protestant Christians began to wrestle with Latin America's socio-economic and political problems. These Christians began to interpret their faith and obedience in terms of a whole-

5 hearted and passionate participation in a socio-political-cultural process which progressive Latin American theologians call "the struggle for liberation."

Míguez-Bonino described this change in consciousness in the following way:

10 The change of consciousness did not come for most of these Christians — particularly for those coming from higher or middle class communities — as a sudden conversion or illumination. It developed gradually from an originally naïve philanthropic commitment which tried to alleviate the dire conditions of the large sectors of the population. Poverty, hunger, child-mortality, endemic diseases, illiteracy soon began to yield their secret: they

15 grew out of certain class structure, and a "world division of labour" which condemned "third world countries" to permanent dependence, a political system which perpetuates and strengthens these relations, an ideology which justifies it and into which the Christian religion has been co-opted. A serious attempt to practice

20 charity has landed many of these Christians into political and economic analysis and action. This is the original fact.⁹⁹

Among Christian lay-people the new consciousness meant a move toward armed struggle, student protest or work in the slum areas and shanty towns. Many Catholic clergy organised themselves to denounce and reject the status quo in

25 Latin American society. Several clerical groups associated with revolutionary movements or began to take direct political participation.

Of course, this new consciousness required a new way of doing theology. If Christians and churches were going to reasonably and realistically explore the relation of theology to the human situation and the relation of the Church to

30 the struggle of the poor, Míguez-Bonino believed that they needed to address the following:

35 *What is the reality of which theology speaks? The response is now clear: this concrete reality in which we find ourselves—a reality that in Latin America it is necessary to designate with such concrete terms as "conscientisation," "imperialism," "world market," "monopolies," "social classes," "developmentalism,"*

⁹⁹Míguez-Bonino, "Theology and Theologians of the New World: II. Latin America," 1976, 196.

"oligarchies." Theology speaks of the struggle of the people for their freedom.¹⁰⁰

If churches are to engage in the struggle for liberation of the oppressed on an accountable level, then they will have to interact with revolutionaries, politicians, scientists, and educationists. Churches will need to become familiar with the language of the people and learn to speak of political-economic structures, systems of production, and international relations.¹⁰¹ This proposal, Míguez-Bonino reminds us, is not new to theology; but rather, it offers a new way of doing it:

10 . . . theology has always had this connotation. It has always spoken
consciously or not (unconsciously most of the time) of this political
reality of human life; it has always opted well or badly (badly in
many cases) for an ideological alternative. Today the instruments of
15 socio-political analysis permit us to bring to our consciousness this
fact and adopt it positively. Thus we have, perhaps for the first time,
the possibility of theologising the total meaning of theology and not
just certain of its contents that later are inserted into a human
process, which has not been taken into consideration before and
20 frequently denies the very contents themselves. This is the new
theological situation that today is beginning to make itself clear in
our continent. And I believe that no matter how dissonant and
disturbing it sounds, at times (or perhaps precisely for that reason)
it must be seriously taken into consideration.¹⁰²

In the following pages we will explore what this new method or “way of
25 doing theology” looked like, focusing on three fundamental themes essential to
Míguez-Bonino’s earlier books—*Doing Theology in a Revolutionary Situation*
(1975), and *Christians and Marxists* (1976). These themes are: the use of
Marxism, the relationship between theory and praxis, and the association of
Political Action to Eschatological Expectations.

30 *The Use of Marxism*

We begin with this theme as the first topic for review because it is this
issue that essentially occupied Míguez-Bonino’s thoughts in the two books just
mentioned. He wrote them to defend the use of Marxism and to fend off any

¹⁰⁰Míguez-Bonino, “New Theological Perspectives,” 1972, 82.

¹⁰¹Míguez-Bonino, “The Present Crisis in Mission,” 1971, 42ff.

¹⁰²Míguez-Bonino, “New Theological Perspectives,” 1972, 83.

criticism accusing liberation theologians of being like the German Christians of the World War II era, who allowed their faith to be subverted by an alien ideology.¹⁰³ His sensitivity to this criticism is due to the opposition that the Christians for Socialism movement in Latin America received in the early to mid-
5 1970s.

The first criticisms of this group came from within Chile, where the movement held its first meeting in 1972. The Archbishop of Santiago warned even before the meeting began: “Christianity is reduced to a revolutionary class struggle. . . . Christians are launched into the struggle for a Marxist
10 revolution.”¹⁰⁴ The Archbishop believed that by using Marx’s criticisms to describe the struggle of the poor in Latin America, the movement’s members were renouncing their Christian faith.¹⁰⁵ Later, criticisms came from various European voices and specifically from the Vatican. Rome gave a firm warning after the meeting:

15 A document from the Holy See was sent to bishops and papal nuncios in 1972 warning against the implications of liberation theology. In December 1972 the Sacred Congregation of Catholic Education in Rome also sent a letter to the Latin American
20 hierarchy criticising the “increased politicisation of Catholic education” and the tendencies in CELAM-sponsored projects of “being oriented consciously or unconsciously in many cases toward questioning, criticism, and flirting with negative ideologies.”¹⁰⁶

Two years after the Christians for Socialism conference, Míguez-Bonino found it not only essential to defend the use of Marxism but to insist that in Latin
25 America the association of Christianity with Marxism was “indeed *necessary*.”¹⁰⁷ When he delivered the London Lecture in Contemporary Christianity in 1974 (*Christians and Marxists*, 1976), he began by explaining how Christians in Latin America have made a pilgrimage to Marxism.

¹⁰³Míguez-Bonino, *Doing Theology in a Revolutionary Situation*, 1975, 87.

¹⁰⁴*Ibid.*, 106.

¹⁰⁵Eagleson, ed., *Christians and Socialism*, 1975, 42. Letter from Cardinal Silva to Gonzalo Arroyo, March 3, 1972.

¹⁰⁶Smith, *The Emergence of Liberation Theology*, 1991, 186.

¹⁰⁷Míguez-Bonino, *Christians and Marxists*, 1976, 8.

It is my thesis that, as Christians, confronted by the inhuman conditions of existence prevailing in the continent, they have tried to make their Christian faith historically relevant, they have been increasingly compelled to seek an analysis and historical programme for their Christian obedience. At this point, the dynamics of the historical process, both in its objective conditions and its theoretical development, have led them, through the failure of several remedial and reformist alternatives, to discover the unsubstitutable relevance of Marxism.¹⁰⁸

5
10 Why did these progressive, Latin American Christians turn to Marxism? Why did they find it useful? Why does Míguez-Bonino believe that Marxist criticism is “necessary,” “indispensable,” and an “unavoidable historical mediation” for Latin American Christians? To understand more fully *why* Míguez-Bonino and others adopt Marxism and *how* they use it, we must look at
15 Míguez-Bonino’s summation of Marx’s criticisms of religion in full detail.

Marx’s criticisms include various components. It involves first of all his critique of Hegelian objective idealism and his development of historical materialism. In his first political writings, Marx critiqued Hegel’s method, accusing it of making reality the product of a mystical “Idea” or Spirit.¹⁰⁹
20 Frederick Engels, Marx’s collaborator, concurred. For him “Hegel’s idealism made Spirit or the Absolute Idea the primary creative force in the world. Hegel recognised dialectical development and change in the world but he attributed the change to Spirit. “Thus,” says Engels, “nature and history for Hegel are nothing more than a divine ‘Idea’ or plan working its way through the world.”¹¹⁰ It is
25 against this view that Marx and Engels stressed the historical, material forces of the world and the subordinate role of ideas. Engels writes:

30 The Hegelian premundane existence of the “absolute idea,” the “pre-existence of the logical categories” before the world existed, is nothing more than the fantastic survival of the belief in the existence of an extramundane creator; that the material, sensuously perceptible world to which we ourselves belong is the only reality; and that our consciousness and thinking, however suprasensuous they may seem, are the product of a material, bodily organ, the

¹⁰⁸Ibid., 19.

¹⁰⁹McGovern, *Marxism*, 1980, 19.

¹¹⁰Ibid., 52. See also Marx and Engels, *On Religion*, 1964, 222ff.

brain. Matter is not a product of mind, but mind itself is merely the highest product of matter. This is of course, pure materialism.¹¹¹

Related to this general critique of Hegel and the development of historical materialism, Marx made a more pointed and specific critique of religion—
 5 ideological, philosophical, and secular. His first criticism of religion is the ideological criticism. Míguez-Bonino tells us of Marx's dissatisfaction with the aristocratic Prussian state and the way in which it presented itself as a Christian state. Marx believed that Christianity functioned only as an ideological tool to justify the feudal order, the socio-economic status quo. The state and the social
 10 aristocracy, he argued, used religion to maintain its position in society, associating the notion of being a Christian with support for the actions of the state. This allowed the state to give its secular ambitions and actions sacred power. Míguez-Bonino quotes Marx and Engels' *Gesamtausgabe*:

15 . . . in their hands religion acquires a polemical bitterness impregnated with political tendencies and becomes, in a more or less conscious manner, simply a sacred cloak to hide desires which are both very secular and at the same time very imaginary.¹¹²

The religious element in any society, then, is understood by Marx in its pejorative sense, as an ideological screen that hides reality. Its function "is to
 20 veil the contradictions inherent in a historical mode of production in defence of the dominant class, so that those who are dominated will not raise their consciousness to the need to transform reality."¹¹³ Religion originates out of a sense of helplessness before the powers of nature and society. It continues because of human misery; it is used by the ruling classes to pacify the poor and
 25 justify the rule of the privileged class.¹¹⁴ Thus, Míguez-Bonino concludes that for Marx religion obscures reality with a sacred, ontological character that allows the poor of our world to accept their conditions:

As an ideology, [religion] hides from man the real nature of his alienation. On the one hand, it offers a false remedy to man's

¹¹¹Marx and Engels, *On Religion*, 1964, 231.

¹¹²*Ibid.*, 41f. Míguez-Bonino, *Christians and Marxists*, 1976, 43-44.

¹¹³ Westhelle, *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*, s. v. "Ideology."

¹¹⁴McGovern, "Atheism: Is It Essential to Marxism?" 1985, 490.

sickness—a future or transcendent heaven of peace and unity in which man alienates his human force and thus is lulled into accepting his present real hell. . . . On the other hand, religion invests the present misery with a sacred character: it is the ‘opiate of the people’ in the negative sense of putting them to sleep.¹¹⁵

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Marx’s second criticism of religion follows from the first—it is his philosophical criticism. Míguez-Bonino does not spend much time explaining this criticism or reflecting upon it. In fact, he treats it as a secondary point under the heading of the first criticism. He does this, we suspect, because Marx’s philosophical criticism of religion is fundamental to his ideological criticism. Míguez-Bonino briefly tells us that Marx adopted Feuerbach’s thesis: “Man makes religion, religion does not make man. In other words, religion is the self-consciousness and self-feeling of man who has either not yet found or has already lost himself.”¹¹⁶ Or, using Míguez-Bonino’s rendering, “God is the projection of man’s unrealised humanity, of his creativity and perfection.”¹¹⁷ Religion, then, functions as a tool to invert reality, which in turn inverts the world and individual consciousness. For Marx the issue was clear: “The criticism of religion ends with the teaching that man is the highest being for man, hence with the categorical imperative to overthrow all relations in which man is a debased, enslaved, forsaken, despicable being. . . .”¹¹⁸ Engels wrote in a similar vein in *Anti-Dühring*, “All religion, however, is nothing but the fantastic reflection in men’s minds of those external forces which control their daily life, a reflection in which the terrestrial forces assume the form of supernatural forces.”¹¹⁹ Marx and Engels exposed religion as humankind’s own creation and believed that atheism could remove the false consciousness that religion allows and return people to their humanity. Marx, according to Míguez-Bonino, saw the secular state as the concrete embodiment of this realisation.

¹¹⁵Míguez-Bonino, *Christians and Marxists*, 1976, 49.

¹¹⁶Marx, and Engels, *On Religion*, 1964, 41.

¹¹⁷Míguez-Bonino, *Christians and Marxists*, 1976, 45.

¹¹⁸Marx and Engels, *On Religion*, 1964, 46.

¹¹⁹*Ibid.*, 147. McGovern, *Marxism*, 1980, 253.

Third, is Marx's secular criticism of religion. Míguez-Bonino explains that for Marx, the capitalist, liberal state functioned exactly like religion:

5 it dichotomises man into an ideal projection, 'the citizen', in which rationality, justice, equality are (idealistically) realised, but the real man continues to live in the world of inequality, injustice and egoism, 'so that people, equals in the heavenly sphere of their political world, were unequal in the earthly existence of society: just as Christians are equal in Heaven but unequal on earth'.¹²⁰

10 The liberal state, which advocates "unrestricted expansion of individualistic egoism," fosters the dualism of the ideal and the real person and permits each person to live in an imaginary world that is absolutely detached from the historical, real world. The liberal doctrine of individual freedom encourages people in the belief that they can live their lives without social interferences, concern and solidarity.

15 An explanation of how this dualism occurs in liberal societies is found in Marx's discussion of "the fetishism of commodities" in *Das Kapital*.¹²¹ Míguez-Bonino summarises Marx's argument: Human beings first produced only commodities that they could use themselves, such as food to eat. However, at some point they began to produce commodities that they could exchange for other
20 goods. This gave the produced commodities an unnatural "representative quality." The commodities no longer simply represented the labour of the worker but had a greater value, because they could be used to acquire other goods. At that point fetishism begins: when human beings ascribe to their commodities an objectified value alien from their labour, the commodities are
25 eventually given a life of their own. They are understood to possess "creative ability, the capacity to grow and to reproduce [themselves]." "Money," Marx tells us, "is the general *value* of all things, constituted in itself . . . It has deprived everything else of all value, both in the world of nature and in the world of man. Money is the essence of work and the existence of man alienated from himself

¹²⁰Míguez-Bonino, *Christians and Marxists*, 1976, 45.

¹²¹*Ibid.*, 47.

and this estranged essence dominates him and is worshipped by him.”¹²² In other words, money and “commodities become ‘subjects’ acting apparently by themselves while living human beings become objects.”¹²³ Marx calls this economic inversion “fetishism” because it invests the qualities of life and power in an image which humanity has made itself, while alienating the worker from his or her work.

Franz Hinkelammert, a German economist and theologian who lives in Costa Rica, sees this notion of fetishism at the core of Marx’s rejection of capitalism and his critique of religion. Capitalism, like religion, encourages people to “relegate their decision-making power to a commodity market system. They accept no responsibility for the consequences of their action and project responsibility onto God or the gods of private property, armies, or history itself.”¹²⁴

Both the Medellín and Puebla conferences are also critical of capitalism on similar grounds. Members of the Puebla meeting concluded:

capitalist liberalism, the idolatrous worship of wealth in individualist terms . . . views “profit as the chief spur to economic progress, free competition as the supreme law of economics, and private ownership of the means of production as an absolute right, having no limits or concomitant social obligations.” . . . capitalist liberalism persists in its original form, or has even retrogressed to more primitive forms with even less social sensitivity.¹²⁵

Míguez-Bonino draws a similar conclusion:

Capitalism, therefore, which is precisely the cult of this hypostatisation, the cult of money, is the perfect form of religion: it robs man of this relation to himself, to his neighbour, to the world by mediating it through this fetishistic creation, money.¹²⁶

Why, then, does Marxism have an “indispensable significance” for Latin America? Míguez-Bonino gives us four contributions that Marxism makes.¹²⁷

¹²²Ibid., 46.

¹²³Berryman, *Liberation Theology*, 1987, 149.

¹²⁴McGovern, *Liberation Theology and Its Critics*, 1990, 143. Hinkelammert, *The Ideological Weapons of Death: A Theological Critique of Capitalism*, 1977, 15.

¹²⁵Hennelly, *Liberation Theology*, 1990, 244-245.

¹²⁶Míguez-Bonino, *Christians and Marxists*, 1976, 47.

¹²⁷Ibid., 92-94.

First, it understands history not as a product of human theories, consciousness or ideas, but as an outcome of human activity that works to transform reality in order to meet human needs. Second, human beings exist only in communal unity and relationships, not as independent individuals. Míguez-Bonino tells us that

5 “society is not an aggregate of autonomous individuals but . . . a network of relationships which form a human being’s existence.” Third, Marxist dogma explains the fact of class struggle and the revolutionary role of the oppressed class. Marx described the capitalist industrial world as being founded upon the

10 “antagonism of classes,” where wealth is increasingly concentrated in the hands of the elite few and the majority of people are required to sell their labour. Marx believed that eventually the poor majority would destroy the capitalist system and create a new form of organising work, production, distribution and property. Lastly, Marxism offers an important indispensable contribution to all struggles for liberation because of its notion of praxis:

15 [Praxis] means, at least, that true knowledge can only be acquired starting from the concrete actions of men, that theory has meaning only as it leads to a course of action which proves significant and that action itself becomes the test of theory. Truth is not found in

20 the contemplation of a Platonic world of ideas or in the exploration of subjective consciousness but in the scientific analysis of the activity of human beings within the conditions of their social situation. Knowledge finds its place as an activity in the sense of its objective conditions. Revolutionary action is not an intrusion in the world: it is a response to reality and, in turn, it moves the world

25 towards its realisation.¹²⁸

These provide us with four clues as to why and how Marxism is used by liberation theologians. Míguez-Bonino concludes that: “The criticism of religion is valuable in so far as it is a criticism of bourgeois society which unveils its dynamics and provides the revolutionary proletariat with adequate theoretical

30 instruments for carrying out its historical mission of destroying and overcoming this society.”¹²⁹ Though Míguez-Bonino does not draw our attention to it, the

¹²⁸Ibid., 93.

¹²⁹Ibid., 50.

usefulness of Marxism for Latin America corresponds to the usefulness of history in Marx's work:

5 *The task of history*, therefore, once the *world beyond the truth* has disappeared, is to establish the *truth of this world*. The immediate
 10 *task of philosophy*, which is at the service of history, once the *saintly form* of human self-alienation has been unmasked, is to
 unmask self-alienation in its *unholy forms*. Thus the criticism of heaven turns into the criticism of the earth, the *criticism of religion*
 into the *criticism of right* and the *criticism of theology* into the *criticism of politics*.¹³⁰

What history does for the world, Marxism is understood by many Latin American theologians as able to do for their continent. This reminds us of what Míguez-Bonino asked earlier: To what extent can the Marxist criticism of religion help us to expose the shortcomings or betrayals in our obedience and to correct our
 15 attitudes? Once structural-alienations (capitalism and the unjust social system) have been exposed a person's self-alienation is exposed, which allows the individual to inquire how their obedience and attitudes can be corrected.

Theory, Praxis, and The Hermeneutical Circulation

20 In *Doing Theology in a Revolutionary Situation*, Míguez-Bonino explains how conservative theologians frequently conjure up "the ghost of 'German Christians' and their monstrous accommodation to Nazi ideology" to anathematise the theology of liberation.¹³¹ These conservatives argue that like the Nazi German theologians, liberation theologians have allowed their theology to become enslaved by revolutionary ideology.

25 It appears as the hopeless prisoner of a hermeneutical circle, the spell of which it cannot break. The text of Scripture and tradition is forced into the Procrustean bed of ideology, and the theologian who has fallen prey of this procedure is forever condemned to listen
 30 only to the echo of his own ideology. There is no redemption for this theology, because it has muzzled the Word of God in its transcendence and freedom.¹³²

Conservatives believe that they carefully guard against all ideological assaults on theology because they successfully maintain a division between Scriptural

¹³⁰Marx and Engels, *On Religion*, 1964, 42.

¹³¹Míguez-Bonino, *Doing Theology in a Revolutionary Situation*, 1975, 87.

¹³²*Ibid.* See also Clodovis Boff, *Theology and Praxis*, 1987, 36.

truths and human formulations. They retain a neutral understanding of biblical truth that is free of all ideological positions; they therefore reject liberation theology on the basis that it reduces biblical reality to ethical action and the heresy of humanism. They argue that liberation theology allows the vertical dimension (God's revelation) to be swallowed by the horizontal dimension (human action).

While Juan Luis Segundo traces these "anti-ideological" attitudes through Roman Catholic and Protestant ecclesial sources, Míguez-Bonino believes that the conservative position is based on an appeal to some "absolute Christian truth, or Christian principles, somehow enshrined in Scripture and/or in the pronouncements of the Church."¹³³ Míguez-Bonino calls this appeal "the classical conception of the relationship between truth and practice." Here we can see the influence of Marx's critique of ideologies on Míguez-Bonino's argument.

According to Míguez-Bonino, classic or "academic" European theology has traditionally argued for the existence of an absolute "Truth." This truth exists on its own, apart from the historical realities of the world. It has a complete universe to itself, "which is copied or reproduced in 'correct' propositions, in a theory (namely, a contemplation of this universe) which corresponds to this truth." Then, and only then, can truth be applied to a particular historical situation. Míguez-Bonino describes Western theology as a

process aimed at determining, explicating and possibly vindicating, the correct doctrine, on the basis of a study of the Scriptures and the Tradition, and sometimes with the use of philosophical categories. We go through this process in order to derive from it correct Christian action in all realms of the life of the Christian community.¹³⁴

In another article:

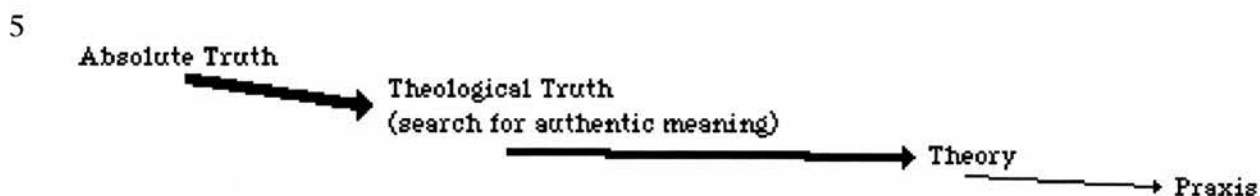
Many times theology has pursued the question of truth as if it were a "logos asarkos" that later one had to "apply": the problem of the working of truth was a second step; first, it had to be apprehended and later put into practice.¹³⁵

¹³³Ibid., 88. Segundo, *The Liberation of Theology*, 1976, 126ff.

¹³⁴Míguez-Bonino, "The Struggle of the Poor and the Church," 1975, 38.

¹³⁵Míguez-Bonino, "New Theological Perspectives," 1972, 85.

In order to have a better circumscription of what Míguez-Bonino is describing, we have prepared the diagram below based on his description of Western theology.



Absolute truth inspires theological truth, which successively assists the theologian in a formulation of a general theory that can define a non-specific and
 10 indiscriminate political praxis. By understanding this relationship as a movement from absolute truth to theological theory and then finally to praxis, European theologians believe that their theology can “remain at some neutral or intermediate level” above “particular ideological projections” and all political conflicts.¹³⁶

15 Theology, then, becomes the process of determining universal truths so that they can later be *connected* or *matched*, in a choiceless fashion, to appropriate corresponding historical situations when they arise. In order for this model to maintain its integrity and be most effective, it is believed by European theologians that the Christian must never reverse or confuse its order, because that
 20 would jeopardise the “Truth” and supplant it with human fabrications, leading to an ideological subjugation of God’s revelation. Truth, Míguez-Bonino explains, must therefore be understood in this model to be “pre-existent to and independent of its historical effectiveness. Its legitimacy has to be tested in relation to this abstract “heaven of truth,” quite apart from its
 25 historicization.”¹³⁷

The diagram is constructed with the arrows decreasing in size to represent Míguez-Bonino’s dissatisfaction with European theology. He questions its ability

¹³⁶Míguez-Bonino, *Doing Theology in a Revolutionary Situation*, 1975, 95.

¹³⁷*Ibid.*

to “operate in some autonomous sphere detached from historical praxis,” believing that it loses the very thing it attempts to protect—God’s revelation.¹³⁸ The best illustration of Míguez-Bonino’s antipathy to this hierarchical, hermeneutical model comes in the form of a story which he uses in several of his

5 articles. He tells about a Puerto Rican professor of theology who was sent to prison because he demonstrated against the carrying out of United States military experiments in his land. He justified his action by appealing to his Christian faith. A fellow prisoner pointed out that the person who sent him to prison could also justify his action by appealing to the same “Christian truth.”

10 This story raises the question: How can the same universal, biblical, and theological truth lead to opposed political responses—defying or supporting a government’s action?¹³⁹

As we can see from the model above, praxis fails to inform theory. This means all theory that has been derived from this model cannot be tested. It is

15 only verifiable in that the Christian has properly formed his/her theory from a correct perception of universal truth. This makes it a subjective model that allows Christians to derive from the same universal truth vastly different and even opposed social actions. Míguez-Bonino concludes, therefore, that “there is no direct route from divine revelation to theology; the mediation of some praxis

20 is inevitable.”¹⁴⁰ He believes that by not allowing praxis to inform theory, European theologians are unable to formulate a proper relationship between God’s revelation and Christian obedience. Any attempt to remain “neutral” by European theologians is, in reality, “assuming a particular analysis and a particular ideological projection.”¹⁴¹

25 Thus far we have been discussing Míguez-Bonino’s depiction of the Western, philosophical, hermeneutical model and the relation of truth, or

¹³⁸Míguez-Bonino, “Historical Praxis and Christian Identity,” 1979, 262.

¹³⁹Míguez-Bonino, *Doing Theology in a Revolutionary Situation*, 1975, 87-88.

¹⁴⁰Míguez-Bonino, “Historical Praxis and Christian Identity,” 1979, 262.

¹⁴¹Míguez-Bonino, *Doing Theology in a Revolutionary Situation*, 1975, 95. See also 101-102.

authentic meaning, to understanding and praxis.¹⁴² Of course, at the root of this philosophical inquiry are the two basic questions: How is the Bible a revelation of God's activity in history? and How do we discern the actions of God within our own situation? Míguez-Bonino informs us that concerning these questions he

5 has been influenced by the work of José Severino Croatto, a colleague of his at the Instituto Superior Evangelico de Estudios Teologicos in Buenos Aires.¹⁴³

In his book *Exodus: A Hermeneutics of Freedom*, Croatto initially locates his hermeneutical discussion both in the realm of metaphysical hermeneutics—the ultimate science of being and knowing—and in the methodological dimension

10 of hermeneutics concerning text interpretation, drawing upon the ideas of H. G. Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur. “Hermeneutics,” Croatto explains, “is a branch of semiotics—while at the same time going beyond it. Hermeneutics is the science of understanding the meaning that human beings inscribe in their practices, as well as in their interpretation by word, text, or other practices.”¹⁴⁴ Therefore,

15 hermeneutics has two dimensions. It attempts to clarify the relationship of truth and human understanding, and it also involves exegetical interpretation of Scriptural text.

Nowhere in his work does Míguez-Bonino give us a critical exegesis of biblical text for liberation theology. He always leaves that task to more qualified,

20 biblical scholars than himself. However, this does not mean that he is not concerned with the interpretation of God's word and its relation to the

¹⁴²Hermeneutics means theory of interpretation, especially of Scripture. However, under the influences of Schleiermacher (1768-1834), Dilthey (1833-1911) and Heidegger (1889-1976) there has been a shift to a more philosophical understanding of the term. Heidegger investigated the existential conditions of the human search for authentic meaning. His thought has had a substantial influence on philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer, who attempted to clarify the way in which truth manifests itself in the act of understanding, and theologian Rudolf Bultmann, who concerned himself with a phenomenological analysis of human existence to express the Gospel and the Christian life as a genuine option for modern people. Coggins and Houlden, eds., *A Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation* s. v. “Hermeneutics” by Werner G. Jeanrond. Also Fairweather and McDonald, *The Quest for Christian Ethics*, 1984, 186.

¹⁴³Míguez-Bonino, *Doing Theology in a Revolutionary Situation*, 1975, 105, n12.

¹⁴⁴Croatto, *Exodus*, 1981, 1. Originally published as *Liberación y libertad: pautas hermenéuticas*, 1978.

theologian and his/her theology. As we shall see, he is very much concerned with the practical issues of hermeneutical interpretation and the way theologians interact with the historical, biblical text in a modern, political situation. His discussions on hermeneutics, as well as those of many other liberation theologians, reflect the modern, twentieth century understanding that biblical interpretation ought to be more than the purely historical and philological analysis of biblical texts, and that the faith response provoked by these texts should be the primary concern of biblical interpretation.¹⁴⁵

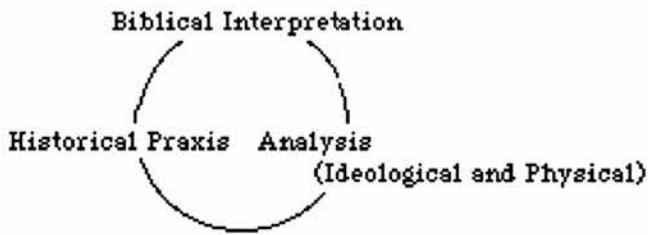
Therefore, our discussion from this point on will be limited to the sense of hermeneutics that includes the theory of biblical interpretation and its relationship to the faith *response* of the Christian. We have already seen that Míguez-Bonino wishes to broaden the theological task so that theology is no longer simply a matter of interpreting eternal truths but is concerned with the total society in which it performs—economic, political and cultural. Thus, Míguez-Bonino remarks that we cannot derive direct political conclusions from a cursory examination of biblical truths, because “there is no direct route from divine revelation to theology.”¹⁴⁶ Míguez-Bonino rejects both revolutionary and pacifist “reductionism,” insisting that it is a dangerous shortcut. Theology’s method is a much more complicated process that involves two mediations: the determination of historical conditions and biblical interpretation. The interaction of these two mediations is what Míguez-Bonino calls the “Hermeneutical Circulation.”¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁵Coggins and Houlden, eds., *A Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation* s. v. “Hermeneutics” by Werner G. Jeanround.

¹⁴⁶Míguez-Bonino, “Historical Praxis and Christian Identity,” 1979, 262.

¹⁴⁷Míguez-Bonino, *Doing Theology in a Revolutionary Situation*, 1975, 102.

Here again, a diagram may be helpful:



While recognising that theological reflection cannot prescind from politics and be non-temporal, Míguez-Bonino argues that theological reflection must include an analysis of the situation in which the Christian community is located.¹⁴⁸ This entails at least two things: identifying the ideological framework which guides the Christian community and determining the physical conditions and possibilities of the present situation.¹⁴⁹

With regard to analysing the ideological framework, Míguez-Bonino defines ideology both negatively and positively. He adopts Marx's negative connotation, giving ideology a pejorative meaning as a set of ideas that impede recognition of the true Christian message, but he also gives ideology a positive meaning, as an "instrument through which our Christian obedience gains coherence and unity."¹⁵⁰ He speaks of the positive consequences of an ideological projection:

But there is also a positive consequence of the same fact. Within the historical mediation of our Christian obedience, i.e., the struggle for liberation in the terms that have been defined, there is an ideological projection (now in a positive sense) which provides the terms for a significant criticism of our praxis. The social (collective) appropriation of the means of production, the suppression of a classist society, the de-alienation of work, the suppression of a slave consciousness, and the reinstallation of man as an agent of his own history are the theoretical hypotheses on the basis of which revolutionary praxis is predicated. They become, therefore, *intrinsic tests* for such praxis. A consistent engagement demands a constant criticism in these terms.

Míguez-Bonino, therefore, does not deny or ignore the warnings of conservative European and North American theologians who argue that

¹⁴⁸Míguez-Bonino, "Historical Praxis and Christian Identity," 1979, 262.

¹⁴⁹Míguez-Bonino, *Doing Theology in a Revolutionary Situation*, 1975, 103.

¹⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 95.

liberation theologians allow their theology to be influenced by their ideology. Instead, he affirms that all theology is ideologically biased and that reflection cannot be done in an “ideologically aseptic environment.” He insists that theology “is always reactionary, reformist, or revolutionary.”¹⁵¹ There can never be a neutral, “anti-ideological” theology, because theology always discloses a view of reality and a projection of it that corresponds to a particular historical situation.¹⁵² He writes elsewhere:

10 We are now aware of the fact of ideology, and the role of ideology in society, and this in several respects enters into our theology. We know now, I think, beyond much doubt that ideas do not appear out of the blue or by a sort of spontaneous generation, but that they are born within the context of certain common social representations of ideology. If our churches are part and parcel of certain classes, 15 certain groups and certain sectors of society, the sociology of knowledge will tell us that most probably our ideology will be related to the ideology of those sectors of which we are part.¹⁵³

In his books *The Liberation of Theology* and *Faith And Ideologies* Juan Luis Segundo also argues, like Míguez-Bonino, that all faith expresses itself in some ideology and all ideologies presuppose some underlying faith. He defines 20 ideology without its pejorative connotations as a “system of goals and means that serves as the necessary backdrop for any human option or line of action.”¹⁵⁴ He insists that while faith is certainly not an ideology, faith has sense and meaning only insofar as it serves as the foundation stone for ideologies. Therefore, he argues that a faith without ideologies is a dead faith.

25 We can see that the arguments by both Míguez-Bonino and Segundo echo the conclusions of the 1966 World Conference on Church and Society in Geneva. At that meeting ideology was assessed in a non-pejorative sense. It was defined as “the theoretical and analytical structure of thought which undergirds successful action to realise revolutionary change in society or to undergird and 30 justify its status quo. Its usefulness is proved in the success of its practice. Its

¹⁵¹Ibid., 99.

¹⁵²Míguez-Bonino sites a study of Chilean Pentecostalism, Ibid., 94.

¹⁵³Míguez-Bonino, “The Struggle of the Poor and the Church,” 1975, 39.

¹⁵⁴Segundo, *The Liberation of Theology*, 1991, 102.

validity is that it expresses the self-understanding, the hopes and values of the social group that holds it, and guides the practice of that group.”¹⁵⁵ It was also recognised that “Christians, like all other human beings, are affected by ideological perspectives.” The challenge that came with the Conference was to
5 work out the relationship between faith and ideologies.¹⁵⁶

If we are to understand the situation in which the Christian community exists, we not only have to examine its ideological framework, but Míguez-Bonino insists that we also have to determine the physical conditions and possibilities of a situation through the use of social sciences. The tools of socio-politico-
10 economic analysis are indispensable, and for Míguez-Bonino those tools are found within the framework of Marxist theory, as we discussed earlier.

The second principle of the “Hermeneutical Circulation,” according to Míguez-Bonino’s model, is to “read the direction of the biblical text, particularly of the witness of the basic, germinal events of the faith.”¹⁵⁷ With a critical
15 rereading of the biblical text, Míguez-Bonino is convinced that the believer will rediscover the liberating thrust or “direction” of the germinal events of faith. The person will see such concepts as liberation, righteousness, shalom, the poor and love in “God’s dealing with Israel, the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus, and the hope of the Kingdom.” The liberative direction of these events
20 will become available to our Christian praxis in the present, thus guiding and shaping Christian obedience.

Here, of course, we see Míguez-Bonino dealing with the issue that we stumbled on earlier concerning the relationship between God’s revelation and praxis. He asks: “How do the generating nuclei of the faith (Salvation History)
25 and its historical mediation (intervention) (Church Tradition) act critically on the revolutionary praxis of the Christian?”¹⁵⁸ Or more simply stated: How does

¹⁵⁵Van der Bent, *Vital Ecumenical Concerns*, 1986, 163.

¹⁵⁶ Westhelle, *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*, s. v. “Ideology.”

¹⁵⁷Míguez-Bonino, *Doing Theology in a Revolutionary Situation*, 1975, 103, also 98.

¹⁵⁸Míguez-Bonino, “New Theological Perspectives,” 1972, 86.

God's revelation relate to our contemporary reading of the Bible and Christian obedience in a historical situation (the historical mediation)? Here we follow Míguez-Bonino's outline in *Doing Theology in a Revolutionary Situation* and discuss his interpretation theory.

5 Míguez-Bonino insists that only as we see and understand the social location of a text, its past interpretations and its present readings can we arrive at a hermeneutical circulation "between the text in its historicity and our own historical reading of it in obedience."¹⁵⁹ Therefore, the text has a "double location." First, the biblical text must be examined with respect to its own
10 particularity. For this reason, Míguez-Bonino believes, theological hermeneutics cannot forgo a historical, literary, traditio-historical and linguistic, critical examination of the text. However, to examine the text is not the same as understanding its meaning. For Míguez-Bonino, to interpret the meaning of the text one has to understand how the present-event *adds to the meaning* of the
15 historical biblical-event.

In other words, at the same time that we affirm that the uniqueness of the original historical nucleus is intrinsic to the efficacy of the paradox, we must insist that the discernment of the present-day efficacy of the paradox is the keystone to the genuine
20 interpretation of the original historical nucleus.¹⁶⁰

Míguez-Bonino makes this statement in relation to the Resurrection. The truth of the Resurrection cannot be deciphered from a simple examination of the events and the consequences of the event. We cannot understand the meaning of the Resurrection by trying to understand it "in its original sense" and only
25 then draw conclusions about what it means for us. He rejects traditional exegetical method, which first formulates a historical-critical exegesis; which claims autonomous 'scientific' individuality by separating it from commitment to the text studied; and then attempts to apply what has been discovered "scientifically" to a modern situation.¹⁶¹ Instead, he insists that to understand

¹⁵⁹Míguez-Bonino, *Doing Theology in a Revolutionary Situation*, 1975, 102.

¹⁶⁰Míguez-Bonino, "New Theological Perspectives," 1972, 87.

¹⁶¹Kirk, *Liberation Theology*, 1979, 77.

the truth of the Resurrection we have to understand it as our resurrection. We have to understand our participation in the event. He says that the Resurrection of Jesus can be understood in a number of ways: it unleashes a human resurrection, that it is a world of absolution, that it confirms the meaning of death and that it certifies mission. In each case, the text bears a “present word” about us. In being open to us, the meaning of the original Resurrection event changes and takes on a new meaning.

To some extent what Míguez-Bonino is saying follows Paul Ricoeur’s work on biblical interpretation. Lewis Mudge, who has edited Ricoeur’s *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, offers the following summation of Ricoeur’s hermeneutical model:

And so we come full circle: from our initial naïve fascination with texts in which testimony is preserved in *poesis*, through the critical disciplines which help us overcome idolatry and dogmatism, to the post-critical moment when we ourselves begin to testify in a divestiture of consciousness, which implicates our lives in the world “in front of” the text.¹⁶²

Here we see the same elements as we saw above: an inspection of the text, a use of the critical disciplines and the belief that the interpretation of the reader adds to the meaning of the text. In relation to the Resurrection, Ricoeur insists that it is not a closed event, “the meaning of the Resurrection is in its future, the death of death, the resurrection of all from the dead. The God who is witnessed to is not, therefore, the God who is but the God who is coming.”¹⁶³ Because the Resurrection is an open event, it includes our resurrection; by including us, our interpretation becomes an integral part of the original biblical interpretation of the Resurrection event.

J. Severino Croatto, whose work has influenced Míguez-Bonino, borrows his approach to biblical interpretation from Ricoeur and H. G. Gadamer. Croatto bases his hermeneutical model on Gadamer’s “historical effect”—the capacity of a

¹⁶²Ricoeur, *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, 1980, 27.

¹⁶³*Ibid.*, 159.

human event to generate other happenings.¹⁶⁴ Croatto explains how God's actions form the "foundational" events of history and how these events contain a "reservoir-of-meaning" to be interpreted in later "founded" events by later words "after the mediation that time effects." Thus, after the occurrence of a historical event, humans reflect on the event and interpret it in light of their own historical situation. This interpretation adds meaning to both the foundational and founded events. Over time other meanings are added to meanings already known about the event. For example, this happens in the case of the Exodus event:

10 The unfolding of the latent meaning of the first Exodus occurred in
 the lineal prolongation of that liberation and was expressed in a
 "word." This word was "recharged with fresh meanings by succes-
 sive hermeneutical rereadings up to the time it was fixed perma-
 15 nently as expressing a whole world-view in the Exodus *account* in
 its present form. The Exodus is thus not the bald happening that
 took place around the thirteenth century B. C., but rather
 represents the event as it was reflected upon, pondered, and
 explored by faith and grasped in all its projections. This explains
 why the narration of the book of Exodus "says" much more than
 20 what actually transpired at that time.¹⁶⁵

Discovering, then, the meaning of the Exodus is much more than simply investigating what lies "behind" the *account* of the first Exodus (a literary analysis). It also includes investigating the "reservoir-of-meaning" which has been transmitted in a continuum of tradition (the "accumulation-of-meaning") from generation to generation. Croatto believes that an event's "reservoir-of-meaning" can only be discovered as one discovers God's revelation in new circumstances. We understand the Exodus event just as the Hebrews themselves did, namely by "exploring" its meaning from the vantage point of the new situations that followed after the event. Therefore, one must also investigate the "world of the text"; the "historical project" that the text represents; its "horizon"; or, using Ricoeur's words, what is "in front of the text." Thus, Croatto concludes:

¹⁶⁴Croatto, *Exodus*, 1981, 1. See also 13ff.

¹⁶⁵*Ibid.*, 14.

According to a hermeneutical line of thinking it is perfectly possible that we might understand ourselves *from* the perspective or the biblical Exodus and, above all, that we might understand the Exodus *from* the vantage point of our situation as peoples in economic, political, social, or cultural “bondage.”¹⁶⁶

Croatto describes his method of interpretation as a circular dialectic between the foundational event and its word, between “kerygma and situation, between the biblical word on liberation and our process of liberation.” Because he wishes to incorporate both circular and linear motion, a “spiral” might be a more appropriate model. With each new interpretation comes new meaning of the event, which promises another “founded” event, therefore a spiral. It is this model that has influenced Míguez-Bonino’s hermeneutical model. As we have already seen, it consists of two mediations. One is the reading of the direction of the biblical text, particularly of the witness of the basic, germinal events of faith; the other is the determination of the historical conditions and possibilities of our present situation, as discovered through rational analysis.¹⁶⁷ There is no shortcut, he insists, between biblical text and contemporary political action. The attempt to derive direct political conclusions (either revolutionary or pacifist) from the text is dangerous. It is only by way of the two meditations that Míguez-Bonino believes can we find, “not certainly a foolproof key to Christian obedience, but a significant framework for it.”¹⁶⁸

The Church, Political Action, and Eschatological Expectation

The topic of this section is one of the most important themes in liberation theology: the relation of God’s eschatological activity to our political activity concerning the creation and transformation of society. In the Old Testament, says Míguez-Bonino, the prophetic and deuteronomic tradition perceived the social and political order as being created by God, affirming that there is no divine activity that does not have some bearing on human history, and human

¹⁶⁶Ibid., 15.

¹⁶⁷Míguez-Bonino, *Doing Theology in a Revolutionary Situation*, 1975, 103.

¹⁶⁸Ibid., 103-104.

history is never recounted except in relation to God's sovereignty. This did not mean that God's sovereignty justifies all human activity nor that human action could carry out and fulfil God's sovereignty. Instead, it meant that God interacted with people in their very midst in the form of a covenant that established
5 creation as God's own.¹⁶⁹

In the New Testament the relationship is formulated a little differently because of a different historical context. In the Gospels and in the letters of Paul, Míguez-Bonino tell us that "we undoubtedly encounter a change." "The history of God's action acquires a certain consistency and solidarity of its own, a certain
10 'distance' vis-à-vis human history as a whole."¹⁷⁰ In the Old Testament the history of Israel's salvation was completely interwoven with its history as a people; thus, God's activity was easily associated with all other historical activity. But in the New Testament, we find Gentiles, whose historical experience is quite alien to God's salvation, being introduced into the church. Unlike the nation of
15 Israel, the Gentile church had to import an "alien," salvific history—that of Israel and Jesus Christ. As people came to the Church and adopted the Christian faith as their own, it was unavoidable that they simultaneously distanced themselves from their secular personal history. This context, therefore, gave the first Christians a "two-fold reference" of faith.¹⁷¹

20 Unfortunately, this two-fold reference has caused many problems in the Church through the years. It has led many theologians to suggest that the New Testament is "more spiritual" because it deals more with eternity than the Old Testament.¹⁷² Míguez-Bonino does not agree. What theologians who make this mistake do not understand is that while addressing the two-fold reference of the
25 Christian faith, the New Testament still maintains the unity of God's work and

¹⁶⁹Míguez-Bonino, "Historical Praxis and Christian Identity," 1979, 267.

¹⁷⁰This statement can be found in both Míguez-Bonino, *Doing Theology in a Revolutionary Situation*, 1975 and "Historical Praxis and Christian Identity," 1979. In the latter the words "consistency and solidarity" have been substituted for the word "destiny" in the former.

¹⁷¹Míguez-Bonino, "Historical Praxis and Christian Identity," 1979, 268.

¹⁷²*Ibid.*, 267-268.

human history. God still acts in history, offering signposts of his sovereignty and paving the way “for his ultimate victory yet to come.”¹⁷³

Míguez-Bonino points to several other attempts to relate God’s activity to human activity in the theological history of the Church.¹⁷⁴ One such attempt is 5 Augustine’s distinction between sacred and secular history. Essentially, Augustine divided secular history from sacred history in an effort to demonstrate that when the Roman Empire of the Constantinian Christian era collapsed, God’s sovereignty, which is manifested in the *civitas Dei*, was still intact. To do this he had to separate the Christian faith from Roman civil religion and argue that 10 each belonged to its own separate sphere. Augustine argued, therefore, that “no one should owe an absolute allegiance to the earthly city”; instead, people have their true citizenship elsewhere and that “they owe total allegiance only to God and his City.”¹⁷⁵

Although Augustine’s formulation may have been justifiable at the time to 15 meet socio-political and religious needs, Míguez-Bonino questions its viability, arguing that it is “dualistic,” it is untenable from the standpoint of the Bible and it suffers from unsolvable ethical difficulties. In Augustine’s formula the present, temporal, earthly history becomes less important than eternal history, which is understood to be “the true realm of life, fulfilment and happiness, and 20 the goal for the Christian.”¹⁷⁶ The kingdom of God is therefore only linked with a salvific history that is located outside historical human events. Míguez-Bonino declares this division unbiblical on the basis that the Bible forcefully suggests some continuity between general human history and the eschatological kingdom:

25 The Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles depict a divine mission that takes on Israel’s hope (Luke 1-2) and launches it out toward the limits of this earth and history through the power of the Spirit. The seer of Patmos envisions all the peoples of the world

¹⁷³Ibid.

¹⁷⁴Ibid., 270.

¹⁷⁵Forrester, *Theology and Politics*, 1988, 24. Augustine *De Civitate Dei* III:4.

¹⁷⁶Míguez-Bonino, *Doing Theology in a Revolutionary Situation*, 1975, 133.

5 bringing their offerings to the heavenly Zion. Paul describes all creation waiting in expectation for the manifestation of God's children; he proclaims the collapse of all barriers, the creation of a new humanity, and the recapitulation of all things in Christ. All of these notes in the New Testament would seem to be incompatible with the straitening religious view that would make the history of human beings and nations irrelevant.¹⁷⁷

10 The Bible does not separate between two histories. Instead, it speaks of one unified history where God's eternal eschatological future is fashioned in the history of humanity.

Also, Míguez-Bonino wonders if Augustine's dualistic approach is capable of constituting a proper basis for Christian ethics in the church:

15 The connection between these two worlds came to be seen almost exclusively in terms of the moral and religious life of the individual. Temporal, collective life has no lasting significance except as it may help or hinder the individual to achieve and/or to express the religious and moral virtues which belong to the Christian life. The hope of the Kingdom, far from awakening an ethos to transform the world in the direction of that which was
20 expected, worked as a deterrent for historical action.¹⁷⁸

From these two points, Míguez-Bonino concludes: "The 'dualistic' situation would seem to involve us in grave difficulties from the standpoint of biblical theology and its ethical and ideological functionalism."¹⁷⁹ Augustine's approach did not simply recognise the "two-fold reference" of faith which characterises
25 the New Testament, instead it divorced God's history from human history and God's activity from human activity. Augustine's formulation has unfortunately had an immense impact on all Christian and Western thought. Of course, one famous example of this influence is Luther's "two kingdoms" doctrine.¹⁸⁰ We

¹⁷⁷Míguez-Bonino, "Historical Praxis and Christian Identity," 1979, 271.

¹⁷⁸Míguez-Bonino, *Doing Theology in a Revolutionary Situation*, 1975, 133.

¹⁷⁹Míguez-Bonino, "Historical Praxis and Christian Identity," 1979, 271.

¹⁸⁰Míguez-Bonino, *Toward a Christian Political Ethics*, 1983, 23. Christopher Rowland reminds us of how much influence Augustine has had on Christian theology in general and on modern European theology in particular: "The legacy of Augustine's Concept of the City of God has been so pervasive in Christian history that the alternative view of a this-worldly hope has either been interpreted in other terms or pushed to the margins of the Christian tradition as a doctrinal experiment which, like some forms of early Christology, was found to be inadequate. Mixing the future hope and history is seen as a symptom of that naive optimism and unrealistic activism which can lead only to disaster. Such a view has seemed to receive explicit confirmation by the main thrust of New Testament exegesis since Weiss and Schweitzer." *Liberating Exegesis*, 1990, 115.

have already seen how Míguez-Bonino rejects Luther's formulation because it suffers from the same dualisms as Augustine's theology (The Response of Latin America's Protestant Churches to the Struggle). Therefore, we continue with two other examples Míguez-Bonino offers as attempts to relate God's activity to
5 human history.

In reaction to "dualistic" formulations and in an effort to retrieve a tradition that has its roots in the theology of Irenaeus and Origen, Míguez-Bonino identifies two theological movements in modern theology which offer what he calls a "monist" solution. The first is the political theology of Jürgen
10 Moltmann and the second is Latin American liberation theologies. Both maintain a "one single God-fulfilled history" and argue, according to Míguez-Bonino, that

God builds his kingdom from and within human history in its entirety; his action is a constant call and challenge to man. Man's response is realised in the concrete arena of history with its
15 economic, political, ideological options. Faith is not a different history but a dynamic, a motivation, and, in its eschatological horizon, a transforming invitation.¹⁸¹

Although Míguez-Bonino has referred to Moltmann as "the theologian to whom liberation theology is most indebted and with whom it has the closest
20 affinity," Míguez-Bonino has accused Moltmann of relativising the present historical reference of faith and action.¹⁸² , which tends to reinforce "the dualistic relativising of historical action."¹⁸³ Like other Liberation theologians, Míguez-Bonino believes that Moltmann's theology suspends history, not because it envisions God's revelation to be complete, but because it is too futuristic.

25 Rubem Alves and Gustavo Gutiérrez were among the first liberation theologians to give a critical assessment of Moltmann's theology. Gutiérrez summarises Moltmann's theology of hope, drawing upon the relationship of *present and future*:

30 The present order of things, that which is, is profoundly challenged by the Promise; because of one's home in the resurrected Christ,

¹⁸¹Míguez-Bonino, *Doing Theology in a Revolutionary Situation*, 1975, 138.

¹⁸²*Ibid.*, 78 and 144.

¹⁸³*Ibid.*, 140.

5 one is liberated from the narrow limits of the present and can think and act completely in terms of what is to come. For Moltmann, a theology of hope is simultaneously a theology of resurrection. The resurrected Christ is humankind's future. The statements of the Promise "do not seek to illuminate the reality which exists, but the reality which is coming," and therefore establish the conditions for the possibility of "new experiences." Thus there is maintained "a specific *inadaequatio rei et intellectus*" regarding "the existing and given reality," inaugurating a promising and productive "open stage for history."¹⁸⁴

10 Alves tells us that for Moltmann, the challenge of the present is derived from the Promise. The Promise of the future is the only element which can negate "what is." For Moltmann, "there is no immediacy between man and the negativity of his present and that he feels this negativity only when it is mediated through a transcendent hope."¹⁸⁵ Furthermore, quoting Moltmann, Alves tells us that "'the revelation of the risen Lord does not become 'historic' as a result of the fact that history continues willy-nilly, but it stands as a sort of *primum movens* at the head of the process of history.' It is not historical, but 'pulls' history." For Moltmann there exists, therefore, a "discontinuity between future and present," making it so that "history is not open."¹⁸⁶ Thus, Moltmann's concept of "Promise" is unable to inspire concrete historical transformation of society.

Míguez-Bonino recognises that the criticisms of Gutiérrez and Alves are based only on Moltmann's first book, *Theology of Hope*, and did not consider *The Crucified God*, because it was published later. Míguez-Bonino tells us that in the second book Moltmann corrected and deepened his ideas, thus meeting earlier criticisms. However, Míguez-Bonino argues that even after the second book, Moltmann's work still lacked historical substance. The force of Míguez-Bonino's objections are stated in the following:

30 This, in turn, seems to lead to a more serious problem: the failure to give a concrete content to the "identification with the oppressed." Two sentences from this chapter will illustrate the point: "The crucified God is really a God without country and without class. But

¹⁸⁴Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 1988, 124.

¹⁸⁵Alves, *A Theology of Human Hope*, 1969, 59.

¹⁸⁶*Ibid.*, 61-64. Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 1965, 103.

5 he is not an apolitical God; he is the God of the poor, of the
 oppressed, of the humiliated” (Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 305).
 But the poor, the oppressed, the humiliated *are a class and live in*
countries. Is it really theologically responsible to leave these two
 sentences hanging without trying to work out their relation? Are
 we really for the poor and oppressed if we fail to see them as a class,
 as members of oppressed societies? If we fail to say *how*, are we
 “for them” in their concrete historical situation? Can we claim a
 10 solidarity which has nothing to say about the actual historical
 forms in which their struggle to overcome oppression is carried
 forward? It is perhaps necessary to say that “a modern political
 theology does not intend to dissolve the Church into a politics of
 right or left.” But is it possible to claim a solidarity with the poor
 and to hover above right and left as if that choice did not have
 15 anything to do with the matter?¹⁸⁷

Míguez-Bonino therefore concludes that Moltmann’s theology attempts to remain
 a-historical, neutral and “independent of a structural analysis of reality.”¹⁸⁸

Moltmann’s theology becomes trapped in idealism and suspends history by
 ignoring all concrete historical situations.¹⁸⁹

20 Once he has examined Augustine’s and Moltmann’s theologies, Míguez-
 Bonino turns his attention towards liberation theology. Míguez-Bonino
 identifies the “dangerous tendency” in liberation theology to collapse the love of
 God into the love of neighbour with the effect of “deifying history or humanity
 itself.” He has cautioned that liberation theology risks seeing God’s activity as
 25 “secondary, merely exemplary, and even dispensable.”¹⁹⁰ In its concern for
 humanity, liberation theology tends to collapse a love for God into neighbour-
 love. “If we carry that tendency to its ultimate conclusion,” Míguez-Bonino
 insists “we will end up wittingly or unwittingly deifying history or humanity
 itself. . . . There can be no doubt that contemporary Latin American theology has
 30 no such intention. But we must ask ourselves whether the formulations we have
 worked out so far do enough to rule out that possibility.”¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁷Míguez-Bonino, *Doing Theology in a Revolutionary Situation*, 1975, 148.

¹⁸⁸*Ibid.*, 149.

¹⁸⁹Míguez-Bonino is not alone in his assessment. Duncan Forrester, *Theology and Politics*, 1988, 152. Chopp, *The Praxis of Suffering*, 1986, 116.

¹⁹⁰Míguez-Bonino, “Historical Praxis and Christian Identity,” 1979, 272. See also Villa-
 Vicencio, *Between Christ and Caesar*, 1986, 134.

¹⁹¹Míguez-Bonino, “Historical Praxis and Christian Identity,” 1979, 263, 272. See also “How
 does God Act in History,” 1972, 22.

Míguez-Bonino's concern for liberation theology also includes ecclesiology issues. He tells us that some liberation theologians argue that God's action and human activity can easily be related through some transforming activity of God in the history mediated through the Church. An example of this can be found in René Padilla's claim: "The Church has cosmic significance because it is the affirmation of Christ's universal authority. In and *through* the church, the powers of the new era unleashed by the Messiah are present in the midst of human beings. The correlate of God's kingdom is the world, but the world which is redeemed *in and through* the church."¹⁹²

On the other hand, other Latin American theologians offer a different solution, one that inclines toward an inversion of traditional ecclesiological understandings concerning the role and meaning of the Church and its relation to both God and history. For example, Míguez-Bonino tells us that in Roman Catholic circles the traditional ecclesiastical understanding of the Church is embodied in Vatican II. Although Vatican II radically challenged the ideas of papal primacy and infallibility that were secured in Vatican I, the Second Council spoke of the Church as "the sacrament of the salvation of mankind." With this statement, it affirmed that "the Church is the means through which God's saving will is manifested and achieved in history" and that "the Church holds the meaning of human history."¹⁹³ Míguez-Bonino is concerned that some liberation theologians "drastically" modify this notion through the mixing of two concepts: "God's saving action in the world in the struggle for liberation" and the idea that "the struggle for liberation is pioneered and carried forward by social classes and movements."¹⁹⁴ For example, Juan Luís Segundo identifies the Church as the community which grasps through faith the meaning of liberation and commits itself to action. Segundo, Míguez-Bonino concludes, leaves us with "the wider human community as the realm and scope of God's saving

¹⁹²Ibid., 282.

¹⁹³Míguez-Bonino, *Doing Theology in a Revolutionary Situation*, 1975, 160-161.

¹⁹⁴Ibid., 161.

activity.”¹⁹⁵ Míguez-Bonino believes Hugo Assmann also redefines the identity of the Church in a more drastic way. Assmann identifies the Church with an even wider field. For him, the Church is “the conscious emergence and the more explicit enacting of the one meaning of the one history.” Thus, the explicit
 5 reference to Jesus Christ is not even necessary. Míguez-Bonino thus concludes:

To a certain extent one would have to say that the relation of Church and humanity portrayed by the Vatican II Council is in a way reversed: the secular struggle for the liberation of the poor discloses the meaning of the Church. This struggle becomes in one
 10 sense the true sacrament of God’s historical saving activity.¹⁹⁶

Míguez-Bonino believes that these attitudes are somewhat justifiable, because the position that they oppose—that God’s action in history is manifested and achieved only through the Church—supports a traditional ecclesiology that alienates the poor.¹⁹⁷ However, he wonders if the answer to a “traditional
 15 position” is to be found in “a blurring of that which distinguishes the Church *qua* Church of Jesus Christ from any other human group.”¹⁹⁸ Míguez-Bonino wonders if such a position denies a distinct mission within Christianity. He concludes:

When the cause of Jesus Christ is totally and without rest equated
 20 with the cause of social and political revolution, either the Church and Jesus Christ are made redundant or the political and social revolution is clothed in a sacred or semi-sacred gown. Nonbelieving revolutionaries are then baptised as “latent,”
 25 “crypto,” “potential,” or “unknowing” Christians, a new form of Christian paternalism which elicits a quite justified rejection on their part. On the other hand, given the fact that the socio-political revolution takes many and in some cases mutually divergent forms, how is the true Church to be identified? We seem to add the

¹⁹⁵Ibid.

¹⁹⁶Ibid., 162.

¹⁹⁷Míguez-Bonino writes: “On the one hand, it is necessary to unmask the fact of class struggle as it takes place *within* the Church and, insofar as the sociologically measurable entity that the Church is becomes or remains a part of the system of oppression, to ‘combat the Church’ and work for its overthrow. On the other hand, the struggle for the poor discovers within the ecclesiastical institution—its organisation, liturgy, forms of teaching—the factors of alienation and oppression that operate as a part of the religious life itself: the forms in which authority is exercised, the keeping of the people in a state of permanent dependence and minority, the adoption of the competitive and individualistic criteria of the capitalist society.” Ibid., 159.

¹⁹⁸Ibid., 163.

religious character of a “confessing war” to the differences arising from varying analytical, strategic, and tactical positions.¹⁹⁹

Over against Moltmann and certain trends in Liberation Theology that make him uncomfortable, Míguez-Bonino argues three points. First, he insists that we can only discern how God acts in history through self-revelation in Jesus Christ. Secondly, God’s actions are discernible through mediations. And thirdly, God’s action is only to be understood through the biblical witness as it is proclaimed in the spirit of the prophetic tradition. We will elaborate further on these three points separately.

For Míguez-Bonino, “we cannot establish either a general philosophy of history based on an analysis of history itself, or a ‘Christian interpretation of history’ which attempts to determine the nature and purpose of God’s action in history.”²⁰⁰ One can easily see how the first part of this statement is an argument against any position, either atheist or Christian, that believes it can establish a secular history without God, or that it can distinguish God’s history from secular history. This first half of the statement seems to be aimed at European theologies that are still under the influence of Augustine’s dualism. However, the second half of the statement is aimed at an entirely different audience. Barth rejected both Schleiermacher’s theology of human experience and natural theology’s attempt at establishing knowledge of God outside God’s self-revelation. Natural theology taught that the world is “somehow recognisable” to humanity in the creation of God and that God’s will can somehow be known outside of God’s revelation in Jesus Christ.²⁰¹ Barth rejected such an approach because it tried to establish a direct and unmediated relation with God, therefore it was susceptible to idolatry because it divinised the world—such as economic systems and political ideologies based on race. Barth disliked natural theology’s presupposition. He argued that from a Doctrine of Creation

¹⁹⁹Ibid.

²⁰⁰Míguez-Bonino, “How does God Act in History,” 1972, 23.

²⁰¹Barth, “No! Answer to Emil Brunner,” 1935, 157, in Green, *Karl Barth*, 1989.

one could not simply discern timeless ethical principles which embody the will of God, regardless of historical and social circumstances. Nazi Christian nationalism was an example of an attempt to supersede God's revelation and try to establish eternal ethical principles that could be used in history.

5 Míguez-Bonino has a similar concern for liberation theology, because it is possible that its concern for humanity could become a second source of revelation and set up "patterns" of behaviour based on what is "perceived" about God's will or action in history. This danger, he tells us, is not just unique to Germany or Latin America, but always faces the Church, particularly in a
10 revolutionary and political situation. He believes it is dangerous because "purporting to have some unmediated access to the will of God is the very essence of fanaticism."²⁰² In relation to this he writes:

15 In this connection some theologians have sought to provide an ethical interpretation by starting off from this question: What is God doing in history today? They then try to link our actions with that. Without overlooking the fruitfulness of that question, I must say that I do not find it to be completely adequate because it can give rise to the fanaticism of the Crusader. Once people think they have discovered "what God is doing," they quite logically tend to
20 absolutise it and their own actions; they are led to sacralise their own ideology.²⁰³

Against this position, Míguez-Bonino insists that because the Bible affirms a "living God," God acts in each historical time period differently. God uses different forms, methods, manners and ways of acting within any one given
25 epoch and throughout all history. This keeps us from wanting to "establish a 'pattern of procedure' for God's action, by which we ultimately substitute for the expectation of God's action, our own conception of the means of divine intervention."²⁰⁴ It also stands against those who, under the influence of Augustine's dualism, want to divorce God's action from history, thus creating two
30 histories:

²⁰²Míguez-Bonino, "Historical Praxis and Christian Identity," 1979, 275.

²⁰³Ibid., 275.

²⁰⁴Míguez-Bonino, "How does God Act in History," 1972, 24.

5 God's action does not constitute an ultra-history, one superimposed on the pattern of human events and of a different substance from human history: it is made from the same material. God's freedom in history does not operate as a freedom to annul the process of history, but by using these same processes imprints on history a new meaning and direction, integrating the selfsame events into a creative context.²⁰⁵

10 Instead, Míguez-Bonino proposes that “God works through the dynamic of historical events, without either suspending or eliminating its categories, but assimilating them into his creating and redeeming purpose.”²⁰⁶ Those who do theology must understand that every historical epoch “has its own peculiar link with the Kingdom, its own ‘key’, through which any understanding of epoch must be sought.”²⁰⁷

15 Míguez-Bonino is so careful in dispelling any notion of human experience as a second revelation, that he warns against the constant temptation to assume that God acts today in history as God acted in various biblical narratives. He insists that “we know how God acted only in those cases to which Scriptures bear witness. Beyond this, we have only our interpretation based on those events, and this falls into an entirely different and ambiguous category.”²⁰⁸ We warns
20 against any attempt to apply the events of the Bible to our contemporary events in an allegorical fashion. For example, like Barth, Míguez-Bonino rules out the notion of first defining love from human relations and then magnifying and projecting this to a transcendent level. Both theologians believe that such a procedure ultimately ends in self-justification and serves the special interests of
25 a particular social group.²⁰⁹

However, this leads us to ask if Míguez-Bonino believes in any connection between the kingdom of God and human history? It seems as if he has rejected all possible relationships. In fact, he asks:

²⁰⁵*Ibid.*, 25.

²⁰⁶*Ibid.*

²⁰⁷*Ibid.*

²⁰⁸*Ibid.*, 23.

²⁰⁹Green, *Karl Barth*, 1989, 27. Míguez-Bonino, “How does God Act in History,” 1972, 24.

5 Do historical events and human activity in history in all its various dimensions have any meaningfulness with respect to the kingdom that God is fashioning now and will establish in glory at the second coming of the Lord? Or is the latter the complete and total negation of the former? If there is some positive relationship between the two, how are we to understand it and how does it cut into our own activity?²¹⁰

Here we see Míguez-Bonino following Barth again. Both theologians believe that knowledge of God's action in history can only be interpreted analogically. We note here that for Barth analogy means a "correspondence of the thing known with the knowing, of the object with the thought, of the Word of God with the human worked in thought and in speech."²¹¹ Barth insisted that we can only have knowledge of God through the "analogy of faith," *analogia fidei*. This analogy begins with God, not with human experience, and stresses God's initiative rather than human reception of revelation. Summarising Barth's position, Clifford Green writes:

20 Thus the nature of God as love provides the definition and paradigm of what a truly human love would be in the creaturely world. And the divine community, the Kingdom of God, as *God's* society, proves the model of which policies in human society are to be signs and parables. The analogy of faith, then, rests on God's revelation; faith is tutored by God, as it were, to know what behaviour and activities in the world are truly "like," analogous to, God.²¹²

Míguez-Bonino expresses our knowledge of God's action in the world in similar terms. He tells us that our "faith is *given* signs" or "glimpses of the meaning of God's action in the world," not based upon an "optimistic historical and philosophical perspective" but "on what we know of God's action in the history of salvation." We are able to discern a certain "constancy in God's 'ways of acting'—not 'standards' but 'types'" or "directions" of God's actions in Scripture. The basic direction of Scripture, Míguez-Bonino tells us, is the "redemption of human life in its totality (individual and communal, spiritual and physical, present and future)":

²¹⁰Míguez-Bonino, "Historical Praxis and Christian Identity," 1979, 272.

²¹¹Barth, CD I/1, quoted in Green, *Karl Barth*, 1989, 26.

²¹²*Ibid.*, 27.

That redemption is described in terms drawn from everyday human experience which, although they have a special significance in their biblical context, permit of a certain analogous projection in secular history (insofar as God's action opens the way for, and makes possible a human action). A projection of these terms (basically: reconciliation, justice, peace, liberation) and the biblical paradigm in which they are used, allows the believer to orient himself in his search in and through faith, for his course of conduct in the *civita terrena*.²¹³

10 There is, then, a unity-in-difference between the kingdom of God and history that is analogous to the "two-fold reference" of the Christian faith, which was discussed earlier in this section. It is also similar to the Pauline relationship of the unity-in-difference between the present life in history and the life of the resurrected and the transformation of the first to the next. "The transformation

15 does not 'disfigure' or 'denaturalise' bodily life; instead it fulfils and perfects it, eliminating its frailty and corruptibility." The relationship between history and the kingdom can also be understood as analogous to the Pauline conception of works. For Paul, the work that humanity performs in history has an eternal significance insofar as they are of a new order. What Míguez-Bonino wants us to

20 notice about both these examples is that they are oriented in the future—in the "not yet" of history. Because our body and our works have this future orientation, history is always pushing forward toward the future to be transformed into the kingdom. The kingdom is not to be understood as "the natural outcome of history," but neither is it to be seen as the replacement of

25 history. Míguez-Bonino explains this relationship of unity-in-difference: "thus the kingdom of God is not the negation of history but rather the elimination of its frailty, corruptibility, and ambiguity. Going a bit more deeply, we can say it is the elimination of history's sinfulness so that the authentic import of communitarian life may be realised. In the same way, then, historical 'works'

30 take on permanence insofar as they anticipate this full realisation."²¹⁴

²¹³Míguez-Bonino, "How does God Act in History," 1972, 29.

²¹⁴Míguez-Bonino, "Historical Praxis and Christian Identity," 1979, 272-273.

Like Barth, then, Míguez-Bonino gives the relationship between the kingdom of God and history a future; but also like Barth, he places restrictions on this relationship. He tells us that the witness and action of the Church “are in no way justified in themselves or in relation to any infallible standard of interpretation of the action of God: they are purely provisional, fallible, and temporary, and can only be offered under the promise of forgiveness of sin (hence the impossibility of a Christian “politics”, “economy”, “ideology”, or ‘program’.)”²¹⁵ Both Barth and Míguez-Bonino want to affirm the difference between kingdom and history, but they also argue for its unity. Thus, they both provide basic metaphors that avoid the reduction of the kingdom to history or the isolation of the kingdom to one particular part of history.²¹⁶ We cannot relate the kingdom and history for our own political ends, but rather because in the Bible God is constantly transforming history into the kingdom.

Míguez-Bonino believes this relationship unfortunately has been misunderstood from two directions. There is the tendency to separate the kingdom of God from history, relating the kingdom of God to a special salvation history and distinguishing it from concrete human history; this is the dualistic position. It denies the basic biblical concept that the eschatological reality of the kingdom “is fashioned, nurtured, and raised in history.”²¹⁷ On the other hand, there is also the tendency to reduce the kingdom of God to history. This is the monist solution, which denies the mission of Christianity and threatens the nonidentity between Christianity and the world.

This brings us to the last point concerning how Christians can discern God’s action in history. If theologians can avoid the dangers of dualism and monism by recognising that “neither the reality nor the manner of God’s action in history can be established other than on the basis of the self-revelation of its

²¹⁵Míguez-Bonino, “How does God Act in History,” 1972, 29.

²¹⁶Chopp, *The Praxis of Suffering*, 1986, 89.

²¹⁷Míguez-Bonino, “Historical Praxis and Christian Identity,” 1979, 274.

purpose, compass, and meaning, evidenced in biblical history,”²¹⁸ then they will stop asking: “Where is the kingdom present or visible in present history?”

Instead they will inquire: “How do I, both as an individual and part of a community of faith immersed in a concrete history, share in the world that is coming in the promised kingdom?”²¹⁹ In other words, Míguez-Bonino does not want theologians to analyse the world first and then only later determine what elements of the kingdom relate to historical events. Instead, we should look at the kingdom and then ask ourselves how can we be a part of it. For Míguez-Bonino, obedience is the last element in how we can discern God’s activity in history which also forms the basis of his ethics.

The kingdom of God can only be discerned through active obedience. Seeking the presence of the kingdom in history means asking the Lord to show us our task and to deign to accept our obedience into his kingdom. That brings into the picture the whole ethical question of how we are to know the will of the Lord and make out that pathway of obedience.²²⁰

He concludes that “history, in relation to the Kingdom, is not a riddle to be solved but a mission to be fulfilled.”

Míguez-Bonino concludes from his discussion on how God acts in history, and his critique of Moltmann, that there is a positive relation between the kingdom of God and human activity in history. The kingdom insists that people be historically and politically engaged and gives human activity “eschatological permanence” insofar as human activity is directed back toward the kingdom. Furthermore, to the extent that the kingdom requires human activity to be historically engaged it implies a judgement between historical alternatives. This judgement is based upon “the direction of God’s redemptive will and the analytical and projective judgement of the present historical conditions.”²²¹

With respect to the first, Míguez-Bonino has told us that although it is impossible to discern in Scripture any set of laws or principles for society, it is possible to

²¹⁸Míguez-Bonino, “How does God Act in History,” 1972, 23.

²¹⁹Míguez-Bonino, “Historical Praxis and Christian Identity,” 1979, 274.

²²⁰Ibid., 275.

²²¹Míguez-Bonino, *Doing Theology in a Revolutionary Situation*, 1975, 150-151.

see the direction and purposes of God's action conveyed to us in certain concepts such as "love," "peace," "justice" and "redemption." With respect to the second—analysis of historical conditions—Míguez-Bonino insists, through his criticisms of Moltmann, that "it is equally necessary to stress the fact that such insights
5 cannot be operative except in terms of historical projects which must incorporate, and indeed always do incorporate, an analytical and ideological human secular, verifiable dimension."²²² Both elements are important to Míguez-Bonino's theological methodology, because both elements have to be present if Christians are to be historically committed. He concludes:

10 The theological methodology we have defended requires that we develop theological theories in close relationship with the questions which arise out of the concrete historical praxis, and then look to the biblical and theological tradition in order that it
15 may clarify such questions. The basic question posed for Christians politically committed is, in this respect, a certain tension, to which we have already alluded, in their relationships to a community of political engagement and to the community of Christian
 confession.²²³

 However, one may now want to question here: Is not Míguez-Bonino
20 radically departing from Barth's theology and making the same mistake of nineteenth-century liberal theology? Is not Míguez-Bonino turning back to natural theology by starting with an analysis of the human condition or social project in order to understand God's revelation? Míguez-Bonino recognises this concern but believes that this is not the case.²²⁴ His insistence on an ethical
25 reflection which incorporates a certain analytical and ideological understanding of history is not natural theology at all. He does not want to start with an analysis of the human condition, and then only reflect back on the nature of God's character. Instead, Míguez-Bonino insists that the situational analysis doesn't tell us anything about God, it only tells us about the condition of
30 humanity. Furthermore, he is convinced that it is only when we understand that

²²²Ibid.

²²³Ibid., 165.

²²⁴Míguez-Bonino writes: "Under the salutary influence of Karl Barth, most Protestant theology has practically buried this question under the epitaph of "natural theology." Ibid., 165.

condition will we come to the realisation that we have to act concretely in history. Therefore, social analysis is simply a tool that impels us to become politically committed to the poor and oppressed. We only know who God is through God's self-revelation. It is the combination of that revelation and our
5 analysis of the human condition that persuades us that we need to act in history.

His Early Theology: Conclusion

Looking back over our entire sketch of Míguez-Bonino's early theology, we must argue that he presents us with a new paradigm shift—a new locus for theology, a new set of questions, a new way of ordering issues and the inclusion
10 of new categories and new metaphors for interpretation. Míguez-Bonino believes theology is in trouble in Latin America because it is used by the governments to promote injustice, that crisis is only secondary to the primary crisis of poverty and social injustice. Because Míguez-Bonino believes that the Church must answer to the crisis of poverty, by attempting to change the
15 structures of society he offers a theology of social transformation. Míguez-Bonino gives this quest a different dimension as he links it radically with ideological critique and social theory. North American and European theologies fail to offer an analysis of the concrete historical situation; thus, their theology remains neutral and will not result in praxis. Instead, Míguez-Bonino insists that
20 praxis is based upon the reading of the direction of Scriptures and a proper analysis of the human condition. He denies that the two mediations can be simply equated or that one can be allowed to have priority over the other. Rather, they must be held together so that the Christian believer will be truly motivated to act in his/her concrete situation.

2.3 CRITICISMS OF LATIN AMERICAN LIBERATION THEOLOGY

In this section we shall divide the critics of Latin American liberation theology into two groups: conservative theologians who favour an old dualistic approach to theology and politics and argue that the two should never mix; and reformist, neoliberal theologians who agree with certain tenets of liberation theology but fault it for its methodology and its association with Marxism.

Conservative Theologians

Edward Norman

One early critic of liberation theology is Edward Norman who presented his arguments when he gave the Reith Lectures in 1978. In those lectures he argued that Latin American liberation theology reduced the Christian faith to politics. He believed that this reduction was “a symptom of its decay as an authentic religion.”²²⁵ Through liberation theology the Christian faith was “losing sight of its own rootedness in a spiritual tradition; its mind is progressively secularised; its expectations are prompted by worldly changes; and its moral idealism has forfeited transcendence.” The Church was giving up its “distinctly Christian attitude towards the world,” and was beginning to borrow its “political outlook and vocabulary” from the “surrounding secular culture.”²²⁶ Liberation theologies were producing a Christianity that adopted Marxism and socialist ideals and through this adoption the Church was becoming politically bias and selective in its mission and message. An example that Norman gave was modern Christianity's new relation to Human Rights. In his lectures Norman argued that the Christian faith was beginning to adopt the Human Rights movement as “a new Commandment,” and elevated it “to the apparent authority

²²⁵Norman, *Christianity and the World Order*, 1979, 13.

²²⁶*Ibid*, 15.

of eternal truth.”²²⁷ According to Norman, this ignored two fundamental characteristics of the modern Human Rights movement. First, “arguments about society, government, and individual rights, based upon natural law, assume an unimpeachable moral authority, true for all time.” Second, claims of the Human Rights movement “are by nature *political*.”

Christian liberals (which Norman questionably associated with liberation theology) were mistaken in their adoption of the Human Rights movement because, Norman insists, natural law, the *content* of what people choose to regard as natural rights, is not “unimpeachable moral authority.” The Human Rights movement is an ideological tool with an *variable* content. A sign of this instability is the variation between churches and institutions in different countries with opposing socio-economic systems.

Russian Christians agree that Human Rights are important, but they disagree with Western Christians both about their nature and their present form in the world. This should impose caution upon those prepared to define Christianity in terms of the content, at least between Christians in East and West — and actually also, on closer examination, among Western Christians themselves — the practice of adding religious authority to moral and political campaigns for Human Rights is both divisive and partial. In reality, Human Rights issues become the means by which Christians express their endorsement of the political values of their own societies. It is all very relative to time and circumstance.²²⁸

Christian liberals make the mistake, Norman says, of assuming that “personal choice is capable of being represented as a natural law.” They ignore the *political* character of natural law and allow people “to sanctify their ordinary political preferences, drawn from the ephemeral political cultures of their day, and regard them as embodiments of fundamental law.”²²⁹ In other words, Christian liberals have embraced the Human Rights movement as doctrine and given it the authority of the laws of God. Thus we have the politicisation of the Christian faith in the name of Human Rights. Norman believes that liberation theologians have redefined Christianity’s purpose in terms of social

²²⁷Ibid., 30.

²²⁸Ibid., 42.

²²⁹Ibid.

activism and has restructured it “according to fashion or personal inclination” so that it “cannot comprehend a Church which is satisfied with the mere performance of worship.”²³⁰ In reality, then, liberation theologians use the Human Rights movement to promote its cultural ideology.

5 In contrast to liberation theology, Norman believes that “true religion points to the condition of the inward soul of humanity. It is therefore sceptical of the contemporary passion of Christians to reinterpret the faith so that it shall become a component of the modern world’s political idealism.”²³¹ The Christian faith directs one to the imperfections of one’s nature, and not to the perceived or
10 rationalised imperfections of human society. This has been proven, according to Norman, time and time again as “Christians who are wise in their time always return from the fading enthusiasms of unfulfilled improvements to a more perspective understanding of the inward nature of spirituality.” This is to say, liberation theology that wants to interpret Jesus as an activist, Humanist Christ,
15 fails to see the true nature of the Gospel message. Norman states very plainly: “A reading of the Gospels less indebted to present values, however, will reveal the true Christ of history in the spiritual depiction of a man who directed others to turn away from the preoccupations of human society.”²³² Therefore, the most urgent task of Christianity in our day, according to Norman, is to rediscover a
20 sense of historical relativism.²³³

 Norman argues that all social and political circumstances are relative. Any sense of justice or what is right is relative. What a person finds disturbing today, might not be what the same person finds disturbing tomorrow. Therefore, a Christian must not make what he or she senses as justice or righteousness a
25 divine truth. If a person does make this mistake, Norman believes that that

²³⁰Ibid., 36.

²³¹Ibid., 76-77. I have altered what Norman has said in order to make it inclusive of both men and women.

²³²Ibid., 78.

²³³Ibid., 83.

person's "emphasis upon the transformation of the material world would rob that person of their bridge to eternity."²³⁴

Therefore, are we to conclude that Norman believes that there should be no Christian response to poverty and oppression? Norman believes just the opposite, he states that there must be a Christian response, but not by the Church. The Church cannot be associated with political ideologies. The eradication of agreed injustices is the responsibility of the individual Christian.²³⁵ The individual may co-operate with others in "corporate and political action" but Norman considers this "co-operation" as "individualistic" because each person acts "according to their understanding." The person does not work under "the false supposition that religious truth is realised in the process;" a mistaken supposition which occurs when the Church acts corporately. In other words, the individual who is moved by the circumstances of his/her time and feels a moral obligation may act politically, but Norman denies that the person was moved by their faith, because circumstances are relative and faith can not be identified with human idealism. The Church cannot act corporately because it can only be moved into action by divine truth which is interested in the destiny of the soul not human circumstance.

To contend, as I am doing, for the separation of individual Christian action from the corporate witness of the Church, and to regard Christianity as being by nature concerned primarily with the relationship of the soul to eternity, is these days denounced within Christian opinion as a 'privatisation' of religion. I think that is exactly what it is. For I suppose that only the Christian who has induced his own soul into a sense of the immanence of the celestial realities may profitably begin to help his brothers in the present world.²³⁶

We do not wish to refute Norman's remarks here, but it is important to make a few remarks before we continue. Norman's argument rests on two standpoints. First, for Norman the conditions of life and those of other people do not matter in the slightest—we must forget this world and look to eternity. The

²³⁴Ibid., 84.

²³⁵Ibid., 79.

²³⁶Ibid., 80.

only Christian attitude to this world is indifference to it and a contempt for its concerns. Second, the individual Christian is to be concerned with politics, but such a concern can have no particular relation to his/her religious faith. The difficulty with these positions are that they can lead to the idea that people should only concern themselves with their private conduct and their relations with those immediately around them. Is this truly what Christian social concern is all about?²³⁷

H.M. Kuitert

In his book, *Everything is Politics but Politics is not Everything*, 1985, Kuitert, Professor of Systematic Theology in the Free University of Amsterdam, questions what he believes the standpoint of political theology to be: that Christian faith can and should be equated with a total politicisation of human life.²³⁸ He questions statements such as: “The church must make political statements”, “theology is only relevant if it is political theology.”²³⁹ In contrast to these statements, he argues that “politicising is the ruin of the Christian church,” because a political Church (the Church’s involvement “in the power struggle for realising political ideals”) is brought into contradiction with itself.²⁴⁰

The Church, he argues, believes that its power comes from the power of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit authorises the Church to exercise “spiritual power” so that it may speak to the world concerning God’s salvation. However, when the Church speaks in reference to political and social movements, it no longer exercises its spiritual power but rather another worldly type of power—a sociological power defined as “control of the means of controlling others.”

²³⁷Dummett, *Catholicism and the World Order*, 1979, 5-9.

²³⁸Kuitert makes it clear that he is not attacking liberation theology, but instead he is limiting his discussion to what was happening in the Netherlands in the 1980s when Protestants and Catholics massively supported opposition to Nuclear Weapons. However, indirectly he still questions liberation theology’s premises and often includes it in his discussion.

²³⁹Kuitert, *Everything is Politics and Politics is Not Everything*, 1986, 3.

²⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 146.

When the Church exercises sociological power, Kuitert argues, it becomes a political subject or “a political party — and then it is no longer the church.” In other words, when the Church is involved with the world and making political or social statements this forces it to be unfaithful to itself.

5 Affirming Luther’s doctrine of the two kingdoms, Kuitert argues that the Church is to be concerned with the Kingdom of God and eternal salvation and not with “salvation as well-being.” God is concerned with both eternal salvation and “salvation as well-being” but appropriates concern for “salvation as well-being” to governments and social organisations, and concern for eternal salvation to
10 the Church.²⁴¹ Kuitert warns that the Church should not confuse the two kingdoms or amalgamate them into one identity. The two should remain separate:

15 The one kingdom is not the other. If we confuse salvation as well-being with eternal salvation, we make political or social salvation the content of the Christian proclamation. But from a Christian point of view that is impossible. Anyone who is in Christ is a new creation — not anyone who lives in a democratic, revolutionary or whatever other kind of political order. Unless we can keep the political context for Jesus Christ himself (which is impossible): but
20 is anyone a new creation, a new person because he or she is in a new political order?

If the Church is to be involved in politics it would no longer be true to its calling. The doctrine of the two kingdoms reminds the Church that it is to be concerned with the salvation of souls. In Kuitert’s own words: “the duality of the
25 doctrine of the two kingdoms is indispensable for keeping the ship of the church afloat.”²⁴² Therefore, politicising is the demise of the Church because it places it on unfamiliar ground. Making political and social judgements forces the Church to borrow its opinions from political parties or social organisations; thus duplicating “in religious terms what has already been discovered or stated.”
30 There is a danger here because in this borrowing and duplication from the world

²⁴¹Ibid., 112ff.

²⁴²Ibid., 118. I am afraid that I have oversimplified Kuitert’s argument in order to understand his basic criticism. We will return to Kuitert’s discussion and examine his support of this doctrine in greater detail after we have examined why Míguez-Bonino and Barth both reject Luther’s doctrine of the two kingdoms.

the Church will be seen to be redundant; it becomes like all the other welfare organisations or political parties in its attempt to offer social programs. The real difficulty for the Church, argues Kuitert, is that it “lacks the skill and the instruments” that professional people or social organisations have and it does not have access to the power that politicians do. Because of this fact, people will eventually realise that “others can do things better and that therefore the church is not needed.”²⁴³ Kuitert is convinced the reason people go to Church “and indeed want to serve the church is because something other is expected of the church.” The Church, therefore, needs to cleave to what cannot be found elsewhere in our society—“the story of Jesus as Christ, as revelation of God, as reconciler and redeemer.”²⁴⁴ In simpler terms, then, Kuitert believes that the Church should not involve itself in politics but rather remain true to its nature and its task, because if it doesn’t people will not see the need for it any more.

Another reason why the Church should stop politicising, Kuitert insists, is because it brings political style into the Church. Politics, explains Kuitert, means a struggle for power, which he defines as “self-glorification and intolerance with the aim of acquiring or keeping power.”²⁴⁵ Politics is irreconcilable with the doctrine of Christian love of neighbour.

In politics you cannot love the least significant, cannot let the other go first, cannot forgive and begin again (unless that gives you power), cannot think the other more excellent than yourself (at least, you can never say that), for those who do that sort of thing give away power which they never get back. In politics you must show how good you are, walk at the front of demonstrations, love meetings, see yourself (and praise yourself) as being far better than others. In politics you give your opponent a push if he almost falls rather than helping him; you do not let anything go his way, you seize what you can in order to put the other party in a bad light.²⁴⁶

²⁴³Ibid., 166.

²⁴⁴Ibid., 167.

²⁴⁵Ibid., 149.

²⁴⁶ibid., 149.

When the Church gets involved in politics it brings politics into the Church. It divides the Church causing strife among its members. Thus, Kuitert concludes politics is something the Church can do without.

The above remarks spell out why the Church should not be involved in politics, but Kuitert also believes that there is another danger when the Church makes political statements: the socialising of the faith. Kuitert argues, that politically and socially active churches have “sacralised” their political and social opinions, making a personal option the very heart of the Christian faith. Socially minded churches have confused faith and action. According to Kuitert, this confusion places a limit on faith because it makes “our souls and our bliss dependent on our own action, and that is so much in conflict with the character of the Christian message of salvation as grace that we should be denying the Christian tradition altogether if we thought in this direction.”²⁴⁷ By limiting faith to social action the Church would be leaving the Christian impoverished, because he or she would not be receiving God’s message of eternal salvation but rather the message that salvation is dependent on solving the problems of the world. This leaves the Christian tired and overwhelmed and left with the impression that whatever he/she does is not enough.

Therefore, Kuitert argues that faith is more than social action. Faith includes action but action is not the whole of faith. Faith is a trust in God; a search for who God is; an opening of ourselves to God as Creator and Redeemer. When faith is limited to social action this trust, search, and opening is lost because human existence is reduced to a social nature and the Christian no longer asks “Who am I before God?” but rather “What should I do?”

From this analysis of Kuitert’s arguments, should we conclude that he believes that there should be no Christian response to human suffering? In his book, Kuitert constantly insists that Christians cannot ignore social responsibility. The realisation of social and political ends must be carried on by

²⁴⁷Ibid., 161.

Christians and Church members, but not by any particular church. To understand Kuitert's position the reader has to separate the Church as a collective body of people who believe in Christ from the Christian as an individual.

5 So the face presented by the Christian church is different from that
 presented by Christians. Are there then two Christian faces? Yes,
 that is not only an unavoidable conclusion but also an indication of
 the actual situation. The Christian church is not the world's
 10 welfare worker, though welfare work is desperately needed.
 Christians are to take part in it. Far less is the Christian church a
 political organisation or an institution which serves to foster social
 interests, although we cannot live without such institutions. You
 can see Christians playing a role in such institutions and
 15 organisations from top to bottom. Or even more clearly: the
 question of bread is a primary question for all human beings, but
 the Christian church is not the organisation that sees to bread.
 There are other organisations of bakers. And again other
 organisations have been formed for the distribution of the bread.
 20 Christians can be bakers; the church cannot. Christians are judges
 and arbiters, but the church has not been appointed for that.²⁴⁸

So, according to Kuitert, there is no relation between the Christian Church and politics or social action. But there is a relationship between social action and a Christian's faith. What is this relationship? When does a Christian's faith have sociological significance?

25 Looking at Kuitert's argument, the answer is not readily apparent. Kuitert
 begins by saying that the "Christian faith individualises people by bringing
 them personally to entrust themselves to God and his word of salvation."²⁴⁹ One
 would think upon hearing such a statement that Kuitert's argument has fallen
 prey to what liberation theologians call "privatised religion." However, like
 30 Norman this is precisely Kuitert's point, the social significance of the Christian
 faith lies in the fact that "it addresses people personally and tells them that
 something must happen to them." In order for there to be a change in society,
 the individual person must be changed first. This change consists of a turning
 away from sin, which Kuitert identifies as disasters that individuals have
 35 brought upon themselves. Only when an individual is changed in their ways,

²⁴⁸Ibid., 172.

²⁴⁹Ibid., 177.

can a society be changed. There lies the social significance of the Christian faith. To put it in Kuitert's words: "The input — to put it in computer terms — determines the output. If the improver is not himself improved, then the conditions which he or she has created cannot improve."²⁵⁰ Kuitert believes that society does need to be changed, but to do it individual people need to be changed first and foremost — and the only way people can be changed is to hear God's message of salvation in Jesus Christ.

Neoliberal Theologians

Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith

In the early 1980s, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the Vatican office charged with maintaining orthodoxy, prepared its attack on liberation theology. Pope John Paul II named Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, a Vatican traditionalist, to head the office. Ratzinger started his attack by criticising Gustavo Gutiérrez and Leonardo Boff. Ratzinger sent a letter to Boff accusing him of serious "theological deviations" and attempting to infuse Christianity with Marxist symbols and meaning. Ratzinger published in 1984 a critique of liberation theology widely interpreted as particularly simplistic and reductionist in its condemnation of liberation theology.²⁵¹ But the two most widely known examples of Ratzinger's handiwork are the two Vatican Instructions: "Instruction on Certain Aspects of the Theology of Liberation," and "Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation."

The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith could easily be referred to as a "conservative" organisation but we have classified it under the title "neoliberal" because of what appears to be a willingness to accommodate to the aspirations of the Third World for liberation. Although Ratzinger retains his virulent anti-communism and assertion of the traditional authority of the Roman

²⁵⁰Ibid., 179.

²⁵¹Stewart-Gambino, "New Game, New Rules," in Cleary *Conflict and Competition*, 7. See Hennelly, *Liberation Theology*, 1990, for the text of these articles.

Catholic church in his “Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation,” he acknowledges the conditions of poverty and oppression in Latin America as well as tacitly recognises the religious validity of the notion of liberation.

The first *Instruction* recognises the aspirations of the poor for liberation when it says “humankind will no longer passively submit to crushing poverty with its effects of death, disease, and decline. It resents this misery as intolerable violation of its native dignity. Many factors, and among them certainly the leaven of the gospel, have contributed to an awakening of the consciousness of the oppressed.”²⁵² The instruction also insists that the Roman Catholic church must respond to these aspirations. “The church,” it says “intends to condemn abuses, injustices, and attacks against freedom, wherever they occur and whoever commits them. It intends to struggle, by its own means, for the defence and advancement of the rights of humankind, especially of the poor.” However, the main purpose of the document is “to draw attention . . . to the deviations and risks of deviation, damaging to the faith and to Christian living, that are brought about by certain forms of liberation theology which use, in an insufficiently critical manner, concepts borrowed from various currents of Marxist thought.”²⁵³ Therefore, the document admits that “liberation” is a legitimate theological theme and the aspirations of the people which should be defended, but the document’s intention is to defend traditional views.

The Instruction tries to make a case against Marxism. Liberation theology, it argues, wrongly presents Marxism “as though it were scientific language,” somehow distinct from Marxism as an all-embracing philosophy (VII, 12).²⁵⁴ The Instruction denies the possibility of making any distinction between a Marxist social analysis and the rest of Marxist ideology (VII, 6). Therefore,

²⁵²“Instruction on Certain Aspects of the Theology of Liberation,” I. 4., in Hennelly, *Liberation Theology*, 1990, 395.

²⁵³*Ibid.*, Introduction, 394.

²⁵⁴Hebblethwaite, “Document Warns About Liberation Theology ‘Abuses’ Does Not Condemn,” in Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, ed., *Liberation Theology and the Vatican Document*, vol. 1, 1985, 106.

liberation theology wrongly makes Marxism the guiding force of “praxis” because it accepts Marxist class struggle which bases its conclusions on hatred and a “systematic and deliberate recourse to blind violence” (IX, 5-7). This is most evident, according to the Instruction, in liberation theology’s treatment of politics and history. Liberation theology, the Instruction insists, reduces Christianity to politics because God and history are identified: “There is a tendency to identify the kingdom of God and its growth with the human liberation movement and to make history itself the subject of its own development, as a process of the self-redemption of humankind by means of the class struggle” (IX, 3). Thus, “every affirmation of faith or theology is subordinated to a political criterion” (IX, 6); the secularisation of Christian concepts is complete. Everything in the church becomes a class fight. For liberation theologians, “the church of the poor signifies the church of the class” (IX, 10).

15 The purpose of the second instruction, which was released two years later, was to create a more positive statement on the church’s own teaching concerning liberation and freedom. It did not treat liberation theology directly but wanted to produce its own version of liberation themes. Like the first instruction, it affirms the church’s commitment to justice for the poor. It insists
20 that the church allows the “signs of the times” to guide its mission and direction. However, in the Instruction it appears that an honest dialogue with the “signs of the times” is partly overlooked because it draws a sharp line between “spiritual” liberation and “temporal” or “earthly” liberation. Freedom is understood individualistically as self-determination; a historical, existential, and corporate
25 anthropology, which is at the basis of liberation theology, is completely missed. According to the Instruction, authentic freedom is being freed from sin and restored to communion with God and can only come about through grace and the sacraments. Earthly freedom can create better conditions for authentic freedom but cannot create it. Inner conversion is essential for social change. Social sin

is derived from personal sin. Although the instruction recognises that people should be active in changing unjust social structures, those structures can only be changed when inner, personal conversion is given priority.

In short, Ratzinger and both Instructions dismiss liberation theology's Marxist conception of history, which is a history of conflict, structured around the class struggle for liberation. This determining principle, they argue, wrongly reinterprets the Christian faith and causes conflict within the Church. Sin, according to the instructions, is also radically misunderstood among liberation theologians as a radical alienation, which is conceived as merely the bias of political alienations in the socio-political sphere. The class struggle is presented as a fact and as a necessity for Christians. The objective of liberation theologians is to make Christianity a means of mobilising for the sake of revolutions. This is why the Vatican is hesitant to embrace Latin American liberation theology.

15 *Richard Neuhaus*

Richard Neuhaus is a prolific North American Lutheran pastor whose work basically agrees with the two Vatican *Instructions*. In those chapters of his book, *The Catholic Moment*, that directly pertain to liberation theology, Neuhaus spends most of his time reviewing Catholic criticisms particularly those of John Paul II and the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith. However, Neuhaus registers his own criticisms in the final section of the part on liberation theology in the form of an analogy (THEOLOGY AND POLITICS—A CAUTIONARY TALE). He tells the story of Emanuel Hirsch, a German theologian who aligned himself with the National Socialists of the Nazi regime. But before he begins Hirsch's story, Neuhaus clarifies some important definitions. He distinguishes the difference between "*theology of politics*" and "*political theology*." All theology, from the early Church on, has *theology of politics* in common. It is simply the affirmation that politics is about the cultivation of the common good. Politics pursues the question: What "ought" to be done so that the common good of all the

people is obtained? By affirming a *theology of politics* through history the Church has demonstrated its concern that what is being done in politics is congruent with the will of God. The *theology of politics* is more concerned with “the public rules by which social life is to be ordered,” than with particular
 5 political positions, which is the main concern of *political theology*. By *political theology* Neuhaus means a theology that takes a political direction or a course of action.

10 A political theology speaks more of “reading the signs of the times” than of obedience to abiding definitions of the good. Put differently, the good is not so much that which God has decreed as it is that which God is doing. History is the story of the “God who acts,” to use the phrase from the older school of biblical theology, and it is the Christian’s responsibility to get with God’s action. Political theology readily becomes politicised theology and
 15 theologised politics. It is susceptible to confusing whatever is happening—or whatever we think is happening—with God’s acting. Thus the slogan, “The world sets agenda for the Church.” Such political theology frequently turns into the paths of enthusiasm and fanaticism.²⁵⁵

20 Neuhaus states that liberation theology is “the most aggressive form of political theology today.” It has forsaken the Church’s classical position, a *theology of politics*, which speaks more of the creation and preservation of political order.

Neuhaus tells the story of Hirsch in a manner that makes it easy for his readers to draw comparisons between Hirsch and modern liberation
 25 theologies.²⁵⁶ Neuhaus remarks how Hirsch was deeply committed to politics and to the German people. Hirsch sought their political liberation from what he believed to be Allied oppression. Hirsch saw reality, according to Neuhaus, from “the underside of history” and by “reading the signs of the times.” Hirsch concluded from this new perspective that the German people were being
 30 oppressed by Western democratic liberalism. Hirsch saw the people as an oppressed people being swallowed up by capitalistic individualism. He wanted to develop a Christian political ethic, rooted in other scientific sources, that would

²⁵⁵Neuhaus, *The Catholic Moment*, 1987, 217.

²⁵⁶*Ibid.*, 218ff.

be a “potent truth and a revolutionary truth, that could cut through debilitating relativities of liberalism.”

According to Neuhaus, to accomplish the goals of this struggle, Hirsch spoke of the necessity of solidarity amongst the people and a liberating
5 revolution. This revolution would be “led by a vanguard that constitutes itself as a ‘community of conscience’ leading the entire society to become such a community of conscience.”²⁵⁷ Though Hirsch disagreed with the use of force, he believed that if it was found to be necessary; the community of conscience could use violence to counter-act forces that were being employed by Western
10 imperialism. Since Germany was in a situation of conflict, violence between the oppressed and oppressor was “inevitable.”

Like modern liberation theology, Neuhaus argues, Hirsch spoke of the relation between history and salvation. He rejected any dualism between salvation and the political and social struggle.²⁵⁸ He believed that Christian faith
15 allowed people to deepen their commitment to concrete causes. The Church had to make concrete choices in history, thus it had to make partisan choices. Hirsch argued that the Church could not ignore the German national crisis. Reality needed to be changed so that the Church could better respond to the needs of the people.²⁵⁹ The Church could not remain neutral; it needed to take a leadership
20 role in the struggle for German identity.

Neuhaus carefully notes that Hirsch’s ideas may have been radical, but “he did not go so far as today’s liberationist proponents” who argue for a “partisan church”. Hirsch did not totally equate the Church’s witness of God’s mercy with the political struggle. Neuhaus tells us, that for Hirsch “the struggle
25 remained in all its parts always under judgement. It may be an encounter with

²⁵⁷Ibid., 219.

²⁵⁸Ibid.

²⁵⁹Ibid., 221.

God in history, but, according to Hirsch, there is no theological warrant for saying it is *THE* encounter with God in history.”²⁶⁰

This point is precisely what Paul Tillich, Hirsch’s friend, accused him of forgetting. “Tillich’s basic argument is that Hirsch had collapsed theology into politics, giving an uncritical spiritual legitimation to his judgement of contingent events.”²⁶¹ Hirsch had turned theology into ideology. He refused, according to Tillich, to give the Church the power to say both no and yes (the *reservatum* and the *obligatum*) to historical developments because the political struggle was equated with salvation history in Hirsch’s theology. Neuhaus summarises Tillich’s position:

Tillich accuses Hirsch of historical myopia, of apotheosising a specific historical moment as *the* moment of definitive change, to the neglect of two thousand years of Christian history, to the neglect of the longer reaches of human experience, and, most particularly, to the neglect of *the* definitive revelation in the Christ event.

When history is sacralised, political events and political commitments can no longer be placed under judgement because it would be like placing God under judgement. The Church can no longer say no! It can only say yes. When the Church’s *reservatum* is nullified totalitarianism takes over. Summarising Tillich’s position, Neuhaus reminds his readers that: “In the absence of the *reservatum*, the *obligatum* becomes spiritually idolatrous and politically disastrous.”²⁶²

Neuhaus argues that, like Hirsch, in liberation theology the *obligatum* has swallowed up the *reservatum*. In liberation theology the Church’s obligation to political commitments is too over emphasised, thus it cannot remain at a critical distance from political ideologies. It has denied the *reservatum* that is implicit in the “eschatological proviso” — that the transcendent Kingdom of God is the negation of our political systems. By denying the *reservatum* liberation

²⁶⁰Ibid., 220.

²⁶¹Ibid., 222.

²⁶²Ibid., 224.

theology denies that political commitments should be judged. And “movements that deny in principle a normative reason by which they can be brought under judgement are not to be trusted,” argues Neuhaus.

According to Neuhaus, then, the Church must retain its right for saying
5 both yes and no to political commitments. The Church can only give its unequivocal yes to the Kingdom of God. It must exercise its *reservatum* in connection with all other historical and political positions. The Church must remember that the *reservatum* is “prior and more certain” than the *obligatum* in its relationship to politics. Thus the Church must maintain the qualitative
10 difference between eschatology and history, between God’s revolution and human revolutions. If it fails to do so, as liberation theology has done, the Church will make the same mistake as Hirsch and give moral and theological support or justification to a totalitarian state.

What then is the relationship of the Church to politics, according to
15 Neuhaus? He argues that every Christian must remember that his or her ultimate allegiance is to the Gospel of God’s justifying grace in Jesus Christ and to the Church which is constituted and sustained by the Gospel. The Church is a historical reality and is in the world, but it has the freedom to proclaim the Gospel and define its mission apart from the world. After all, Neuhaus argues,
20 the Church is defined by “a grace that transcends all historical moments and movements.”²⁶³ Does this mean that the Church’s proclamation or mission is other-worldly and has no concern for the world? Certainly not, Neuhaus would answer. It is true that at times the Church has shown little concern for the well-being of humanity, and at those times the Church needs to be reformed so that it
25 is not inimical to social conditions. However, according to Neuhaus, the Church must never attempt to reconstitute itself in terms other than the its Gospel definition or in terms of a program of social and political change. “What must never be done,” writes Neuhaus, “is to posit an ideologically defined ‘people’s

²⁶³Ibid., 227.

church' against the Church constituted by the Gospel. What must never be done is to attempt to replace the Gospel itself with an ideology for social transformation, which we can call the gospel."²⁶⁴

The problem with liberation theology, according to Neuhaus, is that it attempts to substitute the message of God's grace with "proposals for the common good," — or as Kuitert and Norman called it, social-welfare programs. It confuses politics with salvation and thus does not allow the Church to properly judge between loyalties. Worst of all, Neuhaus argues, by "spiritually inflating" the role of the immanent, liberation theology overestimates political possibilities. Liberation theology is promising that "politics can deliver much more than it actually can." In offering salvation through politics, liberation theology has held out a false hope and a cruel promise to the poor and oppressed.

This false promise is a particularly cruel lie when told to the poor, oppressed, and marginal who—more often than not—have very limited possibilities of bringing about political and social transformations on the grand scale often implied by "liberation." If the meaning of existence is to be established through participation in such transformations, as some theologians are suggesting, then it is to be feared that the masses of the poor are consigned to living meaningless lives. To be sure, it can be claimed that meaningful existence is achieved by participating in, even dying for, "the struggle" that will some day be vindicated in the New Order. But it must be allowed that, on the basis of the historical record and a reasonable understanding of human possibilities, those who make that claim are in a weak position to accuse traditional Christian piety of offering "pie in the sky."²⁶⁵

After saying all this we do not believe that Neuhaus totally rejects liberation theology all together. We believe that we can categorise him as being in the camp of those theologians who support the intent of liberation theology but doubt its method because of his support of Pope John Paul II's critique of liberation theology. Neuhaus argues that John Paul

emphasises the pervasiveness of alienation under all existent social systems. . . he lifts up the alienation of humanity from nature, of the labourer from his work, of corporate power from communal purpose, of governments from their people. . . and some of these

²⁶⁴Ibid.

²⁶⁵Ibid., 229.

alienations can be remedied, or at least tempered, by human action in the worlds of culture, politics, and economics.²⁶⁶

According to Neuhaus, John Paul does not make the mistake of separating God's kingdom into two realms — the “realm of redemption where the Gospel rules,”
 5 and the “civil realm untouched by grace and redemptive possibility.” John Paul holds the two realms together. John Paul also does not make the converse mistake of making the two realms one; equating transcendent with the immanent. While holding out the promise that the gospel message can help people overcome cultural, political and economic alienation, John Paul is also
 10 according to Neuhaus, realistic about the relationship between “eternal hopes and temporal tasks.” “The Church must issue the unremitting reminder that the human aspiration toward the infinite cannot be satisfied by *any* new order short of the ultimate new order that is the Kingdom of God.”²⁶⁷

Like John Paul II, Neuhaus wants the poor and oppressed of this world to
 15 find liberation from those social structures that oppress them, but he questions whether liberation theology provides the correct answers. Unfortunately, Neuhaus fails to refer to actual texts of liberation theology; he spends more time criticising what he perceives the implications of liberation theology to be than actually analysing stated texts. From these implications he makes sweeping
 20 judgements about the dangers of political theology.

Michael Novak

Another theologian who uses similar criticisms of liberation theology is Michael Novak (*Will It Liberate?*, 1986). Like his colleague Richard Neuhaus, Novak argues against the perceived utopianism of the liberationists. He
 25 recognises that behind the idea of socialism in liberation theology lies the desire for a completely new structure of human relationships.

Many who claim to desire socialism actually desire not a particular set of economic institutions, but “a new man.” They want a society characterised by caring, generosity, compassion and unselfishness.

²⁶⁶Ibid.

²⁶⁷Ibid., 230.

5 To some extent, they naively combine the picture of a society in which citizens are saintly Christians with a picture of socialist economic institutions. Their claim is that institutions "condition" humans. Thus, if one can somehow construct the "right" sort of institutions, humans will be conditioned to walk in the paths of Christian righteousness.²⁶⁸

Novak argues that this is theologically unorthodox. He believes that liberation theology does not take sin seriously enough. It ignores human frailty and fails to be realistic about what human beings can accomplish. Novak argues 10 that "Christian theology does not hold that the establishment of an order congruent with Christian principles will 'condition' citizens to act as virtuous Christians."²⁶⁹ Christian doctrine is more realistic than that. It recognises that no institution, project, or movement in history is completely free from human sinfulness. Therefore liberation theology, Novak concludes, is fundamentally in 15 error because it is designed upon a utopian basis. Those who support liberation theology believe that a society can be created were justice and equality prevails. However, Novak agrees with Reinhold Niebuhr and believes that such a society does not exist.

20 What is lacking among all these moralists, whether religious or rational, is an understanding of the brutal character of the behaviour of all human collectives, and the power of self-interest and collective egoism in all intergroup relations. Failure to recognise the stubborn resistance of group egoism to all moral and inclusive social objectives inevitably involves them in unrealistic and confused political thought. They regard social conflict either 25 as an impossible method of achieving morally approved ends or as a momentary expedient which a more perfect education or purer religion will make unnecessary. They do not see that the limitations of the human imagination, the easy subservience of reason to prejudice and passion, and the consequent persistence of irrational egoism, particularly in group behaviour, make social conflict an inevitability in human history, probably to its very 30 end.²⁷⁰

The danger of this utopianism basis, according to Novak, is social conflict. Novak 35 concludes that, "the trouble with [liberation theology] is that it lacks checks and

²⁶⁸Novak, *Will it Liberate?*, 1991, 114.

²⁶⁹Ibid.

²⁷⁰Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, 1932, xx.

balances. It does not restrain selfishness. It channels selfishness into the quest of military and bureaucratic power.”²⁷¹

But the full force of Novak’s criticism does not lie in this rejection of liberation theology’s utopianism. As President Reagan’s Chief of the U.S. Delegation to the U.N. Human Rights Commission Meeting in Geneva for two years, Novak’s work on liberation theology focuses almost entirely on the difficulties of its economic analysis and its subsequent rejection of capitalism in favour of socialism.²⁷²

Novak operates with the thesis that “of all the systems of political economy which have shaped our history, none has so revolutionised ordinary expectations of human life—lengthened the life span, made the elimination of poverty and famine thinkable, enlarged the range of human choice—as democratic capitalism.” By democratic capitalism he means a “market economy; a polity respectful of the rights of the individual to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness; and a system of cultural institutions moved by ideals of liberty and justice for all.”²⁷³ The direction of his thought rests upon two pillars, the first is inward. It is the defence of the “inalienable rights endowed in each human person by the Creator” with its central characteristic as the opportunity of self-determination. The second is outward, toward institutions. At the foundation of his thinking is the desire to construct institutions that respect individual human rights above all else.²⁷⁴ Only when liberty and self-interest and determination is respected at all levels in our society, argues Novak, will all of society benefit. “Democratic capitalism was in the mind of its first theoreticians a marvellously designed method for harnessing the energies of human self-interest and

²⁷¹Ibid. I have substituted “liberation theology” for the word “socialism” which Novak uses.

²⁷²Sigmund, *Liberation Theology at the Crossroads*, 1990, 147.

²⁷³Novak, “A Theology of Development for Latin America,” in *Liberation Theology*, Nash ed., 1984, 21.

²⁷⁴Novak, *Will it Liberate*, 1986, 201-202.

selfishness for social purposes. There seems to be no question that this design has been successful.”²⁷⁵

Because Novak rejects utopianism, he insists that his understanding of democratic capitalism is not built upon a utopian basis. Institutions that respect a persons individual right for self-determination is built upon checks and balances and is “established against every form of human power, precisely upon the ground that every human being sometimes sins.”²⁷⁶ However, Novak fails to explain exactly how capitalism keeps human sin in check. In fact, when speaking of capitalism, Novak relies upon the goodness of human nature. He tries to discredit the assumption in liberation theology “that private citizens cannot in their own economic actions embody humanistic, Jewish and Christian values, and that such values need to be imposed by *public officials*.”²⁷⁷ Claiming that no social order will assure perfect human virtue, Novak insists that democratic capitalism based upon individual’s seeking their own liberty “will achieve a higher practice of humanistic, Jewish, and Christian values.” It does so in two ways.

First, it maximises the opportunity for every decisionmaker to act in the most humanistic, Jewish, and Christian way open to that individual. Strictly economic outcomes are almost never a person’s sole interest. Second, it maximises the reliance of each person upon the integrity and cooperation of others.²⁷⁸

It is peculiar that Novak would argue against all “utopianisms of every sort” but insist that capitalism allows people to act in a humanistic way that is wanting to co-operate with others for the benefit of all of society.

Novak is critical of liberation theology because of its reliance upon socialism. “Its aim is to repress the individual creator, especially in economic life. It directly opposes the economic liberation of the human person.”²⁷⁹ He complains that under socialism human individualisation cannot be realised.

²⁷⁵Novak, *The American Vision: An Essay on the Future of Democratic Capitalism*, 1978, 13.

²⁷⁶Novak, *Will It Liberate*, 1986, 203.

²⁷⁷Ibid., 207.

²⁷⁸Ibid, 214.

²⁷⁹Ibid., 193.

Individual freedom for self-interest and determination is lost. Against this policy Novak supports what he calls a “liberal” understanding of liberty which means equality of all people under the law, equality of opportunity, and equality to choose among one’s own economic possibilities. For Novak this equality means
5 there should be no interference in economic processes under a free market economy.

J. Andrew Kirk

The final critique of liberation theology that we want to review is J. Andrew Kirk’s. We have saved his criticism until last because he is the most
10 sympathetic to liberation theology compared to those above. Kirk, a Protestant evangelical theologian who at one time was Professor of New Testament at the Union Theological Seminary in Buenos Aires, believes that liberation theology provides a necessary corrective to the practice of traditional European and North American theologies. However, Third World liberation theology has failed to
15 produce what it has set out to accomplish — to bring the liberating message of the gospel to those in need of liberation. He believes that its biblical hermeneutics, which has been unduly influenced by Marxism, is incapable of producing a liberative hermeneutics. Therefore, he believes a “comprehensive, alternative approach to biblical interpretation” is needed by liberation theology. Kirk’s
20 purpose, then, is not to refute liberation theology but rather to offer what he sees as an essential corrective so that, in his words, “an authentic theology of liberation will arise.”²⁸⁰

In his own words, Kirk’s book *Liberation Theology: An Evangelical View from the Third World* is “an inquiry into the premises and outworkings of the
25 use of the Bible by the theology of liberation, with a subsequent discussion of the role of praxis (and the place of Marxism as a revolutionary theory related to praxis) in the hermeneutical circle of Bible, Church and the Third World reality

²⁸⁰Kirk, *Liberation Theology*, 1979, 203.

of poverty and exploitation.”²⁸¹ He questions liberation theology’s hermeneutical method and argues that it relies too heavily on the present situation in the Third World as a controlling factor in interpreting Scripture. He argues that if the classical way of doing theology could be understood as a movement from the “biblical texts to the writer’s theological intentions and then to external referents,” then the theology of liberation can be understood as a movement in the reverse order — “moving from the external referents to the biblical text.”²⁸² Kirk is uncomfortable with the priority given in liberation theology to the “event” or historical situation over the use of Scripture in the hermeneutical circle. The reason for this discomfort is because he believes that liberation theology, due to its influence by Marxism, does not take sin seriously.

Kirk accuses liberation theology of replacing God’s revelation through Scripture with a “dialectical ideology.” He believes that liberation theology has allowed its ideological framework, which is under the influence of Marxist theory, to become the ultimate authority in the interpretation of Scripture. This, Kirk argues, raises fundamental questions about the Christian source of truth. By believing that an event, praxis, or particular ideology is the only source that can truly disclose the truth about interhuman relationships in society, liberation theologians mistakenly make the historical situation the only way to understand reality. It is a mistake, according to Kirk, because it compromises a central biblical principle and a pivotal Reformation theme: Scripture remains the only legitimate terminus for the Christian understanding of reality (*Sola Scriptura*). In other words, in liberation theology Scripture is placed on the periphery of the hermeneutical circle and the “event” is moved to the centre, while in Reformation theology Scripture is given the centre role and events are assigned to the periphery.

²⁸¹Ibid., 207-208.

²⁸²Ibid., 186.

Kirk accuses liberation theology of “using the Bible in an ‘inspirational’ rather than ‘objective’ sense.”²⁸³ By this Kirk means that liberation theology uses the Bible to inspire its prefabricated romantic notions of revolution or structural change in society, instead of allowing the Bible to objectively critique liberation theology's reflection. In Kirk's own words, liberation theology fails to let the Bible make its “unique contribution both to an analysis of human alienation and to human liberation.”²⁸⁴

By using the Bible in an ‘objective’ sense, Kirk does not mean that Scripture can be read from a neutral position. He realises that any interpretation of the Bible is going to be culturally conditioned, but he argues that “all interpretation needs to be conducted with the greatest possible objectivity.”²⁸⁵ Kirk believes, then, that the Bible can (ought to) be read objectively, though the reader is conditioned by his or her ideological position. He believes that Western theologians have mistakenly attempted to read the Bible objectively without paying proper attention to context, while liberation theologians have mistakenly over-emphasised the context and not allowed the Bible to speak to them objectively. He believes an adequate biblical interpretation must be conducted between these two poles. “There is the pole of man’s contemporary situation, scientifically analysed and the pole of the biblical message, interpreted according to its own criteria.”²⁸⁶ The gospel message can be interpreted on its own without the use of Marxism’s ideological critique. In other words, Scripture can be interpreted through its own hermeneutical key. Because Scripture is precisely the self-revelation of God it provides a way to interpret itself. In Kirk’s words: “hermeneutical understanding of the text is first derived from the text’s own hermeneutical procedure.”²⁸⁷ The bible offers an objective hermeneutical procedure which keeps the ideological factor in

²⁸³*Ibid.*, 189.

²⁸⁴*Ibid.*, 187.

²⁸⁵*Ibid.*, 192-193.

²⁸⁶*Ibid.*, 193.

²⁸⁷*Ibid.*, 190.

check because it keeps “man’s propensity to interpose either his own subjective and idealistic feelings or limited human context and understanding,” into the hermeneutical task. Thus, Kirk argues that to interpret the Bible one needs to simply immerse oneself in the biblical world and be prepared to accept biblical thought-forms.

To summarise, Kirk makes the following remarks:

The theology of liberation has opted for a contemporary historical pre-understanding before approaching the text. By doing this, it believes that theology’s perennial ideological problem will be solved and its contribution to man’s liberation consequently maximised. This is not so, however, for the text questions and confronts man much more radically than does that particular ideology from which the option has been made. For this reason, we insist that the task of modern theology should be a consciously critical reflection on God’s Word in the light of a contemporary praxis of liberation. If this is not the order of our methodology then the phrase (in Gutiérrez’ definition), ‘in the light of God’s Word’, ultimately becomes emptied of content.²⁸⁸

Kirk argues that a contemporary historical pre-understanding (the Marxist critique) should not be given precedence over the Biblical text. He believes that while Marxism makes us aware of the ideological element in empirical expressions of the Christian faith, the liberation theologians use it for something more— as a revolutionary theory about how and why to change reality, and a theory of oppression that is derived from “an inadequate analysis of evil” that is “but one more example of the modern tendency towards philosophical monism.”²⁸⁹ The hermeneutical method found in liberation theologies, then, cannot adequately produce a true theology of liberation. The biblical text, on the other hand, confronts us much more radically because it places the centre of man’s alienation elsewhere—“in his desire to be autonomous with regard to his Creator”—and it defines man’s freedom “only in terms of the recognition that he is a creature absolutely held to account by God for the way he pursues his relationships” and that his Son is “the only one sent by God to take away the sin

²⁸⁸*Ibid.*, 193.

²⁸⁹Sigmund, *Liberation Theology at the Crossroads*, 1990, 138.

of the world.”²⁹⁰ Only when a hermeneutic is given this basis can it truly become a liberating hermeneutic. In essence, then, Kirk gives the same warning raised by other critics. Liberation theologians must always maintain a critical distance from social praxis and the social situation.

5 Summary of Major Criticisms

The Gospel Message is Diminished

Latin American liberation theologies are criticised for over-stressing the historical setting and for losing the Christian gospel. Critics argue that instead of simply applying the gospel message to a particular situation, in actuality, liberation theologians read into the gospel a foreign ideology — what they want to find there. They selectively read the scriptures, disregarding passages that do not suite their purposes. They reread the Bible simplistically and naively, and use texts and passages out of contexts. What makes matters worse, argue critics, liberation theologies combine this narrow selectivity with unexamined axioms of the unity and authority of the Bible.²⁹¹ Liberation theologies do not allow the gospel to stand on its own integrity. They supplement or support it with scientific formulas which are supposed to make the message more applicable to the human situation. Critics question the necessity of this and feel the gospel is being diminished.

Politicisation of Faith — This criticism is closely related to the first. Critics believe that liberation theologies understand eschatology strictly as a human enterprise. According to the critics, they confuse the coming of the Kingdom with social change. They focus on “social sin” to the neglect of personal sin, and therefore they stand accused of utopianism. They are not interested in other dimensions of the Christian faith, they only identify liberation exclusively with freedom from political, social and economic oppression. In the words of Donald

²⁹⁰Kirk, *Liberation Theology*, 1979, 192.

²⁹¹Forrester, *Theology and Politics*, 1988, 83.

Bloesch, Professor of Theology in the University of Dubuque Theological Seminary:

5 The worship of God tends to be equated with the service of
 humanity, and prayer becomes nothing more than reflection upon
 what God is calling us to do to alleviate the suffering of the
 dispossessed. The mission of the church is reinterpreted to mean the
 self-development of oppressed peoples rather than the conversion
 of the heathen to Christianity.²⁹²

10 Thus critics argue that liberation theology's claim that all life is political and
 that the church must involve itself politically, runs counter to the primary
 religious mission of the church. This leads to the final major criticism.

15 *Church as a Political Weapon* — Critics question if the *reservatum* found in
 the eschatological proviso is really as Segundo argues, "one more outmoded
 Christian ideology." The critics believe that liberation theologies dangerously
 overemphasise the *obligatum* at the expense of the *reservatum*. The Church is no
 longer given the ability to say both a Yes and a No to political programs or
 ideologies. Liberation theologies require that the Church exercise only its Yes to
 political programs without any kind of critical reflection upon those ideologies.

20 Critics argue that without the *reservatum* the Church can quickly become
 partisan political weapon. Without the *reservatum* politics will enter the
 Church and destroy it; politics will turn one believer against another. Politics,
 argue many critics, calls for the use of power which does not agree with the
 Christian gospel. It is the struggle for power. It uses power to acquire and
 maintain more power. Thus politics is located in the sphere of violence because
 25 it is essentially the attempt to control others. Politics, then, when injected into
 the Church will destroy all Christian unity. It will require Christian to turn
 upon Christian. Thus, the critics argue that all political involvement must be
 rejected and the Church most never forget the *reservatum* — its ability to say No
 to political programs.

²⁹²Ibid.

2.4 RESPONSE TO THE CRITICS

In the last section we saw how critics of Latin American liberation theology appear to present their arguments along two lines of thought. On the one hand, there are those conservative theologians who defend an old, dualistic approach to theology and politics, arguing that the two should never mix. On the other hand, there are those reformist theologians, the neoliberals, who appreciate all that liberation theology has taught them about defending the needs of the poor and oppressed but fault liberation theology for its methodology and its association with Marxism. The two groups have attacked liberation theology, challenging its political, economic and theological positions. This thesis argues against both groups, claiming that liberation theology, represented here by José Míguez-Bonino, presents a more adequate understanding of the relationship between theology and politics because of its “option for the poor.”

In Section 2.2, we clarified the “fundamentals” of Míguez-Bonino’s position concerning the relation of church and politics by looking at his earlier work. In 2.3, we reviewed criticisms espoused by European and North American theologians. In this section (2.4), we examine Míguez-Bonino’s arguments against these criticisms in his later work.

The Political, Economic, and Theological Atmosphere of Latin America in the 1980s

The Political Climate

Throughout the 1980s repressive military dictatorships were replaced in many nations of Latin America by civilian democracies. Civilian governments gained control in Peru in 1980, Honduras in 1982, Argentina in 1983, Brazil and Guatemala in 1985, Chile in 1988 and Paraguay and Panama in 1989.²⁹³ These democracies emerged as a result of a tenacious resistance by popular

²⁹³Christian Smith, *The Emergence of Liberation Theology*, 1991, 231.

organisations and a lack of administrative ability demonstrated by the military in power.²⁹⁴ It is without doubt that this resurgence of democracy has helped reshape liberation theology in Latin America. Evidence of this can be found in statements made by liberation theologians at the 1986 meeting of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT). There, Latin American theologians affirmed a need for democracy in their continent. In the past, their position toward democracy had been cautious because they “associated the word *democracy* with an institutional order proper to the bourgeoisie.” However, now, along with the popular sectors of their society, they saw “a new valuing of democracy,” because it involved creating a space where various political projects could combine to forge new political structures that could include the participation of the majority.²⁹⁵

In several of his more recent articles, Míguez-Bonino also expresses his preference for democratisation and speaks of the implications this transition has had on the role of the Church in society. He insists that only because of democracy did the CEBs emerge to take advantage of the “space of freedom, juridical protection and the possibility of association.” Therefore, the system of democracy is to be “vigorously upheld and defended,” he argues, because it presents the “means for strengthening the possibilities of the ‘poor’ to

²⁹⁴Munck, *Latin America: The Transition to Democracy*, 1989.

²⁹⁵The “Latin American Report” in Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians, *Third World Theologies*, 1990, 59. Further proof that liberation theology has been reshaped by the resurgence of democracy in Latin America can be found in Hugo Assmann’s work. In the mid-1980s he asserted that socio-political liberation can only be achieved in Latin America through democratic institutions. Even the radical members of the Latin American left “have learned much of their own mistakes and thus realise that they must now re-establish their organic relation to the popular majorities, which never understood their abstract revolutionism.” Many on the left have begun to understand that “democratic values are revolutionary values.” “The real revolutionaries have learned to value democratic participation and the authentically popular movements. For this reason they are no longer interested in chaotic social explosions, which frequently result from despair and extreme poverty.” Thus, Assmann concludes that “liberation theologians and all those in the third world” concerned with poverty are developing “a spirit of openness to negotiate minimal consensus.” Assmann, “The Improvement of Democracy in Latin America and the Debt Crisis,” 1987, 47-52.

participation” in society.²⁹⁶ This has given the Church a new role to play in society:

5 The role of the church now is to shape the building up of a democratic consciousness in the people—slowly to overcome the sense of fear, of indifference created by fear, of self-repression, that exists in the Argentine population.²⁹⁷

The Economic Climate

There are three external factors that caused the debt crisis: the oil-price shock of the 1970s, the rise of interest on loans and the imbalance of international trade. When in 1973-74 OPEC began raising the price of their oil from \$2 (United States currency) to more than \$10 per barrel (and to \$30 by 10 1980), the less developed countries (LDCs) saw no alternative but to borrow from commercial banks in industrialised countries so that future growth and industrialisation prospects in their countries would not be affected. Bankers, 15 who had large cash reserves due to deposits made by OPEC, encouraged Third World leaders to borrow heavily with the hope that their economies would grow fast enough to generate funds with which to repay the loans (or at least the interest).

A second external cause for the Latin American debt was due to an 20 increase in interest rates on United States loans in the early 1980s “to counter the effects of that nation’s huge continuous trade and federal budget deficit.”²⁹⁸ This increased the size of the debts owed by LDCs to foreign banks quite substantially, making it impossible for those countries to even pay the interest on the debt, let alone the principal.

25 A third major external cause for the debt crisis was the imbalance of trade experienced by LDCs. From 1974-1982, LDCs, who were not members of OPEC, imported \$1087 billion worth of goods but only exported \$730 billion, creating a

²⁹⁶Míguez-Bonino, “Re-covering Democracy? The Concept of Democracy in Liberation Theology,” 1991, 210-211.

²⁹⁷Míguez-Bonino, “Democratic Argentina,” 1986, 150.

²⁹⁸WCC, *Christian Faith and the World Economy Today*, 1992, 21. See also George, *The Debt Boomerang*, 1992, 151.

loss of \$357 billion.²⁹⁹ This loss was due to the declining prices of Latin American minerals and agricultural goods and the increase of prices on imported, manufactured goods from developed countries. World Bank data shows that 60 percent of LDCs exports purchased 40 percent fewer industrial goods in 1972 than in 1954.³⁰⁰ The decline in prices can be attributed to a world surplus caused by the rise in artificial substitutes for natural products, which drove down the price of Latin American natural goods. We must also take into consideration that LDCs exports depend on access to markets in the First World. The protectionist policies of the developed countries limited industrial growth in LDCs and widened the gap between natural goods and finished products. For example, in the United States tariffs have been lowest on raw materials (cotton), higher on semiprocessed goods (bolts of cotton cloth), and highest on finished products (cotton shirt already packaged).³⁰¹ This consequently, drives down the price of raw materials and raises the price of finished products. We also must remember that trade negotiations (GATT) which regulate tariffs—i.e., the market value of goods—are controlled by the industrialised countries who have a larger market share in world trade.³⁰²

These external causes for the Latin American debt have allowed many liberation theologians to conclude that the debt crisis is another sign of external exploitation and subjugation due to continuing dependency of LDCs on developed nations. However, recent studies have shown that while external factors can explain some of the economic problems in Latin America, “domestic policies have had a clear impact on the foreign debt situation of developing countries.”³⁰³

²⁹⁹Nunnenkamp, *The International Debt Crisis of the Third World*, 1986, 57.

³⁰⁰Owensby, *Economics for Prophets*, 1988, 138.

³⁰¹Ibid., 140.

³⁰²Segal, *The World Affairs Companion*, 1991, 36-37. Hugo Assmann concludes: “In 1984 alone Latin America lost \$20 billion because of deteriorating terms of trade; \$10 billion because of excessive interests; \$10 billion because of capital outflow; \$5 billion because of the overvalued dollar. If one adds to this the service of the debt, recalculated at the historic interest levels (approximately \$25 billion), one arrives at a total of around \$70 billion.”

Assmann, “The Improvement of Democracy in Latin America and the Debt Crisis,” 1987, 44.

³⁰³Nunnenkamp, *The International Debt Crisis of the Third World*, 1986, Chapters 5 and 6.

This conclusion is based on the fact that other developing countries—primarily South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore—have been able to properly service their debts and gain a substantial position in the world economic order. Latin American countries, on the other hand, have been plagued by

5 authoritarian-centralist forms of government, which have been susceptible to corruption and the misappropriation of funds. The governments of LDCs who have relied heavily on centralised bureaucratic decision making have run considerable risks and made devastating mistakes concerning the economies of their countries. They used loans to finance their operating deficits, to buy

10 military equipment and arms, and to invest in foreign markets, instead of concentrating on labour-intensive projects.³⁰⁴ These centralised, authoritarian regimes extinguished all political and economic regulating bodies or mechanisms that could curtail unwise spending and corruption.³⁰⁵

This has caused some liberation theologians to reconsider their previously

15 held convictions concerning the dependency theory. In the introduction to the revised (1988) edition of *A Theology of Liberation*, Gutiérrez virtually repudiates the dependency theory because he sees the economic problems of Latin America have been cause by internal factors:

20 It is clear, for example, that the theory of dependence, which was so extensively used in the early years of our encounter with the Latin American world is now an inadequate tool, because it does not take sufficient account of the *internal dynamics* of each country or of the vast dimensions of the world of the poor.³⁰⁶

The Theological Climate

25 The CEB movement began in Brazil in the mid-1960s in rural areas or in the slum peripheries of large cities where churches were without priests to conduct mass. To alleviate the problem, bishops trained and encouraged lay

³⁰⁴Ibid., George, *The Debt Boomerang*, 1992, 144-148.

³⁰⁵The WCC *Christian Faith and the World Economy Today* document tells us that it is suspected that the leaders of Mali have placed in European banks the equivalent of that country's entire debt. See also Larry Sjaastad, "Where the Latin American Loans Went," in Novak, *Liberation Theology and the Liberal Society*, 1987, 236-238.

³⁰⁶Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 1988, xxiv. Emphasis added.

catechists to gather Roman Catholics into groups to lead them in prayer and in the reading of Scripture. The gatherings soon became popular and became communities of ten to thirty persons in a group. They met once a week to read the Bible, pray, sing hymns and to discuss problems and how to act on them in a Christian way. They also shared their problems with each other and discussed them “in light of scripture,” recognising that the stories of the Bible dealt with persons like themselves in situations like their own.³⁰⁷

Soon after their formation and some initial growth, it soon became apparent to the participants of these gatherings that they were not just forming “prayer meetings” or “discussion groups.” Instead they were building a community based on mutual support and the need to share each other’s struggles. They soon realised their potential for organising to affect social change, coordinating their skills in order to solve mutual social concerns such as illiteracy, disease and malnutrition.

Liberation theologians have argued for many years that CEBs provide a source for theological reflection.³⁰⁸ These communities inspired Leonardo Boff to write a series of books dedicated to an understanding of CEBs as a new form of the Church.³⁰⁹ In each book Boff reflects on the presence of Christ amongst the poor and oppressed in the CEBs. He argues that these communities have learned how to represent Christ among the destitute more effectively and faithfully than the more traditional forms of the Church. Unfortunately, the Vatican interpreted Boff’s assertions—that the Church should be nothing more than the people of God—as a challenge to its authority; thus, Boff was silenced in 1985 for ten months and again in 1991.

Due to this silencing, the release of the two Vatican Instructions on Liberation Theology and a conservative shift in the Roman Catholic hierarchy

³⁰⁷McGovern, *Liberation Theology and Its Critics*, 1990, 197-212.

³⁰⁸Míguez-Bonino, “Theology as Critical Reflection and Liberating Praxis,” 1985, 45.

³⁰⁹*Ecclesiogenesis: The Base Communities Reinvent the Church; Church: Charism and Power: Liberation Theology and the Institutional Church; Trinity and Society; and E a Igreja se fez povo* (And the Church Became People). The latter two books he wrote during his silencing.

during the mid-1980s, it has been said that Latin American progressives have been forced to retreat and modify their thinking.³¹⁰ One sign of this retreat, according to Paul Sigmund, is the desire by liberationists to remain in communion with Church hierarchy.³¹¹ After the second *Instruction* was released, Gutiérrez said that it “closes a chapter, [and] a new more positive period is beginning.” Despite one of Ratzinger’s aids claiming that Boff “must not have read the document” because he could not see “how it can be read to validate the positions of the liberation theologians,” Leonardo Boff understood the document as legitimating twenty years of creative theological activity in Latin America.³¹²

10 In other words, from the mid-1980s on, because of attacks on liberation theology from the hierarchy, Sigmund argues that liberation theologians have felt it necessary to show that their theology is in line with Church hierarchy.

By looking over the three changes in Latin America just outlined, northern observers of liberation theology conclude that progressive Latin American theologians are opting for a more cautious political position closer to neoliberalism. Arthur McGovern notes:

20 Liberation theologians have . . . modified their politico-economic views in recent years. The new political context in many parts of Latin America has led liberation theologians to talk about building a “participatory democracy” from within civil society.³¹³

Sigmund concurs:

25 What seems to have happened in the case of nearly all the liberation theologians is that as a result both of the attacks to which they have been subjected by their critics, and of the changes in the historical context in which they are writing in Latin America . . . they are now adopting a more open attitude toward the possibilities of establishing an effective democracy in Latin America. They have also left behind much of the Marxist baggage with which the movement was encumbered in the early 1970s. While hardly more favourable to capitalism than they were at that time, they are

30 willing to make use of the mechanisms of political democracy to

³¹⁰Sigmund, *Liberation Theology at the Crossroads*, 1990, 154-175. Klaiber, “The Church in Peru: Between Terrorism and Conservative Restraints,” 1992, 90, in Cleary and Stewart-Gambino, *Conflict and Competition*, 1992.

³¹¹Sigmund, *Liberation Theology at the Crossroads*, 1990, 175.

³¹²*Ibid.*, Cox, *The Silencing of Leonardo Boff*, 1988, 115.

³¹³McGovern, “Liberation Theology Adapts and Endures, and Keeps a Perspective From Below.” *Commonweal*, November 3, 1989, 589.

moderate and restrain its excesses. Participation by the Ecclesial Base Communities has replaced the abstract call for abolition of capitalism and denunciations of bourgeois democracy of the earlier period.³¹⁴

- 5 Michael Novak believes that this move toward democracy has put liberation theology and those who believe in the liberal society on common ground.³¹⁵ Christian Smith goes as far as to ask: "If liberation theologians fully embrace the liberal democratic process in Latin America, will not their theology, de facto, increasingly resemble the progressive, reformist theology which they
10 repudiated in the late 1960s?"³¹⁶

We question these conclusions, arguing that the neoliberalist's social, political and economic programs are very different than the liberationist's. Even their theological agendas are not compatible. While we agree with McGovern that liberation theologians have modified their views in recent years,
15 we cannot agree with Sigmund, Novak and Smith that neoliberalism and liberation theology now share so much in common that we can talk about the compatibility of the two in a common search for a liberal society. We argue instead that liberation theology has a much better understanding of the relation between the Christian faith and political programs.

20 *Should the Church be Involved in Politics?*

Since neoliberals and liberation theologians fundamentally agree that the Church has a political role in society; before we continue our discussion on neoliberalism and liberation theology let us first examine the more basic question of church political involvement. In the previous chapter, we presented
25 Edward Norman's and H. M. Kuitert's arguments against progressive political theologies and demonstrated how they both oppose the politicisation of the Church. But we must agree with Duncan Forrester, that Norman and Kuitert differ in their approach to this subject. While they both denounce a form of

³¹⁴Sigmund, *Liberation Theology at the Crossroads*, 1990, 175.

³¹⁵Novak, *Will it Liberate?*, 1991, 246.

³¹⁶Christian Smith, *The Emergence of Liberation Theology*, 1991, 232.

politicisation “which may be characterised as radical, left-wing, ecumenical and sometimes sectarian,” Norman accepts another form of politicisation which Kuitert rejects. Norman recognises the need for the Church to play the role of civil religion, but Kuitert, on the other hand, is suspicious of using Christianity for even a conservative affirmation of the status quo; thus, he concludes there should be no relation between the Church and politics.³¹⁷

We call attention to Forrester’s distinction because Míguez-Bonino’s thinking opposes both Norman’s and Kuitert’s conclusions, but in different ways. In the following discussion, we first outline how Míguez-Bonino’s thinking opposes Kuitert’s conclusions by showing how Míguez-Bonino argues in favour of the political involvement of the Church. We then turn to the temptations that an argument such as Míguez-Bonino’s faces in order to show that because Míguez-Bonino is aware that Christianity is inherently a bad civil religion, he places certain limits on how the Church should be involved in politics. Thus, against both Norman and Kuitert, we assert that Míguez-Bonino provides a more adequate and realistic way to delineate the Church’s relationship to politics.

In the first chapter of his book, *Toward a Christian Political Ethics* (1983), Míguez-Bonino gives two reasons why Christians cannot separate themselves from political engagement. First, he explains how modern society has become so interconnected by modern technologies that all individual decisions and actions are automatically incorporated into a global system which affects the whole international community. Because of this, he insists, that all decisions become political decisions. For example, if a person chooses to buy one make of car over another or decides to drink one brand of coffee instead of another, that person’s choice affects the lives of those who manufacture those products in another country. Thus, simple decisions can affect the international economy and in

³¹⁷Forrester, *Theology and Politics*, 1988, 51-54.

turn the political milieu of another country. Therefore, Míguez-Bonino concludes that every Christian person is somehow involved in politics.³¹⁸

Associated with this interrelatedness of the world's systems there is a secular ideology to accompany it. Míguez-Bonino traces this ideology back to 5 1776 when Adam Smith first described the "invisible hand" that guides the "free market system." Smith believed that through economic competition of individuals who were pursuing personal gain, the greatest good for all of society would result. Today, governments and large international corporations have adopted Smith's idea of the "invisible hand" and refined it so that poverty is 10 believed to be an accident or is explained as an unavoidable consequence of market fluctuations. Governments and corporations foster the ideology that the market shows complete objectivity and cannot be held responsible for some people's misfortune. Míguez-Bonino dismisses this ideology as a hoax that Christians must become aware of:

15 It is a hoax, we said. But the trick easily succeeds. The most fundamental political decisions—about economy, education, use of resources, population policy, arms production—are presented as inviolable laws, as "the nature of things" or of "reality." The consequences of such laws are pronounced "inevitable."³¹⁹

20 Míguez-Bonino explains that the market, contrary to popular belief, is not "free" at all. At least, not in the sense that everyone has access to its benefits. Instead, only the rich and the powerful, who are represented by large corporations that are unaffected by the needs of the poor, have access to it. In this respect, Míguez-Bonino says, "humankind exhibits an apparent inability, unwillingness, 25 or impotence: to organise life on our earth on human terms; to use the resources of our world intelligently for the common good; . . . [or] to devise political structures able to cope with the problems and give viability to the hopes of our time."³²⁰

³¹⁸Míguez-Bonino, *Toward a Christian Political Ethics*, 1983, 11-12.

³¹⁹*Ibid.*, 15.

³²⁰*Ibid.*, 16.

It is on the basis of these two imperatives, then, that Míguez-Bonino argues Christians need a new political ethic to guide them in a constructive political engagement. This rationale, of course, has been dismissed by others, such as Norman and Kuitert, as an argument for the politicisation of Christianity based upon secular or humanist ethics which ignore all other theological imperatives. However, Míguez-Bonino does not limit his argument to just these two reasons. Most of his recent work, in fact, concerns theological discussions on why Christians should be politically engaged. Following a Barthian tradition, Míguez-Bonino believes that theological doctrine drives the Christian into the public realm and a concern for politics.³²¹ In several of his recent articles, all written since 1981, Míguez-Bonino discusses the doctrines of God, salvation, and the Church.

Doctrine of God: The Being of God is Characterised by Covenant and Justice

Míguez-Bonino tells us that in the story of Noah (specifically Genesis 9:1-17), God identifies himself as a covenantal being, one who manifests himself as a liberating God and as one who brings justice to the people that he has created. God's deepest desire is that human life should grow, develop and live. God does not leave humankind to be on its own; instead, God stands by human life to help it prosper. God does this by taking responsibility as "go'el, the defender, the avenger, the redeemer of all Adam."³²²

God, accordingly, is seen as the redeemer, the liberator and avenger (go'el) of the oppressed. . . . God has promised to be the protector of the people—he becomes the "next of kin" of all Israelites—and the law ensures the means through which such protection is guaranteed. In the priestly tradition of Genesis 9, this covenant has a universal scope: God is the guarantor of all life, the avenger of all human blood, and he entrusts to man the exercise of this protective function.³²³

³²¹Duncan Forrester argues that for Barth and liberation theologians, Christian theology operates in the public realm as theology, and not simply as ethics. *Beliefs, Values and Policies*, 1989. Also Peter Hinchliff argues that Barth's political engagement was not based upon secular theology but theological doctrine. "Religion and Politics: The Harsh Reality," 1979.

³²²Míguez-Bonino, "A Covenant of Life," 1981, 343. Míguez-Bonino, *Toward a Christian Political Ethics*, 1983, 84-85.

³²³Míguez-Bonino, *Toward a Christian Political Ethics*, 1983, 85.

But Gutiérrez tells us that the term *go'el* more specifically means the *defender* of the poor *above all else*. This means that God is the protector of the people *to the extent* that God is also the defender of the poor. It is this understanding of *go'el*, Gutiérrez remarks, that is the “ineradicable seal that permanently marks the covenant.”³²⁴ Thus, the act of doing justice by defending the poor is the focus of God’s covenantal relationship with Israel. In doing justice God “proves himself faithful to the relation he has established.”³²⁵

However, both Míguez-Bonino and Gutiérrez insist that God’s faithfulness to humankind is not a one-way street. “It is this same faithfulness,” Míguez-Bonino tells us, “that is required from the partners in the covenant both in the relation to God and in the communal relation of everyday life.”³²⁶ When God made his first covenant with Adam and then again with Noah, God was giving the responsibility of *go'el* to humankind. God was allowing humanity to take responsibility for the world:

... in Adam God delegates his commitment as *go'el* of human life. It is fallen man, “whose heart inclines towards evil”. Fallen man capable of violence and crime, who is made responsible for enforcing God’s protection of life. He is entrusted with the mission of restoring right, of establishing justice, of defending life.³²⁷

Through the covenant God entrusts humankind with the task of protecting and expanding life. This explains why the defence of the poor becomes the very essence of the Jewish people’s claim to nationhood. “The failure to do justice to the poor means turning one’s back on the true identity of Israel as a nation.”³²⁸ It would run counter to Israel’s own self-understanding.³²⁹ This is why the prophets described Jewish leaders who failed to defend the poor as “foreigners.” They failed, Gutiérrez tells us, to establish justice as prescribed in the covenant.³³⁰

³²⁴Gutiérrez, *The God of Life*, 1989, 21-22.

³²⁵Míguez-Bonino, “The Biblical Roots of Justice,” 1987, 13.

³²⁶Ibid.

³²⁷Míguez-Bonino, “A Covenant of Life,” 1981, 344.

³²⁸Gutiérrez, *The God of Life*, 1989, 22.

³²⁹Míguez-Bonino, “The Biblical Roots of Justice,” 1987, 13.

³³⁰Ibid., 23.

The implications of this for the present-day Church are easy to discern. Míguez-Bonino explains that the covenant makes the defence of the poor, the protection of life and a vigilance for human rights not optional for Christians. Defending justice “is not the expression of a humanist sentiment or the adoption of a contemporary concern. It is directly, explicitly, irrevocably rooted in God’s manifest will. It is a *testimony* to that permanent relation which God has established with humankind and a task which has been given to us within that relation.”³³¹ In the covenant Christians are commanded to protect the fullness of life, not just some minimal standard for survival; and because we are to protect it with “all the legitimate means history offers us,” the Christian and the community of faith have to be politically involved.³³²

Doctrine of Salvation

In the many different places where Míguez-Bonino discusses salvation, he frequently calls into question the Protestant formulations of this doctrine. He does not wish to betray the Protestant tradition, nor jettison the insights of the Reformation. Rather, he wishes to recentre its thinking and deepen the meaning of its constructions. There are three concepts he examines.

First, he says that the “Protestant tradition has rightly emphasised the absolute priority of God’s initiative and the gratuity of God’s salvation in Jesus Christ. In the articulation of this affirmation, however, one may wonder whether that priority has been thought out in the biblical perspective of the ‘covenant’ or in terms of a scheme in which God’s acting and human action are conceived as competitive and mutually exclusive, almost as a physical problem of a summation of forces in which what is attributed to human action has to be detracted from God’s.”³³³ In their zealous battle to protect God’s divine action in salvation, he tells us, Protestant reformers dismissed all human action from that process. They spoke of salvation as something external to the person; as “a

³³¹Míguez-Bonino, “A Covenant of Life,” 1981, 344-345.

³³²*Ibid.*, 345.

³³³Míguez-Bonino, “The Biblical Roots of Justice,” 1987, 19.

declaration of a change of status before God, extrinsic to the person, rather than an intrinsic process of personal transformation.”³³⁴ Míguez-Bonino summarises the Protestant Reformation perspective:

5 In the crisis of the ecclesiastical institution and the medieval sacramental system, the Reformers found in God the assurance of salvation. . . . It is God, and not our vacillating conscience or the ecclesiastical institution, who is the sure support of our life. Consequently it is necessary to exclude any other "mediation" that can reintroduce our salvation into the swampy terrain of human
10 ambiguity. In the beginning, during, and at the end of life's journey, there is no other security except divine grace.³³⁵

Míguez-Bonino believes that unfortunately this position does not consider the priority of God's initiative from the perspective of the covenant.

Understanding salvation in those terms could allow one to interpret God's action
15 as “‘enabling,’ as constituting a human subject (personally and communally) who participates meaningfully and effectively in God's work.”³³⁶ Through the covenant God incorporates us into the active sphere of Christ, which means “to become totally available to the neighbour as God himself has become totally available in Jesus Christ.”³³⁷ This means, argues Míguez-Bonino, that we have to
20 recast our understanding of the priority of God's initiative of salvation in terms of the “partnership” which salvation institutes.³³⁸

Second, Míguez-Bonino explains that the “Protestant tradition has rightly held to faith alone as our saving relation to God's redemption in Jesus Christ.” However, “human justice [or action] can then only be introduced as ‘a
25 consequence,’ a ‘fruit,’ somehow—ontologically if not chronologically—‘a second moment’ in our relation to God.”³³⁹ In other words, our actions are not intrinsic to the relationship we have with God, but extrinsic. This is tragic, Míguez-Bonino

³³⁴deGruchy, *Liberating Reformed Theology*, 1991, 157. This, of course, was quite different from the Roman Catholic position which insisted that God's grace is “poured into” the soul allowing God to inwardly renew and remould the human being. Karl Lehmann, “The Condemnations of the Reformation Era,” 1986, 48.

³³⁵Míguez-Bonino, “Sanctification,” 1988, 17.

³³⁶Míguez-Bonino, “The Biblical Roots of Justice,” 1987, 19.

³³⁷*Ibid.*, 16.

³³⁸*Ibid.*, 19. Míguez-Bonino, “Sanctification,” 1988, 22.

³³⁹Míguez-Bonino, “The Biblical Roots of Justice,” 1987, 19.

believes, because it allows for our actions to be understood as having nothing to do with our relationship with God. They are viewed as something that comes later, as an extra, or an afterthought.³⁴⁰ They could, then, be looked upon as optional.

5 Míguez-Bonino does not wish to contradict the concept of “justification by faith alone,” or compromise the priority of divine action in salvation which the Protestant tradition rightly protected; however, he does want to balance these concepts with the notion that a Christian is not saved without his/her works.³⁴¹ He explains, therefore, how Paul’s fierce battle against “works righteousness,”
 10 rejected a certain understanding of work, not action itself. Paul rejected those forms of work that were based on a law that had been divorced from justice. The Pharisees, who insisted on the fulfilment of the law, used it as an instrument of self-righteousness through which they could protect their own power and leadership in the community. In clinging to the letter of the law, they used it to
 15 judge the conduct of others instead of using it to administer God’s justice. This understanding of the law, according to Míguez-Bonino, reduces works to a sort of table of “fulfilled” and “unfulfilled” duties which depersonalise our relationship with God and neighbour and sees them as mere objects.

20 It is easier to understand the Pauline-Lutheran polemic against “works” and “merits” when we observe that what they attack is a “use” of works as a human product that is converted into a thing, a “coin” for transactions with God and neighbour. Such changing of works into things depersonalises relationships with God and neighbour. “Works” are interposed to establish a pact with God in
 25 which we are not personally involved—that is to say, where faith in its personal character of “faithfulness” is absent. It is absent precisely because the “work” is separated from its author and becomes a religious or moral “instalment payment” objectified in relationship to a law.³⁴²

³⁴⁰Míguez-Bonino, “Sanctification” 1988, 16-21.

³⁴¹Calvin had a similar concern: “Since, therefore, it is solely by expending himself that the Lord gives us these benefits [justification and sanctification] to enjoy, he bestows both of them at the same time, the one never without the other. Thus it is clear how true it is that we are justified not without works yet not through works, since in our sharing in Christ, which justifies us, sanctification is just as much included as righteousness.” Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.16.1.

³⁴²Míguez-Bonino, “Sanctification” 1988, 19.

On the other hand, according to Míguez-Bonino, Paul accepted those forms of work where one takes personal responsibility as an active subject such as in “works of love” or “works of faith.” Paul did not reject the notion of works that witness to the work of God in history or works that witness to a person taking
5 responsibility “in a personal relationship of surrender to God and neighbour.”³⁴³

Third, Míguez-Bonino says that the “Protestant tradition has rightly rejected legalism.” However, he wonders if the replacement of “justification by works” with a notion of a private salvation is totally adequate. He believes it
10 unfortunate that in the Protestant tradition salvation is commonly conceived as something that takes place in the “inner sanctuary” of the soul, “alone with God.” Míguez-Bonino dismisses this understanding of salvation as “fictional” because:

15 Conscience is not a “private” area, but the focus of a complex process that includes historical relationships in time and space. Our awareness of ourselves (self-consciousness) is shaped by social representations and the dominant symbols of a society (or of groups within it). Our “hearing” of a message is mediated by the prevalent
20 “code” around us. Any concrete “conversion” is a reply to a mediated challenge in which a certain form of consciousness and praxis is already presupposed. Unless this challenge deals explicitly with such forms of awareness and conduct, it will only succeed in unconsciously reinforcing them. There is no conversion in a vacuum.³⁴⁴

25 Elsewhere he writes:

In the experience of Christian community, one’s personal identity and social commitment have become one single process: my personal future and that of the project of solidarity are interwoven. My personal identity is not “private property” but an interpersonal
30 reality, a gift of the community. Those who “lose” their life in this project of love . . . will “gain” it, not as a result of a divine adjudication of reward but because such life has entered into a fellowship of love with the crucified and risen Lord and his friends, which cannot be destroyed by death.³⁴⁵

³⁴³Ibid.

³⁴⁴Míguez-Bonino, “Conversion,” 1988, 10-11.

³⁴⁵Míguez-Bonino, “Love and Social Transformation,” 1989, 127.

In other words, salvation must not be conceived as an interaction between God and an individual on some metaphysical plane removed from historical action.

This, Míguez-Bonino believes, is unbiblical:

5 Not even the Bible appears to be interested in a “being” of God that would be beyond or separated from action. Nor does it conceive—as modern thought does not conceive—of a human person constituted apart from the actions and relationships of historic existence.³⁴⁶

10 Instead, any notion of salvation must be framed as a “process by which God incorporates the human being as *active and conscious partner* into God's covenant with humankind, a covenant witnessed to, renewed, and assured in Jesus Christ.”³⁴⁷ This redefines conversion so that it no longer is understood as a mere acceptance of a doctrine but instead as a process that synthesises “action” and “being.” In simpler terms, to become a Christian means to take action in history. Thus, salvation can only be properly understood as the “creation of a
15 new creature” in relation to social, economic and political relationships.

*Doctrine of the Church*³⁴⁸

Míguez-Bonino is cautious about defining the Church as an “ultimate point of reference” or conceiving it only in relation to itself. To define the Church in this manner would be to absolutise it and make the institutional church the
20 “global horizon and the ultimate point of reference for the Christian faith.”³⁴⁹ Instead, he wishes to find a way to define the Church that respects its *relativity* to the kingdom of God and the people it is to serve. Thus, he insists that the Church does not have its centre in itself, but rather it is “decentred” in the people that it serves, with its sight on the kingdom.

25 Míguez-Bonino explains that the purpose of the Church is to provide a place where the Christian can *discern* through faith God's universal proposal to

³⁴⁶Míguez-Bonino, “Conversion,” 1988, 10.

³⁴⁷Ibid., 11. Emphasis added.

³⁴⁸Thus far we have distinguished between the institutional “church” and the Universal “Church” in the world. However, in the following section we will use the term “Church” interchangeably to refer both to the Roman Catholic Church and the Universal Church while reserving the term “church” for the institutional church.

³⁴⁹Míguez-Bonino, “Fundamental Questions in Ecclesiology,” 1981, 146.

establish peace and justice in recreating humanity anew. It is not to be equated with the kingdom because it is not the realisation of the kingdom but rather a witness to the kingdom's reality. In this sense the Church is *only a sacrament*—something that represents to faith a reality that is not yet fully present. To substitute the Church for the reality of the kingdom, Míguez-Bonino believes, is committing idolatry by perpetuating two mistakes: ecclesiastical clericalism, which “seeks to reabsorb the people into the church,” and religious imperialism, which “restricts the work of God to the church.”³⁵⁰

To better understand what Míguez-Bonino means by this terminology, it is helpful to look at the work of Leonardo Boff. In *Faith on the Edge* and *Church: Charism and Power*, he explains how the traditional institutional church acts from the top down, from vertex to base. It presents a theology of structural order in which power descends from God to Christ, from Christ to the apostles, from the apostles to the bishops, and from the bishops to the priests. All divine revelation comes from these sources in the form of dogmas and theological theses. Just as capitalist owners control the means of production and retain all decision-making power, so the hierarchy of the church controls the “spiritual means of production” and retains decision-making power over laws, practices and correct interpretations of doctrine. Thus, the institutional church concentrates all its sacred ecclesial power in the hands of a “transhistorical” hierarchy which is above political and social trends of the day. The institutional church regards the world as a kind of appendage of the Church. The institutional church is viewed as a “mother and teacher” and is able to give answers to all the great questions of life. Hence, the work of God is restricted to the institutional church and therefore attempts to reabsorb the laity who are passive acceptors of the faith into itself.³⁵¹

³⁵⁰Ibid.,” 1981, 147.

³⁵¹Boff, *Faith on the Edge*, 1989, 52-53. *Church: Charism and Power. Liberation Theology and the Institutional Church*, 1985, 11-113. See also McGovern's comments on Boff, *Liberation Theology and Its Critics*, 1990, 214-218.

According to Míguez-Bonino, this understanding of the Church rests upon the notion that the term “church” can be defined on the basis of its “nature” alone. It is believed that the identity of the Church can be established without any other considerations, such as its relationship to the people it is supposed to

5 serve:

The fact is that we often hear talk about the tension existing between the “identity” of the church and its “identification” with the people (or with the poor). The implication seems to be that the two realities are inversely proportional. Greater identification

10 supposedly jeopardises the identity of the church, whereas greater stress on the specific nature of the church’s identity necessarily poses obstacles to identification with the people.³⁵²

In other words, far too often theologians wish to define the Church as an autonomous being, whose identity must be established and maintained without

15 identifying with the people that it serves, for to do so would jeopardise its very nature. Norman, Kuitert and the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith provide us with three examples of how the institutional church is defined in this way.

We will recall from the last section that Norman understood the church as

20 an institution that should refrain from public pronouncements, social solutions or take political action. To do so would force it to lose “sight of its own rootedness in a spiritual tradition” and forfeit transcendence. Kuitert argues that the Church receives its power from the Holy Spirit, and it is the Spirit that

authorities the Church to speak to the world about God’s salvation. To involve the

25 Church in social movements would force the Church to be unfaithful to itself.

Finally, in a public letter (March 1985) written to Leonardo Boff, Cardinal Ratzinger of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith strongly rejected Boff’s book *Church: Charism and Power*. The document accused Boff of

relativising the very nature of the Church with a distorted interpretation of

30 Vatican II’s teachings on the Church’s subsistence. Boff had claimed that the Church can subsist in different particular churches outside the Roman Catholic

³⁵²Míguez-Bonino, “Fundamental Questions in Ecclesiology,” 1981, 147.

Church—such as in the base communities. This, argued Boff, changes the function of the institutional church. The church’s hierarchy was to use its prophetic voice to encourage the base communities and coordinate the different charisms in the church. The congregation, in response, acknowledged that the whole people shared in the prophetic office of the church, but it also argued that if the church is to remain legitimate, its prophetic voice must always remain in service of the church itself, not with “Christian elements” outside the true Church. The prophetic voice of the church must accept the church’s institutions and recognise the hierarchy as responsible for judging its exercise.³⁵³

Míguez-Bonino believes such arguments fail to pose the fundamental question: “Wherein lies the ‘identity’ of the church.” This is to say that the above criticisms are so caught up in trying to distinguish the ‘nature’ of the church as separate from that of the people and of history that the argument loses sight of the fundamental character of the church. He argues that the church finds its meaning only “when it takes shape in the very life of the people” and when it serves the community where it has taken shape. He insists that God does not create a “church” but a “humanity”:

It is in humanity that God’s image is reflected. It is to humanity that God entrusts a mission. It is with humanity that God makes a covenant of commitment; and that covenant is renewed even after sin enters the picture (Gen. 9). The central focus of Jesus’ mission is the proclamation of the Kingdom, whose coming is initiated in his words and deeds. . . Finally, the New Testament expands its vision to a total fulfilment that has to do with a new “humanity”—not a temple but a new city.³⁵⁴

Therefore, any proper understanding of the church must include some sort of identification with the people. The New Testament supports this in its teaching that the church’s identity can only be established when it “con-forms” to Jesus Christ and assumes his way of being. Jesus’ way of being is to be found in his identification with humanity and, in particular, with the poor and lowly.

³⁵³Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, “Notification Sent to Fr. Leonardo Boff regarding Errors in His Book, *Church: Charism and Power*” printed in *Liberation Theology*, Alfred Hennesly, ed., 1990, 425-430.

³⁵⁴Míguez-Bonino, “Fundamental Questions in Ecclesiology,” 1981, 146.

5 The logical conclusion is clear: the greater the church's identification with Jesus Christ, the more the church will be driven to an identification with the common people; the more the church is identified with the people, the more it will be in a position to reflect the identity of its Lord. Identity pushes towards identification, and identification is the matrix of authentic identity.³⁵⁵

Therefore, if the Church is to truly be the Church, it must identify itself with people and their struggles and aspirations. The Church "will not go off by
10 itself and then summon all to come to it. It will not try to absorb the people into it, nor will it proclaim itself to be the "leader" of the people. Instead, it will structure itself as a community of faith and incarnate itself in the very midst of the people, giving impetus to the quest of the Kingdom from there."³⁵⁶
Consequently, if the Church is to be in the midst of the people, it will be involved
15 in the structures and institutions of political life. The Church must share "in the pains and hopes of the people while illuminating situations and empowering for transformation through the prophetic and pastoral ministry."³⁵⁷

Míguez-Bonino, in the same manner as his Latin American Roman Catholic colleagues, argues that Vatican II draws the same conclusions
20 concerning the identity of the Church.³⁵⁸ In the chapter "The people of God," Míguez-Bonino tells us that the *Lumen Gentium* develops the doctrine of the "common priesthood" of all God's people. It identifies the Church in relation to the people that it serves. Furthermore, this point is even more clear when one looks at *Gaudium et Spes*. Here we find the Church's mission defined not simply
25 in terms of communicating the Church's teachings but as a *dialogue* with the world. This is what inspired the Latin American Bishops' Conference in Medellín to say: "We want to feel the problems, to perceive the demands, to understand the anguishes, to discover the ways and to co-operate in the solutions." The conference in Puebla defined the task of the Church: "The Christian community

³⁵⁵Ibid., 147.

³⁵⁶Ibid., 148.

³⁵⁷Míguez-Bonino, "The Reception of Vatican II in Latin America," 1985, 271.

³⁵⁸Ibid.

. . . has to build the bridge of contact and dialogue with the builders of temporal society, with the purpose of enlightening them with the Christian vision, to encourage them with meaningful gestures and to accompany them with significant acts; in this dialogue and contact, the problematics brought by them from their own temporal situation must circulate, and be listened to in a sincere and welcoming attitude. . .”³⁵⁹

We have to be careful not to overstate the point; Vatican II did not reach the depth that the “option of the poor” had acquired at Medellín and Puebla. But the theme was addressed. On 6 December 1962, the archbishop of Bologna, Cardinal Giacomo Lercaro, gave a stirring speech in which he spoke of “the Mystery of Christ in the Church of the poor” stating that the evangelisation of the poor must not only be one of many subjects, but *the* subject, the central theme, of Vatican II.³⁶⁰ Unfortunately, other speeches directed the Council in other directions, but his ideas were not totally lost. In *Lumen Gentium* (para. 8) the presence of Christ in the poor and the poverty of the Church as a sign of its unity with Christ is clearly affirmed.³⁶¹ The poor are also specifically mentioned in *Gaudium et Spes* where Christians are called to discern in their situation “Christ himself crying out in the poor” and to respond in service. Also, in *Ad Gentes* Christians are invited to have a special “concern for those in greater need (‘especially the poor and afflicted,’ para 12), the peoples who are struggling for better life (‘the strivings of those peoples who are waging war on famine, ignorance and disease and thereby struggling to better their way of life and to secure peace in the world,’ *ibid.*). For this purpose, Christians should participate in the organisations which people create for these purposes.”³⁶²

Considering, then, all that we have said so far, we conclude that Míguez-Bonino finds both a sociopolitical demand as well as a theological demand for the

³⁵⁹*Ibid.*, 269.

³⁶⁰Gutiérrez, “Church of the Poor,” in Cleary, ed., *Born of the Poor*, 1990, 12. Also *Ibid.*, 270.

³⁶¹Míguez-Bonino, “The Reception of Vatican II in Latin America,” 1985, 270.

³⁶²*Ibid.*, 272.

Church to be involved in politics. Míguez-Bonino has argued against the individualistic solutions that Kuitert and Norman promote. He tells us that “no retreat into subjective individualism, or otherworldliness can finally satisfy the Christian conscience.”³⁶³ According to Míguez-Bonino: “in view of the long history of the church it is difficult to see how the church can avoid coming to grips with the concrete issues and options of the outside world—and even if it could, it would still have to face the questions of power and injustice within the community itself! Moreover, as the community continues to be involved in the whole nexus of social relations and conditions of public life in general, it cannot avoid participating in the struggle of ideologies and powers now taking place in the world.”³⁶⁴ Elsewhere he concludes:

it is our faith in God, lived out in the Latin American context, that leads inevitably to the option of the poor and, just as inevitably, into the area of politics. . . . For us there is no possibility of a neutral, uncommitted, or aseptic religious life and practice. The only question is how, from what perspective, in which direction, and on what basis will religion be present in political life.³⁶⁵

The Temptations of Political Involvement

Míguez-Bonino is well aware of the temptations that political involvement presents to the Christian community. In fact, in his book *Towards a Christian Political Ethics*, after he concludes that Christians should accept the task of bringing their Christian faith to bear upon politics, he writes: “But the challenge is also a temptation: It would be easy to embrace the idealistic fallacy that, since the gospel is the revelation of God’s purpose for humankind, we can directly derive from the gospel a political ethics, or even worse, a political ideology and program.”³⁶⁶ However, Míguez-Bonino cannot agree with any solution that would exclude the Christian community from the political realm. While recognising the need to take temptation seriously, he defends Christian political involvement. There are three temptations that he recognises: 1) that

³⁶³Míguez-Bonino, *Toward a Christian Political Ethics*, 1983, 36.

³⁶⁴*Ibid.*

³⁶⁵Míguez-Bonino, “Theology and Peace in Latin America,” 1989, 45.

³⁶⁶Míguez-Bonino, *Toward a Christian Political Ethics*, 1983, 16.

liberation theology reduces the “church of the poor” to the “church of the class,” thus disturbing Church unity 2) politicalisation involves the Christian community in the struggle for power, which is irreconcilable with the doctrine of love; 3) politicalisation of the Christian community leads to utopianism.

5 *Church of the Class*

In making a theological option for the poor, do liberation theologians make the mistake of introducing into the Church a class struggle, thus causing division? We have already seen how the first Vatican Instruction on Liberation Theology claims that for liberation theology the “‘church of the poor’ signifies
10 the ‘church of the class’” which it declares “divides the church itself” (IX, 2, 10). Liberation theology absolutises one particular social class making that class the “object of faith” (IX, 12). It dangerously equates the identity of the Church with the poor or the people, thus diminishing the centrality of Jesus in the Church. Poverty becomes the element constituting the Church, not Jesus Christ, making
15 the Church and world one identity. In other words, to say, as liberation theology often does: “the poor belong to the Church,” or rather “the Church belongs to the poor,” makes the act of removing poverty from the world the object of people’s faith and the basis for the Church. The Church and the world, then, become confused.³⁶⁷

20 Paul Abrecht, writing in the *Ecumenical Review*, shows a similar concern. He argues that the liberationist movement is now obliged to correct its theology in light of the collapse of socialism in Eastern Europe. For the past twenty years, liberation theology has been based upon a false socialist vision of achieving an economic order free of injustice and class distinctions. He argues that “the
25 communist assumption that the working class was the only group in modern industrial society which could lead the way to complete social justice has to be discarded. The idea that the leadership (dictatorship) of the proletariat (the poor in liberationist terms) could not possibly do anything contrary to the best

³⁶⁷Míguez-Bonino, “On Discipleship, Justice and Power,” 1989, 134.

interests of society, that it was the guarantor of social fulfilment, is now recognised as a fundamental illusion of Eastern European socialism.”³⁶⁸ In other words, liberation theology’s epistemological principle of the preferential option for the poor, which is based on a socialist ideal, is mistaken because it is

5 responsible for the present crisis in the ecumenical churches. “It has caused the churches to lose credibility with their own members and with society at large.”³⁶⁹

It is not difficult to find examples in Míguez-Bonino’s work, where he shows an awareness of the dangers of making a particular social class the object

10 of faith and the constituting principle of the Church. We see this concern when he writes: “it is particularly important that we do not fall prey to a sociological determinism and come to regard the theological task as merely a reflection of a social location.”³⁷⁰ We have found three examples where he sees that the Church has fallen prey to social determinism because of its theological

15 association with a particular class perspective.

The first example we have already discussed in relation to his early work. He has always rejected any alliance between the Roman Catholic hierarchy and the government in Argentina because of the hierarchy’s support for the political establishment and the status quo. In his article “Catholics and

20 Protestants in Latin America,” which he wrote in 1965, he speaks of the “unholy league between Church, wealth and army.” He argues that the Church needs to give up its political ambitions and its desire to establish a Catholic society that can dominate all social and cultural life. The hierarchy, he warns, should not attempt to establish a Christendom or aspire to become the church of the

25 government.³⁷¹

³⁶⁸Abrecht, “The Predicament of Christian Social Thought after the Cold War,” 1991, 326.

³⁶⁹Ibid., 327.

³⁷⁰Míguez-Bonino, “Theology as Critical Reflection and Liberating Praxis,” 1985, 41.

³⁷¹Míguez-Bonino, “Catholics and Protestants in Latin America,” 1965, 130. See also Míguez-Bonino, “Democratic Argentina,” 1986, 150.

In a recent article, “On Discipleship, Justice and Power” (1989), he repeats these warnings again but directs them not at the Catholic hierarchy but at liberation theology. He admits that there may be a measure of truth behind the criticisms of liberation theology that argue that it has fallen into the trap of attempting to build a new Christendom based on the poor class perspective. He writes:

10 I will not deny that the Christendom reflexes die hard and that we have to be on guard against this temptation—particularly when Christian leadership participates actively in the struggle for a new society and consequently Christian leaders’ influence and power as social leaders are not clearly distinguishable from their Christian leadership in the [base] communities. The temptation to build a Christian society and to equate it with the kingdom is a real one to which we are, alas, too prone.³⁷²

15 A second example where Míguez-Bonino shows concern for theology that has been socially determined by class perspective, can be found in an article that he prepared for a book aimed at creating a political theology for Britain, *Agenda For Prophets*. In this article, he introduces a few observations on theological activity in the United Kingdom. It is his observation that British theologians do
20 theology mainly from their own social community. They raise questions and converse on issues that concern their own class; therefore, their theological interpretations are rather skewed and fail to take into account, or produce a theology, that addresses all of British society.

25 In other words, and putting it rather crudely, one could say that the answer to the question: who does theology? and for whom? is: a limited sector of a social class (the academic community mostly located in the middle and higher-middle class) does theology basically for the same community. To the extent that this answer is true (and I would only venture it as an hypothesis), one of the basic
30 problems for theology would be how to relate the theological enterprise actively to the larger Christian community and to society as a whole. . . . [This means] that *unless theology finds a way to overcome class captivity*, it cannot expect to render a true service to the 'whole people of God', either within the Churches or in the
35 wider social body.³⁷³

³⁷²Míguez-Bonino, “On Discipleship, Justice and Power,” 1989, 135.

³⁷³Míguez-Bonino, “A View From Latin America,” 1980, 105. Emphasis added.

Finally, a third example is found in Míguez-Bonino's recent discussions on the ecumenical movement. At a symposium in honour of Philip Potter, Míguez-Bonino spoke of the "oikoumene of domination," which is the opposite of the "oikoumene of solidarity." The "oikoumene of domination" refers to the socialisation, universalisation or interrelatedness of the world. We have already seen how Míguez-Bonino argues that with the spread of modern science and technology and the development of the world structures of trade and communication, all parts of the world have been growing together into a interwoven system. He writes:

10 We have an established *system* which occupies the oikoumene,
determines the structural relations within it, assigns the roles and
resources, sets the laws, regulates communications and establishes
the mechanisms of control and of the reproduction of the system. It
operates with a rationality it has developed and which prescribes
15 the limits of reality, proscribing as irrational and unreal whatever
does not correspond to its "reason."³⁷⁴

This system is oppressive because it is based on a logic of universal domination. It pursues unity in terms of "normalisation" of the variants within the oikoumene. The system attempts to establish uniformity at the expense of diversity. Therefore, the system "cannot incorporate the idea of real change and transformation because it is built on a principle of absolute immanence, in fact, on an absolutely closed materialism."³⁷⁵

Míguez-Bonino asserts that the "oikoumene of domination" unfortunately pervades everything, including the churches in the WCC. Konrad Raiser affirms this in his book *Ecumenism in Transition*, where he explains that this had been the case up until the mid-1970s. He tells us that the 1968 assembly in Uppsala understood the "unity of humankind" as the central element in the ecumenical calling of the churches.³⁷⁶ We can see the universal dimension in its call for the churches "to work for the time when a genuinely universal council may once

³⁷⁴Míguez-Bonino, "Oikoumene and anti-oikoumene," in Wieser, ed., *Whither Ecumenism*, 1986, 29.

³⁷⁵Ibid.

³⁷⁶Raiser, *Ecumenism in Transition*, 1991, 59-65.

more speak for all Christians and lead the way into the future.”³⁷⁷ The difficulty with such a historical quest for unity in the WCC, according to Míguez-Bonino, is that it establishes an ecumenical domination of the First World churches over the Third. He writes:

5 Such “provisional” insitutionalisations of unity tend to become
sacralised and to claim a normative character for all the future.
This is the situation which we find in the ecumenical movement
today, as Western modern bourgeois Christianity struggles to set the
10 terms within which unity can be sought and realised. It is
particularly critical for the Faith and Order movement since it is
the movement concerned with the possibility of consolidating the
unity of the church in our time in its dogmatic, institutional and
sacramental expressions. Born in the very centre of the life of the
15 confessional traditions, carried theologically by the Western
churches, it is only natural that it may see unity in terms of the
“normalisation” of the variants within this tradition.³⁷⁸

From a Third World perspective, Míguez-Bonino is a little cautious about the ecumenical movement because, like the world economic system that is striving for socioeconomic unity, it risks destroying diversity in the churches with its
20 desire for uniformity. The ecumenical movement, therefore, is captive to the socioeconomic movements in the North.

From these three examples we can see that Míguez-Bonino is aware of social determinism—allowing one’s theological perspective to be determined by one’s location in society—which is the central issue to the *Instructions* concerns.
25 In response, Míguez-Bonino says that the Church’s theological task should not be a mere reflection of social location. In fact, at one point he explains that he has become more and more convinced “that theology must remain theology through and through. It will best fulfil its vocation in the struggle for liberation by retaining its specificity and refusing to dissolve its fundamental epistemological
30 principle—it is a knowledge of faith rooted in God’s self-revelation centred and fulfilled in Jesus Christ.”³⁷⁹ Therefore, he points to three sets of considerations that should prevent Christians from doing this. First is the fact that each

³⁷⁷*Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*, 1991, “Unity”.

³⁷⁸Míguez-Bonino, “A ‘Third World’ Perspective on the Ecumenical Movement,” 1982, 123.

³⁷⁹Míguez-Bonino, “For Life and Against Death: A Theology That Takes Sides,” 1981, 173-174.

individual does not have just one social location. In society there are many different instances that influence our choices and decisions; there is no one “determinant” that influences us entirely. Second, social reality is not simply fate but choice. We may be situated by birth, place and education, but we can position ourselves by option. Third, “theology has its own status. It cannot be sanctified sociology but has to think through the impact of a social location and option in terms of the particularity of theological knowledge, a knowledge that has a form of apprehension, an epistemological principle—faith—and fundamental reference—God (in the Christian faith, God’s revelation in a special history, fulfilled in Jesus Christ).”³⁸⁰

Therefore, from this discussion we can see that Míguez-Bonino is concerned about allowing the theological task of the Church to become captive to one particular social class. In this sense he shares the Vatican’s concerns. However, does this mean that Míguez-Bonino agrees with the Vatican’s sentiments entirely—that liberation theology makes the “church of the poor” into the ‘church of the class’” and absolutises one particular social class making it an “object of faith” instead of Jesus Christ? The Vatican Instruction on Liberation Theology makes the mistake of defining the “poor” as simply another social class or a group of people. It sees the poor only in relation to the social condition of the marginalised people of our society. Míguez-Bonino, on the other hand, believes that the “poor” does not only refer to a socioeconomic condition but also to a “theological locus” and an “epistemological principle.” In the Bible the poor are not simply assimilated to a social class; instead, God’s vindication of the poor is the decisive element or the very essence of the biblical witness:

The poor are the privileged locus, the place where God makes himself/herself present and invites all to follow. This relation—God, Christ, the poor—is not a deduction, it is immediate. The identification is theologically based because in the Christian mystery God and the poor are intimately united; there is a sort of

³⁸⁰Míguez-Bonino, “Theology as Critical Reflection and Liberating Praxis,” 1985, 41-42.

kinship between them. The word in Spanish would be *parentesco*, a family relation between God, Christ, and the poor. This sort of blood relationship is rooted precisely in the mystery of the incarnation, the incarnation of the Word in the form of poverty. God is present
 5 as the powerless, as the abandoned, in the suffering of the poor.³⁸¹

Because of this “epistemological privilege of the poor” the world is able to find conversion through the poor:

It is not arbitrary or merely ideological to see the poor and marginal as the human bearer of this possibility. They are by
 10 virtue of their place in society able to see the deadly nature of the system of domination since they constantly die under it. Their suffering, when illuminated by the hope of the new, becomes the fertile soil for the germination of a new rationality. They are
 15 therefore the occasion for the conversion of those who are caught in the system of domination because they challenge them from outside. It is in this sense that we talk of the poor as God’s messengers, as the bearers of the gospel, not on account of any moral or other superiority on their part. Their hopeful suffering contains the “possibility” of a new and different oikoumene, an
 20 ecumenicity of solidarity and life.³⁸²

Thus the poor are not simply another class of people, nor is liberation theology’s epistemological focus on them simply based on a communist vision that exalts the proletariat over the other class as Abrecht suspects. Identifying the Church’s identity with the poor is similar to the way the nationhood of Israel
 25 was defined by its protection of the poor. Gutiérrez explains this perfectly when he says: “The building of the Christian community acquires its full meaning to the extent that this community defends and protects the poor, who are the privileged members of the kingdom; otherwise, there is a contradiction of the very essence of the ecclesial community.”³⁸³ In other words, if the Church does
 30 not protect the poor, but instead tries to sustain its traditional authority and role in society by becoming politically central and legitimating the political order (as Norman would have it),³⁸⁴ then its unity will be destroyed.

Struggle for Power

³⁸¹Míguez-Bonino, “Theology and Peace in Latin America,” 1989, 47.

³⁸²Míguez-Bonino, “Oikoumene and anti-oikoumene,” in Wieser, ed., *Whither Ecumenism*, 1986, 30.

³⁸³Gutiérrez, *The God of Life*, 1989, 23.

³⁸⁴Forrester, *Theology and Politics*, 1988, 51-53.

Kuitert maintains that the Church should not involve itself in the political realm because it brings political style into the Church. He tells us that politics is about using power in order to realise a set of ideals. When a person enters politics he/she joins a group that identifies itself with a particular ideal or world view. The group's ideal then becomes part of the individual's identity. The individual also establishes their identity in relation to opposing ideals, which are perceived as a threat. The person and the group to which he/she belongs must then defend their ideals in order to prove that their ideal is the best way to organise society; thus, they become involved in a struggle for power where they must destroy the opposition. Politics is, therefore, a struggle for power which depends on a self-glorification and intolerance toward others. Kuitert concludes, then, that politics is irreconcilable with the doctrine of Christian love.³⁸⁵

Following Míguez-Bonino's discussion on politics in *Toward a Christian Political Ethics*, Kuitert's understanding of politics appears to be patterned after Hobbes' *Leviathan*. Hobbes defined politics as "the matter, form, and authority of government." Politics did not involve a quest for the common good, as Aristotle understood it. Instead it involved, according to Hobbes, a quest for one's own egoistic interests. Politics involves arranging "contracts" between human beings and governments in order to protect oneself and one's ideals. Thus, for Hobbes, Míguez-Bonino concludes, power was at the base of any political entity.³⁸⁶

However, liberation theologians give a much more profound understanding of politics and power than either Hobbes or Kuitert. In his discussion on politics, Leonardo Boff makes a useful distinction between *politics* and *politicalisation*. "Politics," he writes "is that field of human activity ordered to administer or transform human society by acquiring and exercising power of state." Power is organised in parties that have their own ideologies, programs,

³⁸⁵Kuitert, *Everything is Politics but Politics is Not Everything*, 1986, 10-15, 149.

³⁸⁶Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ch. 17. Míguez-Bonino, *Toward a Christian Political Ethics*, 1983, 18-19.

strategies and tactics. In this sense, then, “politics pertains to power.” However, politicalisation denotes something else. It is “any activity directed toward educating the people to have a popular voice in political and social reality, so that the poor exercise their share of social responsibility and acquire a critical spirit.”³⁸⁷ Thus, with this distinction Boff gives a broader understanding of the way politics relates to power. Politics is not just about providing an arena for the power struggle between ideologies of opposing political parties but is also about the promotion of peace, justice and human rights.

This brings us to Míguez-Bonino’s discussion on politics and power in *Toward a Christian Political Ethics*. He turns our attention to the biblical understanding of power. The first observation is that the Bible ascribes all power to God; however, it is not an abstract power that locates God’s omnipotence outside the historical realm. Instead, the power of which the Bible speaks is always related to specific “acts” of God. This affirmation, Míguez-Bonino tells us, is closely related to the idea of covenant and a faithfulness to humankind. For example, the Old Testament speaks of God rescuing the Israelite nation out of the land of Egypt. This was not just a general act of kindness or a performance of favour. It was an act of liberation, protection and judgement (our example). Thus, God’s power “is his ‘justice’ in action—in defence of the weak, judgement of the unjust, protection of the powerless, and strengthening of those whom he has given in mission.”³⁸⁸ Two important details emerge from this. First, God’s power is affirmed in the midst of conflict and struggle. Secondly, “such acts are related to human agents—persons, peoples, judges, kings—who are empowered and commissioned to execute God’s righteous judgements of deliverance and punishment.” From this Míguez-Bonino concludes that “human mediation is the way in which God’s power operates in history.”³⁸⁹

³⁸⁷Boff, *Faith on the Edge*, 1989, 39.

³⁸⁸Míguez-Bonino, *Toward a Christian Political Ethics*, 1983, 96.

³⁸⁹*Ibid.*, 97.

In his second observation, Míguez-Bonino explains that although we find human mediation of God's power possible, the Bible is ambivalent toward mediation by an "institutionalised monarchy." In 1 Samuel 8-12 there is an explicit distrust for the monarchy on two grounds: 1) the institutionalisation of power represents a rejection of God's sovereignty, and 2) it also opens the possibility for the king to become a tyrant. In other words, God's power may be used by an institution for absolutising its authority or for oppressing individuals.

The implications that these two observations have for human exercise of power is obvious. The human use of power is caught in a tension between a command to be a mediation of God's power and justice on the one hand, and a temptation to absolutise God's power for self-justification, on the other. Míguez-Bonino therefore concludes:

God's power, therefore, is never mediated, as it were, mechanically or automatically through an institution . . . It is mediated rather within the structure of God's justice that corresponds to the covenant.³⁹⁰

Any questions about Jesus' relationship to power must be framed within this tension: as a mediation of God's power for justice, but which tends to absolutise itself and oppress others. Jesus rejected the power of the ruling authorities and prophetically condemned power that absolutised or oppressed, but he also exercised God's power in his care for the poor, offering himself on the cross. Therefore, "Jesus understood his mission not as one of proposing a model for political action but as one of incarnating in a paradigmatic way God's just and liberating rule."³⁹¹

Having said all this, let us return to Kuitert's point. He concludes that politics is irreconcilable with the doctrine of Christian love, because politics is the struggle for power, which depends on self-glorification and intolerance toward others. In other words, he rejects power because it depends on absolutism

³⁹⁰Ibid., 98.

³⁹¹Ibid.

and oppression. Míguez-Bonino would easily agree with this assessment. However, power also includes the mediation of God's justice in action that corresponds to God's covenant with humanity. This is similar to the earlier distinction made by Boff between power used in party politics and power used to educate the poor. Kuitert totally ignores the second use of power, believing that all use of power is about conflict and hate. Liberation theology, on the other hand, attempts to use power not to produce political parties but to mediate God's justice in historical situations, taking full note of the temptation to absolutise it or to use it for oppression. Therefore, liberation theology is not about party politics and using power for self-glorification or to destroy one's opponents. Instead it is about using power for love.

Míguez-Bonino admits that it would be less than honest to deny the hatred for the enemy that is generated in any struggle. There is a Manichean element in every struggle: "the more the struggle escalates in quantity and quality and the longer it is prolonged, the stronger the hatred becomes."³⁹² Kuitert would agree wholeheartedly. Míguez-Bonino insists though that love, not hatred, can be at the centre of any political struggle for liberation. Paul Lehmann tells us that Barth would agree. In Barth's old commentary on Romans 13 he says: "Love is man's existential standing before God, man's being touched by the freedom of God and in his confrontation being established as a person. . . . The protest against the course of this world should be *made* through 'mutual love' and not be abandoned." Lehmann comments: "Love exalts the humanity of the neighbour above the cause that proclaims its advent, and transfigures the passion of revolution so that its promise may in truth be born. Love frees the revolution for the practice of truth in its cause."³⁹³

There will always be a tension between love and hatred in any political struggle, but like Barth, Míguez-Bonino insists that love can be made the focus of

³⁹²Ibid., 113.

³⁹³Ibid.

any protest against the world. Hatred is to be subordinated to love so that the struggle is not only an expression of love for the poor and the suffering, but it is also an expression of love for the oppressors:

5 But we are also talking about the suffering of the oppressors, about their anxiety, their fear of being dispossessed (which in their ideological blindness they count as death because they have defined the whole meaning of their lives by their possessions) and in some cases of being physically eliminated.³⁹⁴

In other words, political struggle does not have to be about setting oneself
10 against an enemy, as Kuitert assumes. In the struggle for liberation in Latin America, Míguez-Bonino tell us, there is a strong temptation to define one's "identity by opposition, as a function of the existence of the enemy." However, this tendency does not necessarily have to be the case; in fact, Míguez-Bonino explains, in the Basic Christian Communities, where people are committed to
15 social transformation, defining the identity of the group in relation to the enemy is not done. The image of the enemy is not absent, he says, "but the deeper sense of identity is born in the encounter with the sister and brother who listen to me and speak to me, who sustain me in the struggle to the point of laying down their life for me."³⁹⁵ In relation to the CEBs, on a trip to Latin
20 America Arthur McGovern noticed:

25 Contrary to stereotyped pictures of liberationists stirring up revolutions, the actual practice most resembles what North Americans would call "community organising." The problems most often addressed turn toward the communities' needs for clean water, sewage disposal, electricity, paved roads, food and education for children, health care and job skills. . . . Most work of base communities . . . involves co-operative efforts of members rather than struggles of conflict, and the groups clearly opt for non-violent methods of change.³⁹⁶

30 The concept of "laying down one's life" for another is, and continues to be, of crucial importance in liberation theology. "Opposition to an enemy is not an end in itself but a temporary and necessary function of the solidarity with the brother and sister who suffer." The identity of the Christian communities is not

³⁹⁴Ibid., 111.

³⁹⁵Míguez-Bonino, "Love and Social Transformation," 1989, 126.

³⁹⁶McGovern, *Liberation Theology and Its Critics*, 1990, 211.

established to exclude people, but to be inclusive: “of the poor and oppressed outside the community (in the larger society), of the poor and oppressed engaged in struggles of liberation elsewhere in the world, of the persons from other social groups and classes who make an option for the poor, and potentially for all as the conditions of oppression are overcome.”³⁹⁷ Therefore, Míguez-Bonino concludes that “in the mind and conscience of the Latin Americans committed to liberation, we are engaged in a project of love, not of hatred.”³⁹⁸

Míguez-Bonino reaches, then, a radically different understanding of politics than Kuitert. For Kuitert, hatred is the inner meaning of politics, but for Míguez-Bonino, “love is thus the inner meaning of politics, just as politics is the outward form of love. When this relation is made operative in the struggle for liberation, there is both the flexibility necessary for humanising the struggle and the freedom necessary for humanising the result of the struggle.”³⁹⁹ For Míguez-Bonino, to love someone is a profoundly political experience. It means to show solidarity in the struggle for liberation in a specific historical situation. It means living in conflictive situations created by the struggle of the poor against injustice, exploitation and alienation. Liberation theology is not about division and hatred but rather about solidarity and love.

Utopianism — In the last section we looked at the criticisms of Richard Neuhaus and Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger. Neuhaus argues that liberation theology dangerously rejects the eschatological proviso which places limits on human ambitions and allows people to look realistically at what can be achieved considering humanity’s fallen nature. He develops his criticisms using “political realism” to stress the reservations that Christians must bring to any political movement. He rejects liberation theology’s naïve optimism and accuses it of trying to create a perfect society. He argues that it does not believe in any limit-situations because it does not take sin seriously.

³⁹⁷Míguez-Bonino, “Love and Social Transformation,” 1989, 126.

³⁹⁸Míguez-Bonino, *Toward a Christian Political Ethics*, 1983, 112.

³⁹⁹*Ibid.*, 114.

Ratzinger is also concerned about liberation theology's utopian vision and he accuses it of chiliasm. He tells us that liberation theology links "irrational aims and reasons with political argumentation in such a way that what emerges is political action that is exactly planned in detail but as a whole is profoundly
 5 irrational. There is no real connection between the promise and its means; individual sensible projects can thus arise but one will have to label the whole as leading astray."⁴⁰⁰ Liberation theology simply ignores the mainstream biblical emphasis which steadfastly refuses to confuse the historical with the eschatological. Thus, according to Ratzinger, liberation theology belongs to a
 10 theological tradition which is fundamentally alien to mainstream eschatology and social ethics.⁴⁰¹

Míguez-Bonino shows that he takes these criticisms seriously by demonstrating that he understands such concerns and admits that while utopian thinking is a strength for Christian political theology in Latin America, it may
 15 also perhaps be a weakness. He writes:

The Kingdom of God cannot be identified with a social or political utopia, nor can a utopia be deduced from the Kingdom of God. Utopias are human creations, built by the exercise of creative reason, which extrapolates from and negates existing reality.⁴⁰²

20 Elsewhere, after he comments that Leonardo Boff "sees the resurrection of Christ as a 'realised utopia,' an anticipation of the goal of human history," Míguez-Bonino admits that he favours "a more indirect relation between utopia and the Christian faith."⁴⁰³ He rejects any formula that draws a direct relation between the two, because he believes the term utopia is ambiguous and it often carries
 25 with it the negative connotation of "human anticipations." A close connection between utopia and the Christian faith could mean the baptism of human projects.

⁴⁰⁰Ratzinger, "Eschatology and Utopia" in *Church, Ecumenism and Politics*, 1988 pp. 237ff.

⁴⁰¹Rowland and Corner, *Liberating Exegesis*, 1990, 116-126.

⁴⁰²Míguez-Bonino, "Theology and Peace in Latin America," 1989, 48.

⁴⁰³Míguez-Bonino, *Toward a Christian Political Ethics*, 1983, 92.

But Míguez-Bonino's recognition of utopianism as a temptation for liberation theology does not necessarily mean that he agrees with Neuhaus and Ratzinger. He cannot conclude along with them that the kingdom of God is irrelevant to political policies or that the existing socioeconomic and political order should be left to itself. Instead, he wonders the opposite by asking: to what extent is the kingdom of God "a horizon which commits us to an effort at transforming the 'existing conditions' in its direction?"⁴⁰⁴

Because utopian thinking has a tendency to distance itself from existing realities, Míguez-Bonino admits that it should be looked upon with some amount of caution.⁴⁰⁵ But he is not willing to dismiss utopian thinking altogether, because he believes like many other Latin American liberation theologians, that it has a positive function in relation to eschatology. The Bible, he insists, does not deny utopian thinking; instead "aspects of the biblical faith actually stimulate the creation of utopias" and incorporate human utopias as bearers of transcendent hope.⁴⁰⁶ One example of this is the early Israelite dream of an egalitarian tribal society, and another example is the New Testament picture of the community of the New Age. Throughout the Bible human utopias are integrated into an eschatological hope which causes human reason to challenge and to transcend the limits of existing reality. In each instance God appears as the negation of determinations and as a protest against things as they are. In turn, God fosters utopias which create "a powerful, expressive, symbolic language—shalom, justice, liberation, the rights of the poor, freedom— [which] offer parallels to today's struggle."⁴⁰⁷ Thus, utopianism in the Bible creates a powerful factor for change.

⁴⁰⁴Ibid., 90.

⁴⁰⁵Karl Mannheim confirms this idea: "[The] Chiliastic mentality severs all relationship with those phases of historical existence which are in daily process of becoming in our midst. It tends at every moment to turn into hostility towards the world, its culture, and all its works and earthly achievements . . ." *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge*, 1936, 198.

⁴⁰⁶Míguez-Bonino, *Toward a Christian Political Ethics*, 1983, 93.

⁴⁰⁷Míguez-Bonino, "Theology and Peace in Latin America," 1989, 49.

Neuhaus and Ratzinger see only the negative aspects of utopian thinking. They understand it as the desire to create a perfect society through human means and within the present historical order. They differentiate this type of thinking from eschatological thinking, which is an other-worldly expectation of the kingdom of God which is brought in by God alone without any human agency. They attempt to retain, then, a clear contrast between history and eschatology in which the latter is conceived as something totally *beyond* history. By doing this they believe they can maintain a more realistic vision of history and a more realistic vision of the role which Christians should play. However, what they do not realise is that by maintaining this contrast they mistakenly assume that eschatological expectation is totally alien to utopian thinking. They wrongly argue that because eschatology challenges present reality and human reason it must also *deny* all existing realities and human capabilities.

In a critical review of Ratzinger's understanding of eschatology, Christopher Rowland and Mark Corner argue that Ratzinger denies the early Christian and Jewish traditions which drew eschatology and history together:

Early Christian and Jewish writings offer a this-worldly materialistic hope which did not consist only of a cataclysmic irruption from the world beyond and the destruction of the present world for the manifestations of the divine righteousness. Human agency is always seen as part of eschatological manifestation. When we recognise that the teaching in the New Testament, particularly that attributed to Jesus, enjoins the ideals applicable to God's reign *on earth*, the New Testament writings can be seen as embodying the struggles of those who looked forward to a new age and recognised the obligation to live in the present as *if* they were living in the age to come. They do seem to correspond to the chiliastic outlook to which Ratzinger and others take exception, and as such liberation theology seems to have pointed in the direction of an important aspect of the tradition in affirming this chiliastic legacy.⁴⁰⁸

The difficulty with the Niebuhrian realist position, argues Míguez-Bonino, is that it falls into the trap of negative utopianism. Here Míguez-Bonino turns around the criticisms of the realists and uses them to accuse the accusers. He

⁴⁰⁸Rowland and Corner, *Liberating Exegesis*, 1990, 123.

argues that in their desire for a more “realistic approach” to theology and politics, realists in fact sacralise the existing social order:

5 In this view the doctrine of sin is made the decisive category for a theological anthropology and therefore the point of departure for understanding society. Moreover, the “eschatological reserve” is seen as a limit in the assessment of human possibilities. Thus, the whole political order becomes primarily a negative endeavour, a way of preserving order against chaos, a salvage operation without eschatological future. If solidarity has any place in this scheme it is as “solidarity in sin,” establishing the need for protection and thus for some form of balances and checks.⁴⁰⁹

By separating eschatology from history they consign sinful humanity to the place of passive spectator in God’s historical plans. Christians cannot work for change because of their sinful human nature. Instead, Christians are to work for the stabilisation of society where a balance between competing individual’s or group’s sinful nature can be found.⁴¹⁰ Christians are not to think creatively and look for other possibilities to the present social order, because this, in Neuhaus’ words, would give a false hope and become a cruel lie for the poor.⁴¹¹ Christians should instead, realists insist, be more realistic and work within the existing social order.

25 The church does not help by pointing to a religious reality *beyond the possibilities* of Latin American countries and making it into a political program. Rather, it must discern the moral implications underlying *existent societal process* and alternative uses of power.⁴¹²

Julio de Santa Ana concurs:

30 If we give way to “realism”, the bewitchment created by the feeling of powerlessness, we lose our energies. We close ourselves against the force of the Spirit and we surrender to the powers that be. This means acquiescing in injustice and oppression.⁴¹³

Thus realism, Míguez-Bonino argues, produces a utopianism not based on eschatological hope but rather on a “purely voluntaristic balance in society.”

⁴⁰⁹Míguez-Bonino, “Love and Social Transformation,” 1989, 126.

⁴¹⁰Míguez-Bonino, “Theology and Peace in Latin America,” 1989, 50.

⁴¹¹Neuhaus, *The Catholic Moment*, 229.

⁴¹²Míguez-Bonino, *Toward a Christian Political Ethics*, 1983, 89. A quote by Thomas G. Sanders, one of the first North Americans to use Niebuhrian realism to critique liberation theology. *Christianity and Crisis*, 33/15 (Sept. 17, 1973), 173.

⁴¹³de Santa Ana, “Spirit of Truth — Set Us Free!,” *Ecumenical Review*, 1991, 371.

This type of utopianism has had disastrous consequences. It is so concerned with establishing a balance and placing checks on human optimism that it “makes no contact with social reality.” It forgets the experience of the poor and fails to offer them new possibilities.⁴¹⁴ De Santa Ana argues that it is based on an instrumental reason which fails to “take into consideration its non-intentional effects, and therefore, trying to resolve one problem, very often gives rise to a multiplication of troubles.”⁴¹⁵ Liberation theology’s link between eschatological hope and human utopias, however, opens a different perspective:

10 Sin is thus seen not as a static quantity, an established blockage for human achievement, but as a negative force, with which a permanent struggle has to be waged. The quest for peace, justice, and freedom is therefore a permanent struggle until the end. The eschatological distance is not a predetermined limit to human creativity but an ever-moving target, or better, an absolute future that challenges us to discern the relative future striving to be born in the womb of present reality.⁴¹⁶

According to Míguez-Bonino, then, the linkage between biblical precedents and human utopias has at least three significant effects in the political realm. First, “it unifies the people by gathering them around symbols that carry and focus the memories of past struggles and projecting them into future achievements.” Second, “it relates the small struggles and immediate goals to the larger issues of justice, freedom, and democracy.” Utopian thinking makes the people outward looking. And third, “it helps people to be imaginative so that they may design a new scenario in relation to the existing problems.”⁴¹⁷

25 This means that utopian thinking helps people to denounce their present situation by describing a new and different situation. It explores the unrealised possibilities in search of “a new humanity and a new society.” It takes existing realities seriously in that it does not deny the future existence of history, as Neuhaus and Ratzinger do. Instead, the utopian thinking that liberation

30 theology supports defines reality “against the horizon of its possibilities, in what

⁴¹⁴Míguez-Bonino, “Theology and Peace in Latin America,” 1989, 50-51.

⁴¹⁵de Santa Ana, “Spirit of Truth — Set Us Free!,” *Ecumenical Review*, 1991, 371.

⁴¹⁶Míguez-Bonino, “Love and Social Transformation,” 1989, 126.

⁴¹⁷Míguez-Bonino, “Theology and Peace in Latin America,” 1989, 49.

has been called ‘an ontology of the not-yet.’ Utopia is not an illusion,” argues Míguez-Bonino. “It is knowledge—an anticipation of the possible future of reality.”⁴¹⁸

5 *How can the Christian Community be involved in Politics?
(Neoliberalism vs. Míguez-Bonino’s Liberation Theology)*

To answer this question we must begin with three other questions that must be answered first: 1) *Who* does theology? 2) *From where* is theology done? and 3) *How* do we do theology? It is only after answering these questions can we ask: what is the historical and political aim of our theological work?⁴¹⁹

10 *Who does Theology?*

Míguez-Bonino simply replies, the Church. However, he recognises that the Church is a complex and differentiated subject; thus, he clarifies his answer by defining four different forms that “the Church” can take. There is the “gathered church”—the religious and cultic community which in its liturgy, its
15 fellowship, its administration and its service reflects and enacts a certain understanding of the Gospel, sometimes verbalised or made explicit, more often only implied, but in any case powerfully operative. Second, “the institutionally appointed teaching church”—that is, the people who are officially charged with, and authorised for, the transmission of the Christian understanding. Third, the
20 “charismatic church”—people who feel attracted to theological (or philosophico-, or socio-, or cultural-theological) such as the artist, the prophet, the reformer, the philosopher. Fourth, the “Christian people”—those who live their faith through their actions, struggles and sufferings which determine their faith much more strongly than the systematic teaching that the Church gives.⁴²⁰

25 In Latin America, explains Míguez-Bonino, the base communities bring together these four separate instances. But in Europe and in North America there is a tendency to separate these instances, aligning the teaching church

⁴¹⁸Míguez-Bonino, *Toward a Christian Political Ethics*, 1983, 91.

⁴¹⁹Míguez-Bonino, “Theology as Critical Reflection and Liberating Praxis,” 1985.

⁴²⁰Míguez-Bonino, “Theology as Critical Reflection and Liberating Praxis,” 1985, 39-40.

with the dominant classes and the Church of the “people” with the marginal and oppressed. Traditionally the teaching church has been more politically active and apt to make public statements. Therefore, in the North when the “church” becomes involved in politics, it usually represents the dominate class

5 perspective. In Míguez-Bonino’s view, if we want to address the question “how can the Christian community be involved in politics,” we must first remember that the Church is not simply the teaching church or the gathered church, but it is also the church of the common people. The Church is the combination of these different forms; therefore, it cannot speak in the public realm as an institution
10 unconcerned with or unrelated to the “common people.” Instead, when the Christian community ventures into the public realm it must speak as a community of believers on behalf of the entire Christian community.

From Where is Theology Done?

We have already seen how Míguez-Bonino believes that theology must be
15 done from the perspective of the poor.

The specificity of our discipline—the demands of the Word of God and faith—within the historical context of our world converge to point out a place for the theologian: solidarity with the poor. I am not speaking of “a theology of poverty”, not even necessarily of “a
20 theology of the poor” but a theology which “thinks” the Gospel from within a conscious and lucid option for the poor. Such an option cannot be a particularity of some theologians, or of people living in certain regions of the world—the so-called “third world”. It is an imperative of the biblical faith and a demand of our
25 historical situation. A theologian who does not take this challenge with utter seriousness fails, not only as a Christian, but specifically as theologian—he/she fails to assume the weight of the biblical witness and the reality of the historical situation.⁴²¹

This option for the poor does not mean that Míguez-Bonino believes that the
30 experience of the rest of society is not meaningful or valuable. It simply means that the experience of the rest of society cannot be taken as autonomous data outside any relation to the suffering of the poor. This is the second factor we must remember when answering the question of how the Christian community can be involved in politics. It must project its theological statements from the

⁴²¹Míguez-Bonino, “Doing Theology in the Context of the Struggles of the Poor,” 1981, 370.

perspective of all humanity or from the whole human community not from the perspective of the wealthy minority.

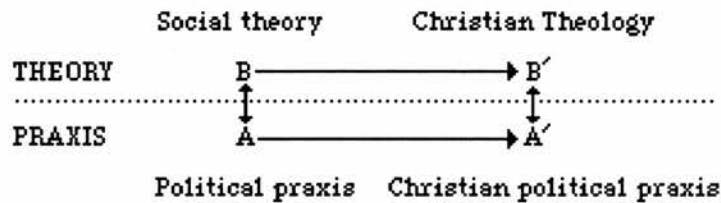
How Do We Do Theology?

To explain the relation between theory and praxis, Míguez-Bonino relies on two observations made by Clodovis Boff in his book *Theology and Praxis*.⁴²² First is Boff's suggestion that reflection always turns around a dialectic between abstract ethical principles and the concrete experience of struggle. The columns in the centre of the following chart illustrate this dialectic:

Pragmatism	PRAXIS	THEORY	Theoreticism
Determinism	WORLD	CONSCIOUSNESS	Utopianism
Positivism	FACTS	MEANING	Voluntarism
Empiricism	EXPERIENCE	TRUTH	Dogmatism
Realism	BEING	THOUGHT	Idealism

By holding the two centre columns in a dialectical tension, one column is prevented from being collapsed into the other, which would result in the “isms” found in the outer columns. These columns represent undialectical relations. As long as a dialectic is maintained between theory and praxis, Christian social activists need not fear becoming captive to “both objectivistic procrastination” (demonstrated by those concepts on the right), and “voluntaristic adventurism” (those concepts on the left).⁴²³

How do these dialectical pairings provide guidance in forming Christian political praxis or a theology of politics? The diagram that follows demonstrates how theory relates to praxis in theology:



The dialectical pairings of the two centre columns above are represented by the vertical connections $A \leftrightarrow B$ and $A' \leftrightarrow B'$. When formulating a Christian theology,

⁴²²C. Boff, *Theology and Praxis*, 1987, 213-219. Míguez-Bonino, *Toward a Christian Political Ethics*, 1983, 37-53.

⁴²³Míguez-Bonino, *Toward a Christian Political Ethics*, 1983, 107.

Míguez-Bonino tells us that there are two adequate approaches. The first is the $A \rightarrow A' \rightarrow B'$ connection. Christian theology (B') can only incorporate the experience of secular political praxis (A) through the praxis of Christians (A'). An example of this is to be found in the Latin American basic Christian

5 communities. These communities, in their common social praxis and concern for the plight of the poor, have become a source for theological reflection.

The second connection available in formulating Christian theology is the $A \rightarrow B \rightarrow B'$ route. This suggests that Christian reflection on political praxis can be mediated by secular social theory. Míguez-Bonino believes this connection is
 10 necessary because theology does not have a specifically Christian social theory due to the fact that “it has no particular access to social reality.”⁴²⁴ Christian theology must use the mediation of social sciences because they incorporate an analysis and an understanding of secular social praxis and its commitments. The Christian must therefore make choices in relation to social sciences which are
 15 not always objective or neutral. The Christian, warns Míguez-Bonino, must be careful not to wrongly interpret the social sciences and substitute ideology for faith.

This, of course, leads us to the two possible dangers that Míguez-Bonino believes the diagram suggests: the $B' \rightarrow A$ and $A' \rightarrow B$ diagonals. The $B' \rightarrow A$ relation
 20 mistakenly proposes that theology can reflect on secular political praxis without the mediation of Christian political praxis. An example of this would be when Christian theology is developed based on general social praxis or on the basis of social analysis alone instead of on Christian social praxis. This diagonal relation “tends to become a form of sociology of religion or an ideological discourse, quite
 25 useful and necessary in its own place but one that does not and cannot qualify as ‘theology’.”⁴²⁵ In the $A' \rightarrow B$ relation a secular social theory takes the place of a theological ethics of politics. This results, according Míguez-Bonino, in the

⁴²⁴Míguez-Bonino, “Theology as Critical Reflection and Liberating Praxis,” 1985, 46.

⁴²⁵*Ibid.*, 45.

exclusion of the peculiar perspective of faith; therefore, “Christians committed to the political struggle lack an adequate understanding of what they are doing, . . . they end up living a dual existence in which their faith is neither enriched nor deepened by their praxis (thus resulting in an alienated faith) and their praxis is neither illumined nor qualified by their faith (thus diminishing the contribution that, as Christians, they owe to the common cause).”⁴²⁶ Therefore, from this we can conclude that for Míguez-Bonino, if the Christian community is to have a voice in the political realm, its theological statements must take into consideration secular social theory, secular political praxis and Christian social praxis of the entire human community, both secular and Christian.

Theology’s Historical and Political Aim

Only after the Christian community recognises that it speaks on *behalf of* the entire Christian community (the church of the people), that it speaks *for* the entire human community (particularly the poor), and needs to use secular social theory as well as Christian political praxis, then the Christian community can consider how it should take up its role in the public realm. Of course the question of *how* concerns both ends and means.⁴²⁷ For Míguez-Bonino, the question of ends is seen as a reversal of the priorities of “the Constantinian church”:

The true question is not “What degree of justice (liberation of the poor) is compatible with the maintenance of the existing order?” but “*What kind of order, which order is compatible with the exercise of justice (the right of the poor)?*” Here alone do we find adequate point of departure for the theological determination of priorities. The fixed point is “justice, the right of the poor.” This is the theological premise from which we cannot depart.⁴²⁸

Recalling an earlier discussion, there are several important points we must remember in relation to Míguez-Bonino’s understanding of justice and order. First, drawing upon the work of Gerhard von Rad, Míguez-Bonino argues

⁴²⁶Míguez-Bonino, *Toward a Christian Political Ethics*, 1983, 49.

⁴²⁷For a discussion on Míguez-Bonino’s approach to Christian social ethics see McCann and Strain, *Polity and Praxis*, 1990, 150-152.

⁴²⁸Míguez-Bonino, *Toward a Christian Political Ethics*, 1983, 86.

that justice can only be defined as a relational concept. The notion of justice does not denote an absolute moral norm, but rather it deals specifically with God's covenantal relationship between God and humanity within history. God's justice pertains directly to Israel's struggle for liberation and the establishment of an egalitarian society that is able to defend the rights the poor, the hungry and those who thirst for justice. Secondly, Míguez-Bonino defines the term law not as a foreign body of rules which are to be made binding on God and humanity, but as a rule of action in which God makes his justice concrete for the life of his people. Law is not about duties to be fulfilled or an order to be maintained; rather, the intention of the law is to lead a person into maturity, repentance, and open a person to God and neighbour. Jesus spoke against the Pharisees and their insistence on the fulfilment of the law, because they used it as an instrument of self-righteousness to protect themselves against the claims of their neighbours. They did not use the law to defend the poor or the weak, but instead they perverted it, divorcing it from God's justice and using it to establish an unjust social system. The prophets also argued against such a use of God's law; thus, they denounced the social system that was being built on the backs of the poor in favour of a system that defended the rights of the oppressed and had its basis in God's covenantal relationship. For Míguez-Bonino, then, the goal of the Christian community in the public realm is to establish an order that complies with God's justice.⁴²⁹

Underlying Míguez-Bonino's position is a notion that is currently shared by the WCC. Building upon several theological concepts, such as "the essential goodness of the created order, and the responsibility for it entrusted to humanity," as well as "the innate value and freedom of each human being and of all humanity," a recent study document by the WCC Advisory Group on Economic Matters (AGEM) asks:

⁴²⁹Míguez-Bonino, "The Biblical Roots of Justice," 1987, 13-18.

5 In a world increasingly divided between those who have access to decision-making processes and those excluded from them, *what kinds of systems can allow people to participate in the decisions which affect their lives?* . . . How can genuine political freedoms be combined with appropriate systems of economic exchange, and with wide-ranging social and environmental security measures . . . at all levels of decision-making from the local to the international?⁴³⁰

This document also searches for a social order that will establish justice for all people and defend the rights of the poor. It also has a clear discussion on the
 10 meaning of justice that resembles what we have already seen in Míguez-Bonino's work. The document dismisses notions of justice as "the right to receive what is due to a person." Instead, "Biblical justice is about right relationships with God, between people and with creation as a whole. Justice resides in responsibilities and mutual duties and not in 'rights' that are asserted against one another."⁴³¹
 15 The document also concludes that a "'preferential option for the poor' is thoroughly grounded in scripture and in the best of the subsequent Christian tradition. Any economic policy or system has therefore to be tested from the perspective of how it affects the position of the poor."⁴³²

For Míguez-Bonino and the WCC, the goal of the Christian community is to
 20 look for a social system which complies with God's justice. It could be argued that neoliberalism, represented by Michael Novak and Amy Sherman, also has the same goal. In Novak's comments on the second *Vatican Instruction* he tells us: "What Christians can aim at is the building of such institutions as to achieve the three fundamental liberations: freedom in the political order, freedom from
 25 poverty, and freedom of conscience, information, and ideas." He supports this with a statement from the *Instruction*: "The fight against injustice is meaningless unless it is waged with a view to *establishing a new social and political order in conformity with the demands of justice*. Justice must already make each stage of the establishment of this new order."⁴³³ Novak and Sherman

⁴³⁰WCC, *Christian Faith and the World Economy Today*, 1992, 29. Emphasis added.

⁴³¹*Ibid.*, 15.

⁴³²*Ibid.*

⁴³³Novak, *Will It Liberate?*, 1986, 228. Emphasis added.

believe strongly that their neoliberalist project establishes liberation for the poor because it is searching for a new social order based on justice. In fact, borrowing a statement from Richard Neuhaus, Sherman says: “the neoliberal model *is* the preferential option for the poor.”⁴³⁴

5 But is this true, that Novak’s search for a just order is the same as the “liberating project” promoted by liberation theology? Does neoliberalism and liberation theology share a “common ground” as Novak contends? We argue that this is not the case. Novak and Sherman simply reaffirm old capitalistic principles without making any new progress to help the poor, thus making a
10 very different project based on a different interpretation of the terms liberation, justice and law.

For Novak and Sherman, these terms are concepts that are used to establish individual freedom. Novak tells us that “the first direction of liberal thought, therefore, is inward, toward the inalienable rights endowed in each
15 human person by the Creator,” therefore making the protection of individual freedom the very centre of neoliberal ideology.⁴³⁵ He and Sherman believe that individual freedom can be maintained most adequately when the different spheres of authority in society are limited to their proper role. For example, they argue the government’s proper role is to provide defence, law and order,
20 and a judicial system that will protect property rights and fair practices in the marketplace. The government should leave the market to itself and allow private developers to focus on the creation of wealth rather than wealth redistribution. It should also leave welfare tasks up to churches and neighbourhood associations.⁴³⁶ Sherman gives the following summation of the neoliberal
25 vision:

In sum, the neoliberal vision of democratic capitalism appears to be informed by Christian teachings on human nature and on the nature of society as composed of various “rightly ordered” spheres

⁴³⁴Sherman, *Preferential Option*, 1992, 220.

⁴³⁵Novak, *Will It Liberate?*, 1986, 201-202.

⁴³⁶Sherman, *Preferential Option*, 1992, 209-210.

5 enjoying complementary relations in which the rightful authority and responsibilities of each are respected. . . . Christians who embrace the importance of liberty, of “rightly ordered” social relations, of limited government, of human creativity, and of justice (understood as rendering to each his due) can support the neoliberal approach because it affirms and institutionalises these concerns more fully than alternative forms of political economy.⁴³⁷

10 Here we see concerns for realism and the need to establish social stability through law and order. Looking back at Míguez-Bonino’s two questions that were stated above, we can see how neoliberalism limits its scope to the first: “What degree of justice is compatible with the maintenance of the existing order?” Neoliberalism fails to understand the biblical notion of justice — as a commitment to the poor — and instead defines it in terms of the right to receive what is due to a person. It understands justice as the establishment of the “right
15 order of things” — the creation of social structures which maintain social stability. We can see how neoliberalism is more interested in maintaining social order than it is in establishing a just social system when we look Sherman’s conclusions. She argues that neoliberalism favours the poor with its market-oriented development strategy and its emphasis on the creation of wealth. She
20 does admit that this strategy may cause some social inequality, but she reminds Christians that the Bible recognises such inequalities as natural. To equalise wealth in society causes political instability and turmoil. Because “the neoliberal prescription seems more likely to produce desired social stability,” the poor will eventually be better off.⁴³⁸

25 Neoliberalism’s downfall is that it does not remember that the Christian community speaks on *behalf* of the “church of the common people,” and *for* the entire human community. Instead, it assumes that the Christian community’s role in the public realm is to work within the established order, bringing charity to those in need. Sherman describes the role of the Christian community
30 assigned by neoliberalism:

⁴³⁷Ibid., 211.

⁴³⁸She follows Novak’s discussion of the parable of the ten virgins. Novak, *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism*, 1982, 345.

. . . voluntary associations are more effective, efficient, and relevant service providers. The state may accomplish more for the poor simply by providing the hospitable juridical framework that allows such organisations in civil society to flourish, or by partnering with them in initiatives where each party is accorded respect and decision-making authority. Along these lines, the neoliberal approach heartily affirms the importance to society of robust "mediating structures" (such as voluntary associations, churches, neighbourhoods, families, free trade unions, etc.) . . .⁴³⁹

5 This approach is quite different from the one promoted by liberation theology. In his book *Toward a Christian Political Ethics*, Míguez-Bonino draws upon Gutiérrez to explain liberation theology's "project of liberation." It has four elements: "(1) societal appropriation of the means of production; (2) societal appropriation of political power (his expression is 'political management,' *gestión*); (3) societal appropriation of freedom; and (4) the creation of a new social consciousness."⁴⁴⁰ This formula, Míguez-Bonino tells us, points to a society which is "socialist in the organisation of its economy, democratic in terms of the political participation of the people, and open in the sense of ensuring the conditions for personal realisation, cultural freedom and opportunity, and the mechanisms for self-correction."⁴⁴¹

15 Here we detect that Míguez-Bonino is aware of the dangers of Marxism, both as a system of government and as an economic system. Although he insists that socialism is the only alternative for Latin America, he recognises the need for "mechanisms of self-correction." These mechanisms are: democracy, the protection of individual and cultural freedoms, and an interplay between social and individual action in the economy, which "leaves room for a number of specific options, such as *various forms* of societal appropriation of the means of production, gradations of interplay between *central planning* and group and *individual initiative*, diverse models of political participation."⁴⁴² In a more recent article he even recognises the need for "different relations between

⁴³⁹Sherman, *Preferential Option*, 1992, 7.

⁴⁴⁰Míguez-Bonino, *Toward a Christian Political Ethics*, 1983, 77. Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 1988, 65-68.

⁴⁴¹*Ibid.*

⁴⁴²*Ibid.*, 78.

different forms and extents of planning and markets” that include “different configurations of social subjects of the economy: private enterprises, cooperatives of different types, or state initiative.”⁴⁴³

His recognition of the need for self-correcting mechanisms in the socialist project is part of a general awareness by most liberation theologians since the mid-1980s that socialism has many difficulties and dangers. Segundo has become more critical of existing socialisms, especially of Marxist-socialist regimes, because they have involved the practices of repression and state control and need bureaucracy and harsh repression to sustain themselves.⁴⁴⁴

Also, in an interview with McGovern, Gutiérrez has distanced himself from socialism: “Socialism is not an essential of liberation theology; one can support liberation theology or do liberation theology without espousing socialism.”⁴⁴⁵ However, are we to conclude, then, that Míguez-Bonino and others are moving away from socialism toward capitalism? Are they turning to neoliberalism as Christian Smith suspects?

McGovern tells us that liberation theologians have always resisted “centralised” models of government in favour of a “socially-oriented” strategy: “for example, the Peruvian periodical *Socialismo y Participación* in an editorial statement called for decentralising the government and delegating functions of government to the population.⁴⁴⁶ Here McGovern points out an important distinction that liberation theologians have always made. They reject all forms of socialism that are authoritarian and totalitarian in nature, where a central government has complete political, economic and cultural control over society. Instead they accept a form of socialism defined in socially-oriented terms, where the people have control of the government, the means of production and their culture.⁴⁴⁷

⁴⁴³Míguez-Bonino, “Re-covering Democracy?,” 1991, 209.

⁴⁴⁴McGovern, *Liberation Theology and Its Critics*, 1990, 147.

⁴⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 148.

⁴⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 211, 271.

⁴⁴⁷Míguez-Bonino, “Re-covering Democracy?,” 1991, 208-209.

In order for the people to have control, Míguez-Bonino explains that Latin America must become a democratic society, but by this he means something radically different than what neoliberalism would interpret it to mean. To illustrate this difference he distinguishes between a ‘transition to a liberal democratic society’ and ‘democratisation’ as a process. The first notion traditionally has meant the creation of a representative form of government. This correctly advocates the idea that “the people” should control the political function; however, it says nothing about control of the economic or cultural functions. This is because the liberal democratic society teaches that these functions are to be free of all control (political or societal). Unfortunately, Míguez-Bonino tell us, this means that no one is made responsible for these functions; thus, they are susceptible to abuse by those who have power.⁴⁴⁸ Because the poor are economically powerless, they lose all control in the market. They also lose political power, because the elite provide the financial support for the governmental “representatives”:

The political elites, while claiming popular representation, have not stimulated the organisation of the people at base level. There seems to be a visceral fear or mistrust of “the base” which leads the political leadership to continue to trust the old system of clientage rather than the building of an organised and politically active popular base.⁴⁴⁹

Therefore, not all transitions to democracy can be said to be “liberating projects.” We can speak of democratically-elected governments which are economically and culturally repressive, because no one is given responsibility for these functions.

Democratisation, on the other hand, means that the people gain control not only politically, but economically and culturally as well. To have political control means to ensure the full participation of the people in the government (representative, electoral democracy). Having economic control means to give the people “control of the process of production, distribution and consumption of

⁴⁴⁸Ibid., 206-208.

⁴⁴⁹Ibid., 210.

goods necessary for life.” And lastly, cultural control means giving the people power to enhance their capability of creating culture.⁴⁵⁰ “Culture is understood here as the ‘human’, intentional, value-laden, symbolic dimension of all human activity, which cannot be separated from the material and technical dimensions.”⁴⁵¹ Thus, in this sense, the process of democratisation is a liberating project.

Míguez-Bonino believes that this “liberating project,” which is based on a democratic, humanist-socialist tradition, better serves the needs of the poor than a neoliberal, capitalist solution. The WCC’s study document on the world economy describes the difference between the two approaches quite adequately:

Over some hundreds of years Europe has been developing a sense of individual worth and therefore freedom which is now sweeping through most parts of the world and also through societies which have long upheld different values. In a way, this was a reaction to centuries of traditional feudal systems which left very little room for individual freedom. This historical trend explains a great deal of economic “progress”, both in terms of expecting wants to be met and of justifying initiative and creativity despite the longer-term costs. However, today many are increasingly sensing the counterweight of solidarity with the poor as an equally vital criterion as that of individualism. The tension between individualism and solidarity is one of the keys to the economic dilemmas of today.⁴⁵²

Which system can be more successful?

Neoliberalism rests on the principle of individualism and the private accumulation of wealth, while liberation theology favours solidarity with the poor.⁴⁵³ It would be difficult for us to argue that Míguez-Bonino’s liberating

⁴⁵⁰Míguez-Bonino never specifically outlines what this would entail. However, it seems that he is promoting something similar to what Donald Hay, a lecturer in economics at Oxford University, calls for: “. . . give ownership rights in the firm to those who actually work in it. These rights would confer not only a share in the profits, but also the potential to influence the activity of the firm. A simple means to achieve this would be equity participation by long-standing workers. An alternative would be recognition in the legal constitution of the firm that its objectives include the long-term provision of employment for the labour force. This could be given substantive content by provision for worker participation in major decisions.” Hay, *Economics Today: A Christian Critique*, 1989, 173-174.

⁴⁵¹Míguez-Bonino, “Re-covering Democracy?,” 1991, 208-209.

⁴⁵²WCC, *Christian Faith and the World Economy Today*, 1992, 32.

⁴⁵³Ironically, Novak twists his notions of each individual’s right to accumulate wealth around so that it is not attributed to individualism but rather to solidarity. Novak argues that his system “maximises the reliance of each person upon the integrity and cooperation of others.” Novak, *Will it Liberate?*, 1986, 214.

project is more feasible than Novak's and Sherman's or that one can alleviate poverty better than the other. However, we can comment on which project seems to follow biblical principles more closely; here we rely on other theologians and economists for our evaluations. Walter Owensby, who is

5 Associate Director of the public policy office of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), and Donald Hay, lecturer in economics at Oxford University, argue that neither the biblical faith nor Church tradition rests easy with the concept of accumulation of wealth.

Owensby comments:

10 Our [capitalist] economic system rests upon the concept of
privatising creation. It assumes that everything of economic value
should belong to a particular individual whenever possible. It is
the right of that individual to accumulate as much as energy and
15 opportunity make possible and to do with those goods whatever he
or she chooses. This is not the biblical perspective.⁴⁵⁴

Owensby structures his case against capitalism by focusing on the Old and New Testaments. The Old Testament recognises the legitimacy of private ownership, but it also understands that "possession is always conceived of in the larger context of responsibility. What belongs to the individual belonged first to God and does not cease to belong to God." Thus, Owensby tells us, in the Old Testament "stewardship rather than ownership is the primal category."⁴⁵⁵ There are many verses which support this claim by warning against the amassing of wealth by the rich (Deut. 17:16-17) and the danger of using it as a leverage over the poor.

This is also true for the New Testament. Here we find that the concepts of
25 wealth and property ownership are "ultimately based upon the recognition that God is the true owner of all things and that human claims are contingent upon stewardship responsibilities." For the New Testament, Owensby concludes, "distribution of wealth to end misery, not endless accumulation, is the biblical ideal."⁴⁵⁶ Of course, such a perception of economic realities collided with the

⁴⁵⁴Owensby, *Economics for Prophets*, 1988, 34.

⁴⁵⁵*Ibid.*

⁴⁵⁶*Ibid.*, 36.

Roman law concept of private ownership. It recognised absolute and exclusive individual ownership over virtually all property and the right to acquire all that ability, opportunity and privilege afforded. Both Owensby and Hay argue how this conflicts with the Christian ideal of personal responsibility.

5 Hay's argument against capitalism is similar to Owensby's, but Hay bases it on eight biblical principles. We will not explain each principle, but instead divide them into three groups as Hay does in his evaluation of capitalism. The first three principles are concerned with creation, human dominion and stewardship. Hay explains that God has entrusted humankind with the role of
10 steward over creation. (We have already seen this in Míguez-Bonino's work.) This implies that people are given "responsibility for deciding how resources and talents should be used. In the exercise of that responsibility, the individual should look beyond immediate self-interest to see how resources may be used for the good of others."⁴⁵⁷ Of course, market capitalism has proven to be rather
15 hostile to this concept because it rests on the concept of self-interest and competition. It therefore encourages a lack of responsibility for personal resources.

The next three principles that Hay outlines concern humanity's work. The Bible defines work as the means by which humanity exercises stewardship;
20 thus, people have the right and the obligation to work. This work is a social activity in which people cooperate as stewards of their individual talents, using the world's resources jointly. This means that individual work cannot be simply treated as labour input: "he should be given a formal status which recognises that he too has responsibilities for the way in which resources are used and the
25 firm conducts itself."⁴⁵⁸ Market capitalism denies this principle. In the market system, Hay explains, the structure of companies is divided between the shareholders, who take very little interest in running the company;

⁴⁵⁷Hay, *Economics Today*, 1989, 166.

⁴⁵⁸*Ibid.*, 168-169.

management, who is responsible for hiring labour; and workers, who are not given any voice in how the company is run.

The last two principles concern the distribution of income. These principles show us that “every person has a right to share in God’s provisions” and that “personal stewardship of resources does not imply the right to consume the entire product of those resources, and that the rich have an obligation to help the poor, who cannot provide adequately for themselves by work.”⁴⁵⁹ Nor does personal stewardship imply the right to consume the entire product of one’s labour. In the biblical vision, the world’s resources and an individual’s labour are at the disposal of the community. Resources and the products are communal rather than individual.⁴⁶⁰ Western capitalism functions on a different principle. Resources are owned individually, or by a few, and income generated from those resources is understood to be at the disposal of the few and to be shared with the community.

Owensby provides us with an excellent evaluation from a biblical perspective of market capitalism:

There is simply nothing in biblical tradition that even remotely accepts the concept of the right of the individual to acquire any quantity of goods or wealth in blind indifference to the condition and needs of others. Nor does the biblical tradition exhibit any inclination to trust in the good will of individuals or in supposedly automatic mechanisms (e.g., invisible hands or trickle-down theories) to achieve a God-envisioned economy of justice where the needs of all are met. The voice of the prophets and of the early church fathers is avowedly interventionist in economic affairs.

Biblical faith acknowledges individual property rights, but only within the context of a stewardship ethic that regards the whole of creation as God’s capital on loan to each generation to meet the needs of all God’s people. It is out of character with our faith to accord autonomy to capital owners in the economic decision-making process. However efficient, however profitable for enterprise, investment decisions made in the absence of concern about the larger arena of labour, consumer, and community are not acceptable to the norms of our early faith tradition.⁴⁶¹

⁴⁵⁹Ibid., 169.

⁴⁶⁰Owensby, *Economics for Prophets*, 1988, 52.

⁴⁶¹Ibid., 40.

Neoliberalism, therefore, which avidly supports market capitalism, betrays biblical principles; but liberation theology, with its bias toward the poor and promotion of community, supports those principles. Neoliberalism promotes the idea that all resources are at our disposal so that we can manipulate them for private, personal wealth and advantage. Liberation theology, on the other hand, supports the biblical notion that people are called to be good stewards of God's creation. Furthermore, essential to neoliberalism is the idea that the individual is the absolute value, prior and superior to the community. The right to maximise personal benefits is seen as the cornerstone of the natural order. It recognises the notion of equality, but only in competition. It fails to recognise socioeconomic equality which is so important to liberation theology.

The biblical view, which liberation theology supports, does not deny the absolute value of the individual or the equality between people, but it understands these terms differently than neoliberalism. The Bible defines the value of the individual in terms of the community, not isolation. It defines equality in human terms with reference to well-being of all people. As we saw earlier, Míguez-Bonino argues that God makes a covenant with all of humanity, not just with individuals.

Finally, the biblical faith goes beyond personal piety and acts of charity that soften the edges of poverty. It requires the shaping of a society that will prevent the inequities that cause suffering. Neoliberalism, as we have seen, believes that charity, performed by individuals and voluntary organisations, is the only way to alleviate world poverty. Charity does have its benefits in the short run, but on a long term it simply increases the dependence of impoverished countries.⁴⁶² This is why liberation theologians reject neoliberalism.

⁴⁶²*Ibid.*, xvi-xx, 124.

Conclusion

In conclusion, and as a way of introducing the next section of this thesis, we wish to spend a moment on a few comments that Míguez-Bonino made in 1985 concerning the Kairos Document which was written by a group of South African Christians. Just a few of his remarks will be appropriate here, because we discuss the document in greater detail in the next section.

Míguez-Bonino tells us that in the Kairos Document theology is given two “political” functions: “on the one hand it unmasks an ideological use of theology; on the other, it points to a positive political responsibility of the faith — to resist an illegitimate government and to seek its “replacement” by a legitimate one which can indeed fulfil its pauline function.”⁴⁶³ Many of the Western churches, he says, are today forcefully denouncing horrible governments; however, they lack political commitment. They refrain from assuming an explicit political commitment that works to replace those governments:

They understand their function as a “critical” one, which has gone as far — in the case of apartheid — as declaring a “status confessionis” or “heresy”. But then, they seem to think that a political decision belongs to another discipline, possibly that of “political ethics”.⁴⁶⁴

Theologically, denunciation without commitment introduces a wedge between faith and obedience. This, he insists, leads the Christian person to indifference or passivity; instead, faith and obedience belong together.

The response of faith is always at the same time obedience. And *obedience is always specific*. To separate the two, as if the latter were only a “consequence” . . . is fatal. . . . the only faith through which we are justified is the “faith that is obedience” (in Paul’s terms: the *upakoe pisteos* — the faith that obedience itself is).⁴⁶⁵

We have dealt quite extensively with the issues of capitalism and socialism in this chapter because Míguez-Bonino believes that churches are not only required to be involved in politics to denounce bad systems, but they are also to be involved in politics to promote a just social system that has a particular

⁴⁶³Míguez-Bonino, “Challenge to the Church: A comment on the Kairos Document,” 1985, 56.

⁴⁶⁴Ibid.

⁴⁶⁵Ibid., 58. Emphasis added.

perspective from the condition of the poor. They can do this by “(a) introducing into the consideration of [social issues] a specific perspective on society, history, human life that is born from the faith, and (b) by stimulating Christians to participate actively in human affairs from that perspective.”⁴⁶⁶ The churches
5 can also challenge, stimulate and exhort people, ecumenically with one voice, to commit themselves to an active witness and action in relation to concrete issues.⁴⁶⁷ This idea seems to run totally against all that the critics of liberation theology have said, whom we discussed in the last chapter. This understanding of the Church’s role in politics is against those who argue that the Church should
10 stay out of politics completely; it is against those who say the Church should be involved in politics to the extent that it functions as a civil religion; and it is against those who argue that the Church should be more realistic and work within the established order.

⁴⁶⁶Míguez-Bonino, “Social Doctrine as a Locus for Ecumenical Encounter,” *Ecumenical Review*, 1991, 398.

⁴⁶⁷*Ibid.*, 399.

3.1 BLACK POLITICAL AND THEOLOGICAL RESISTANCE IN SOUTH AFRICA

Many commentators on South Africa look to the year 1960 as the turning point in the protest against apartheid. In March of that year, police fired on a crowd of unarmed protesters in Sharpeville, a small town in the Transvaal, killing sixty-nine people and wounding 186 others. The protesters were participating in a campaign, launched by the African National Congress (ANC) and the Pan African Congress (PAC), to protest against the pass laws which required all Africans to carry passes when working and living outside their native homelands. The PAC called on people to leave their “passes” at home and present themselves for arrest at their nearest police station. The massacre sparked waves of anger and defiance throughout South Africa. On 28 March, the ANC and the PAC called for a day of mourning and a work stayaway. In response the government outlawed both the PAC and the ANC and declared a state of emergency. Thousands of people were detained in dawn raids. Political unrest flared in most of the major centres and the government used violent repression to restore order.⁴⁶⁸

Until the Sharpeville massacre, the black struggle against apartheid had, for the most part, been under the tutelage of white liberal protest.⁴⁶⁹ Like its white liberal counterpart, black opposition operated on the premises of political moderation and was primarily concerned with integrating blacks into a European, socio-economically based system. They did not want to overthrow the state, but just to put an end to their collective exclusion from that system.⁴⁷⁰ At the end of the 1960s, however, there was an ideological shift among young blacks away from the liberal approach. There are three factors that can account for

⁴⁶⁸Ryan, *Beyers Naudé*, 1990, 52.

⁴⁶⁹For a discussion on the history of the white liberal protest see, Villa-Vicencio, *Trapped in Apartheid*, 1988.

⁴⁷⁰Sebidi, “The Dynamics of the Black Struggle and its Implications for Black Theology,” in Mosala and Tlhagale, eds., *The Unquestionable Right to be Free*, 1986.

this: 1) the influence of the American Civil Rights Movement in the mid-1960s; 2) the restlessness of black students due to overt racial policies and the overcrowded conditions of the universities; and 3) the rise of Black Theology.

American Civil Rights Movement

5 More and more contemporary studies on the rise of the Black
Consciousness Movement and black theology in South Africa depict these
movements as being independent from the Civil Rights Movement in the United
States. These studies downplay the influence of the American counterpart,
because they wish to show how expressions of racial assertiveness in South
10 Africa long predated similar signs in the United States. These studies place
greater emphasis on the indigenous influences and the autonomous nature of
the ideology and political practices of South African resistance movements.⁴⁷¹
But because Boesak reviews the concepts of the Civil Rights Movement, and
especially those of Martin Luther King, Jr., we must include a brief discussion of
15 that movement here.

It has been said that King was a conservative militant.⁴⁷² He was a
conservative because he believed in the liberal, humanist ideals of two of
America's great leaders, Abraham Lincoln and Thomas Jefferson. He was
convinced that because the whole structure of American society was based on the
20 American Constitution, which promoted the fundamental equality of all people,
racism was simply a moral accident. King believed that racism could be easily
overcome if he appealed to the consciousness of white people for the integration
of black people into American society. All he had to do was merely appeal to the
ideals of freedom and democracy and American society would change. Therefore,
25 he encouraged nonviolent means and collaboration with white people who
shared those ideals.

⁴⁷¹Alexander, "Black Consciousness: A Reactionary Tendency?" 238-240; Moodley, "Impact of Black Consciousness," in Pityana, ed., *Bounds of Possibility*, 1991, 147. A. Marx, *Lessons of Struggle*, 1992, 42-43.

⁴⁷²Witvliet, *The Way of the Black Messiah*, 1987, 118.

This position isolated King from other, more radical, civil rights leaders who found inspiration in Malcolm X, who more than any one else saw the need for black unity and solidarity. This division eventually led several Civil Rights leaders to reject nonviolence and racial collaboration and call for a movement of

5 Black Power (BP). These leaders believed that the only viable option for black people against white racism was black self-determination. To find their own human dignity, blacks had to withdraw from white society and form their own culture. Integration, which meant the assimilation of black people into the white community, was to be rejected. James Cone explains this position:

10 . . . in order for the oppressed blacks to regain their identity, they must affirm the very characteristic which the oppressor ridicules—*blackness*. Until white America is able to accept the beauty of blackness . . . there can be no peace, no integration in the higher sense. . . . Black Power, then, must say No to whites who invite them

15 to share in their inhumanity toward black people. Instead, it must affirm the beauty of blackness and by so doing free the black man for a self-affirmation of his own being as a black man. Whites cannot teach this.⁴⁷³

Blacks, the leaders of the Black Power movement argued, could no longer

20 afford to be accommodating, not even to white liberals who believed that they could see “both sides” of the issue:

[The liberal] wants to change the heart of the racist without ceasing to be his friend; he wants progress without conflict. Therefore, when he sees blacks engaging in civil disobedience and demanding

25 “Freedom Now,” he is disturbed. Black people know who the enemy is, and they are forcing the liberal to take sides. But the liberal wants to be a friend, that is, enjoy the rights and privileges pertaining to whiteness and also work for the “Negro.” He wants change without risk, victory without blood.⁴⁷⁴

30 Thus, there was no place in the BP movement for people who verbalised the correct things but who were not prepared to risk their life for freedom of the black people.

King protested against Black Power. While recognising that it was merely the “call to black people to amass their political and economic strength to

35 achieve their legitimate purpose” and “the strength required to bring about

⁴⁷³Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 1969, 18-20.

⁴⁷⁴*Ibid.*, 27.

social, political, or economic changes,” King also saw it as “basically a nihilistic philosophy born out of the conviction that the Negro cannot win.”⁴⁷⁵ He saw it as a movement built on a struggle for power through violent means; in this way it wasn’t much different than the white struggle for power. For him, violence was futile in the struggle for justice, a fact proven by the riots, which did not bring any tangible results. But its ultimate weakness was that violence was a “descending spiral, begetting the very thing it seeks to destroy.”⁴⁷⁶

Therefore, King rejected the Black Power Movement’s understanding of power because it was too closely related to violence. He accepted the fact that black people needed power, but the struggle for power did not mean that one had to hate the opposition. King vigorously opposed contrasting the terms love and power. For him power was legitimate if it was a matter of the ability to achieve purpose, or the power needed to achieve social, political and economic changes. For King power was love, which brings the dreams of justice to fulfilment.

“Because King failed to find this connection between power and love in the supporters of Black Power, he believed that the slogan was essentially a nihilistic philosophy born of despair: he was opposed not only to the separatist tendencies which he regarded as unrealistic but above all to the summons to avenging power; this last could only lead to misuse of power and destruction.”⁴⁷⁷

The significance of this discussion of King and Black Power for our examination of Boesak’s theology can be seen in Neville Alexander’s comparative essay on Black Consciousness in the United States and in South Africa, which he wrote in 1974. He argues that in the Civil Rights Movement there were basically two groups—the “inclusionists” and the “separatists.” The inclusionists assumed that moral persuasion was enough to bring about a change in white attitudes toward race. They also assumed that racism could be eliminated from American

⁴⁷⁵Boesak, *Farewell to Innocence*, 1986, 59-60.

⁴⁷⁶*Ibid.*, 60.

⁴⁷⁷Witvliet, *The Way of the Black Messiah*, 1987, 145. See also Boesak, *Farewell to Innocence*, 1986, 52-56.

society without a radical transformation of the political or economic structures. Thus they did not think that a specifically black identity was really necessary, because it only caused further separation between what should be a unified society.⁴⁷⁸

5 The separatists, on the other hand, understood that racism had become institutionalised in America, meaning that racism was not just an attitude that could be ‘cleared up’ through moral appeal. Instead, it had become part of the very fabric of the American social structure, which made it more difficult to identify and to eradicate. Therefore they thought: “Radical socio-political and
10 economic change is essential if the racist attitudes of Americans are to be transformed and humanity is to assert itself. Blacks must organise themselves as a group to accumulate sufficient power with which to bargain their way into the body politic.”⁴⁷⁹ The separatists, then, believed that black people should take their place in a new order as an organised body, whereas the inclusionists
15 believed that blacks would be absorbed as individuals into the existing society.

Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa

The Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) came into being as a response to the political vacuum that existed after the ANC’s and the PAC’s banning in 1960. By the end of the decade, black students, who found themselves suffering in
20 overcrowded and inadequately maintained universities, realised that they could no longer accept their status as second-class citizens in their own country. It became more and more clear to them that the authorities, who kept promising separate but equal education, had no intention of investing the money needed to improve the quality of their education. Thus, they became aware that “separate
25 development” meant “unequal development.”⁴⁸⁰

⁴⁷⁸Alexander, “Black Consciousness: A Reactionary Tendency?” in Pityana, ed., *Bounds of Possibility*, 1991, 241.

⁴⁷⁹*Ibid.*

⁴⁸⁰The apartheid policy, which promised black cultural and economic advancement, led to the devastation of the black culture while safeguarding white interests—privileges, identity, land and resources. Apartheid led to the exact opposite of what the “stated” intentions were—*separate but equal development*. Land and resources were by no means equitably

It also became more evident that they could no longer accept white leadership and political representation in matters that affected them. Because they were forced to attend “black only” universities in remote areas that were completely isolated and cut of from the intellectual, cultural and social life of the nation, black students felt that the white leadership of the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS) could not properly represent their interests.⁴⁸¹

NUSAS was founded in 1924 and was based in the English-speaking universities—University of Witwatersrand, Rhodes, University of Cape Town and Natal. Since its establishment, NUSAS has consistently rejected racism in education and propagated a liberal, radical, humanist and egalitarian philosophy that has always been in complete opposition to the government policy of ethnic separate development. In fact, in 1973 after the Schibusch Commission examined the affairs of NUSAS, seven of its leaders were banned, meaning it was a crime to publish any remarks or statements made by them.⁴⁸²

Because the activity of NUSAS surrounded the big, English-speaking universities, which blacks could not gain access to very easily, it was virtually impossible for black students to attain leadership positions. Steve Biko remarked:

So what happened was that in 1960, effectively all black resistance was killed, and the stage was left open to whites of liberal opinion to make representations for blacks, in a way that had not happened before in the past, unaccompanied by black opinion.⁴⁸³

allocated or distributed. Blacks (87% of the population) found themselves confined to homelands (13% of the total land), which was the poorest land in South Africa. In 1984, only 32% of the adult population could read versus 93% of the white population due to state spending on education. In the years 1987-1988, the government spent 504 Rand per black student versus 2,538 Rand per white student. In 1987 the average income per black person was 1,246 R, versus 14,880 R for a white person. For black South Africa, apartheid meant separate and unequal development. Segal, *The World Affairs Companion*, 1991, 278.

⁴⁸¹In 1959 the government initiated the process of closing the open universities to blacks and establishing universities for blacks only with the Extension of University Education Act. Two universities (University College of the North and the University College of Zululand) were built for Africans in addition to the one that had already existed—the University College of Fort Hare. The Universities of the Western Cape, as a “Coloured” university, and Durban for “Indian” students, were also established.

⁴⁸²International Commission of Jurists, *The Trial of Beyers Naudé*, 1975, 31-32.

⁴⁸³Quoted in Siphon Buthelezi, “Emergence of Black Consciousness,” in Pityanna, ed., *Bounds of Possibility*, 1991, 112.

Exclusion from the organisation's leadership made many blacks feel that their needs were not being addressed. Proof of this was demonstrated at the 1967 NUSAS conference where black students were made to stay at a church building in another town while whites were staying in residence around the conference site. Biko wondered how NUSAS could adequately represent blacks when its white leadership saw nothing wrong with separate living accommodations? He concluded: "This is perhaps the turning point in the history of black support for NUSAS," and that it was now time for blacks "to formulate their own thinking, unpolluted by ideas emanating from a group with lots at stake in the *status quo*."⁴⁸⁴

Thus, Biko established the South African Student Organisation (SASO) as a separate organisation that could represent black student opinion and generate a sense of solidarity between black campuses. The existence of such an organisation, it was hoped, would break the isolation of blacks and bring them closer together. At the first National Formation School at Edendale in December 1969, Biko enunciated the aims of SASO: "To heighten the degree of contact not only amongst the non-white students but also amongst these and the rest of the South African student population, to make the non-white students accepted on their own terms as an integral part of the South African student community."⁴⁸⁵

To promote black solidarity, SASO launched several student and community development projects. These included literacy campaigns, health services, home study assistant projects and several others, all with the aim of promoting community awareness, achievement and pride. In the words of Barney Pityana, second president of SASO, the goal of the organisation was:

to make the Black man see himself, to pump life into his empty shell, to infuse him with dignity, to remind him of his complicity in the crime of allowing himself to be misused and therefore letting evil reign supreme in the country of his birth. . . . This means that Blacks must build themselves into a position of non-dependence

⁴⁸⁴Biko, "Letter to SRC," in Biko, *I Write What I Like*, 1978, 10-11.

⁴⁸⁵Biko, "SASO—its Role, its Significance and its Future," in Biko, *I Write What I Like*, 1978, 4.

upon Whites. They must work toward a self-sufficient political, social, and economic unit. . . . Black man, you are on your own!⁴⁸⁶

To understand the cry “Black man, you are on your own!” we must understand the alienation blacks felt. Kogilia Moodley puts it into perspective
5 for us:

Black South Africa in the 1960s was ripe for an ideology of liberation. The oppression of apartheid society took place overtly and blatantly. With all opposition silenced and institutionalised racism triumphant, blacks were portrayed as innately inferior,
10 accustomed to dehumanised living, sexually promiscuous, intellectually limited, and prone to violence. Blackness symbolised evil, demise, chaos, corruption and uncleanness, in contrast to whiteness which equalled order, wealth, purity, goodness, cleanliness and the epitome of beauty. This stigmatisation was
15 inevitably internalised by the victims themselves.⁴⁸⁷

Thus, SASO became a movement that attempted to restore the dignity of Africans so that they no longer had to be ashamed that they were black and that they had a black history and a black culture distinct from the history and culture of the white people.⁴⁸⁸ This oppressive atmosphere provided the backdrop of SASO’s
20 rejection of integration and its call for blacks “to consolidate themselves and close their ranks” if their aspirations were to be realised.⁴⁸⁹

Biko was well aware of the criticisms that his move to establish an independent black organisation was conforming to the policy of apartheid. In a letter to the Students’ Representative Council, which consisted of the Presidents
25 of the SRCs of English and Afrikaans medium universities, he wrote:

Any move that tends to divide the student population into separate laagers on the basis of colour is in a way a tacit submission to having been defeated and apparently seems an agreement with apartheid. In a racially sensitive country like ours, provision for
30 racially exclusive bodies tends to build up resentment and to widen the gap that exists between the races, and the student community should resist all attempts to fall into this temptation. Any formation

⁴⁸⁶Quoted by Hope and Young, *The South African Churches in a Revolutionary Situation*, 1981, 79.

⁴⁸⁷Moodley, “Impact of Black Consciousness,” in Pityanna, ed., *Bounds of Possibility*, 1991, 143.

⁴⁸⁸Boesak, *Farewell to Innocence*, 1986, 1.

⁴⁸⁹Sipho Buthelezi, “Emergence of Black Consciousness,” in Pityanna, ed., *Bounds of Possibility*, 1991, 122.

of a purely non-white body shall be subject to a lot of scrutiny and so the chances of the organisation's lasting are very little.⁴⁹⁰

But Biko was also aware that unless black people established their own organisation, with their own leaders, black needs would continue to go unnoticed
5 by the white leadership of NUSAS. If black interests were going to be addressed, blacks had to take the initiative.

It was out of fear, then, that whites would continue to dominate SASO that Biko and his colleagues decided not to include whites in their organisation. They did not exclude whites because they believed whites to be inferior or to
10 discriminate against them for the purpose of subjugating them, but because SASO leaders felt they could not trust the "reformist" measures of white liberals. Biko described the white liberal's association with the black community in the following way:

Thus in adopting the line of non-racial approach, the liberals are
15 playing their old game. They are claiming a "monopoly on intelligence and moral judgement" and setting the pattern and pace for the realisation of the black man's aspirations. They want to remain in good books with both the black and white worlds. They want to shy away from all forms of "extremisms", condemning
20 "white supremacy" as being just as bad as "Black Power!". They vacillate between the two worlds, verbalising all the complaints of the blacks beautifully while skillfully extracting what suits them from the exclusive pool of white privileges.⁴⁹¹

The integration which white liberals sought Biko called "artificial,"
25 because integrated groups did nothing to eradicate the attitudes of "superiority and inferiority" within its structures. Liberals believed that they had to do "things for blacks, on behalf of blacks, and because of blacks."⁴⁹² They had no desire to change the structures so that blacks could do things for themselves. Biko wondered, then, how there could be real reconciliation and integration
30 when blacks were continually relegated to an inferior status in society; in this capacity they would "be useless as co-architects of a normal society."⁴⁹³

⁴⁹⁰Biko, "Letter to SRC," in Biko, *I Write What I Like*, 1978, 11-12.

⁴⁹¹Biko, "Black Souls in White Skins," in *I Write What I Like*, 1978, 21.

⁴⁹²*Ibid.*, 25.

⁴⁹³*Ibid.*, 21.

Biko said that he was not against integration if that meant that there would “be free participation by all members of a society, catering for the full expression of the self in a freely changing society as determined by the will of the people.” But, if it meant “a breakthrough into white society by blacks, an
5 assimilation and acceptance of blacks into an already established set of norms and code of behaviour . . . that makes the white a perpetual teacher and the black a perpetual pupil,” then he was against it.⁴⁹⁴

Proof that white liberals had no desire to promote black empowerment came, for Biko, in their frequent accusation of black racism. Liberals insisted
10 that they were in favour of improving the black situation, but Biko tells us, as soon as “blacks announce that the time has come for them to do things for themselves and all by themselves all white liberals shout blue murder!”⁴⁹⁵ This concurs with what James Cone was saying about liberalism in the United States. Cone argued that “black racism” was a concept invented by white liberals, who
15 felt on the one hand that they should work on behalf of black people to secure equal rights, but who were also afraid to sacrifice the power that they had if concrete changes were actually made. “Black racism” was a white *liberal* concept and not a white *racist* concept, insisted Cone, because white racists, who
20 They did not have to explain why they opposed a socio-economic and political change in their society. White liberals, however, found it necessary to offer some explanation as to why they rejected Black Power, thus they dismissed it as being racist: “The myth is needed,” Cone tells us, “by those who intend to keep things as they are, while pretending that things are in fact progressing. When
25 confronted with the fact that the so-called progress is actually non-existent, they can easily offer an explanation by pointing to the ‘white backlash’ caused by ‘black racism’.”⁴⁹⁶ Biko argued along the same lines.

⁴⁹⁴Ibid., 24.

⁴⁹⁵Ibid., 25.

⁴⁹⁶Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 1969, 15.

SASO leaders resisted white participation in their organisation also because they felt white participation in a liberation movement would undermine the prospects for unity among all other ethnic groups who shared a common oppression. Biko held that SASO was not a movement of Africans or any other
 5 group, but of the oppressed people, and that those who experienced oppression in South African society and were committed to the struggle against the oppression should be free to join SASO. SASO's main objective was to promote contact and practical cooperation among all oppressed races. Thus, we can see that Biko resisted the criticism that SASO was conforming to apartheid, or that it was a
 10 racist organisation. He insisted that membership be open to coloureds and Indians, because they too were victims of the same system. C. R. D. Halisi remarks:

15 In his speeches and writings, it is apparent that Biko assiduously avoided the temptation of trying to convert Black Consciousness into a form of racial fundamentalism. In other words, without compromising racial liberation as a core political value, he did not reduce all political conflict to racial factors. For this reason, most commentators rightly assert that there is no evidence of reverse racism in Biko's thought.

20 To give his message greater universal appeal, Biko adroitly situated his version of Black Consciousness philosophy within a humanist framework; he knew that racism was the aberration. From its inception, Black Consciousness philosophy had a humanist bent which allowed the development of a theological counterpart.
 25 The black caucus of the University Christian Movement gave birth to Black Theology, the religious complement of Black Consciousness philosophy. Black Theology encouraged black South Africans to reinterpret the Christian faith in the light of specific realities of their situation.⁴⁹⁷

30 In other words, Biko sought to tread the narrow road between supporting liberation of the black people and a universalist ideology that would include everyone. He wanted to emphasise the particularities of the 'black experience' without dismissing its place within universal processes of change. In this sense SASO was an inclusionist movement.

⁴⁹⁷Halisi, "Biko and Black Consciousness Philosophy," in Pityanna, ed., *Bounds of Possibility*, 1991, 103.

These ideas crystallised into what came to be known as the ideology of “Black Consciousness.” This was a conscious attempt at negating the dominant ideologies of ‘white liberalism’ and ‘apartheid’, as well as an instrument for unifying all oppressed people, irrespective of their class background. To
 5 separate themselves from white liberalism SASO felt it necessary to develop a language of liberation.⁴⁹⁸ Although white liberals had their own role to play in opposition to apartheid, the role of the black person was different. It meant more than simple words of protest that white liberals advocated. It meant a conscious resistance against the demoralising effects of apartheid ideology and
 10 practice. In light of the times, Biko and the BCM adapted a new theory of political consciousness to the black South African experience.

In 1974, following the rallies in celebration of Mozambique's independence, the police arrested and charged nine students with terrorism.⁴⁹⁹ They remained in custody for the duration of their trial, which lasted for almost
 15 two years. While the trial was taking place, violence erupted in the black township of Soweto in 1976. Black students protested in the streets against government educational policies that required the use of Afrikaans in the teaching of high school subjects.⁵⁰⁰ The government responded with arrests and detentions without trial, and many students were killed or badly injured by the
 20 police. The government response culminated with the detention and subsequent death of Steve Biko, and the outlawing of nineteen black organisations and the Christian Institute in 1977. It is important to remember these details as we review Boesak's work.

Black Theology

25 Black theology arose with the establishment of the University Christian Movement (UCM) in 1967 under the influence of a white Methodist minister, Basil Moore, with the intention of improving race relations. The African majority,

⁴⁹⁸Sipho Buthelezi, “Emergence of Black Consciousness,” Ibid.

⁴⁹⁹See Motlhabi, *Challenge to Apartheid: Toward a Moral National Resistance*, 1988, 71.

⁵⁰⁰de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, 1986 169ff.

which was established soon after its formation, "was interested in the radical writings from the United States, particularly Black Theology as a vehicle for examining the Scriptures and the predicament of the oppressed."⁵⁰¹ James Cone's *Black Theology and Black Power*, published in 1969, was of particular
5 interest. The black theology movement in the United States substantially influenced South African black theology, but we will save those details for the next chapter because they form an important part of Boesak's work.

In South Africa many seminars and ministers' caucuses were organised to discuss American black theology and its relevance to the Church and its teaching
10 in South Africa.⁵⁰² This eventually led to publication of *Essays on Black Theology* by South African theologians in 1972. This book was banned in South Africa a month after its publication but appeared later overseas under different titles. In his editor's preface and introductory essay to the British edition (*Black Theology: The South African Voice*, 1973), Basil Moore tells us that black
15 theology has emerged at a critical period within the Church in South Africa, a period which has been brought about by the banning of all forms of black political expression in the country and the failure of the white-dominated Christian church to respond to the needs of the black people.

Because by the end of the 1960s the government had outlawed all black
20 protest, the only option open to black people was the church pulpit. But black preachers could not use what they had learned from white theologians, for the churches in South Africa were still dominated by a colonialist, missionary consciousness. This consciousness "made it plain that everything African was heathen and superstitious barbarianism. Conversion to Christianity meant
25 rejecting traditional forms of dress, authority, social organisation, culture, marriage, medicine, etc. The black people were made to believe not that salvation is in Christ alone, but that salvation is in accepting the new white ways

⁵⁰¹Hope and Young, *The South African Churches in a Revolutionary Situation*, 1981, 79.

⁵⁰² Motlhabi, "The Historical Origins of Black Theology," in Mosala and Tlhagale, eds., *The Unquestionable Right to be Free*, 1986.

of living.”⁵⁰³ The notion of sin was personal and was defined as drinking, smoking and stealing.⁵⁰⁴ Moore, and the black theologians who contributed to *Essays on Black Theology*, insisted that this consciousness could not speak to the experience of black people. It could not deal with apartheid, pass laws or economic exploitation. The Church in South Africa, in the words of Biko, had therefore become irrelevant.⁵⁰⁵

The Church was also in a period of crisis, because as Moore explains, the Church had never seriously come to grips with its own racist structure: “Little or no attempt was made within the Churches to alter the white-dominated power structures of the Churches. All authority still resided in white hands.”⁵⁰⁶ Excluding the Dutch Reformed churches, Biko asserted, blacks comprised 70-90 percent of lay persons, while at the same time 70-90 percent of the leadership of these very same churches was white. Obviously, white leadership in the churches posed a fundamental problem for the masses of blacks struggling for justice and peace on earth. Just as the broader South African society discriminated against blacks and privileged whites, so did the churches mirror this repugnant, unchristian reality.⁵⁰⁷

Black theologians, then, had to redefine their theology. They had to attempt to understand and interpret their situation in light of God’s Word in such a way that the black community could understand that the Gospel was for them. In the words of Biko:

Black Theology therefore is a situational interpretation of Christianity. It seeks to relate the present-day black man to God

⁵⁰³Moore, ed., *Black Theology*, 1973, viii.

⁵⁰⁴Biko, “The Church as seen by a Young Layman,” in *I Write What I Like*, 1978, 57.

⁵⁰⁵*Ibid.*

⁵⁰⁶Moore, “What is Black Theology,” in Moore, ed., *Black Theology*, 1973, 2-3.

⁵⁰⁷Biko, “The Church as Seen by a Young Layman,” in *I Write What I Like*, 1978, 57.

within the given context of the black man's suffering and his attempts to get out of it.⁵⁰⁸

⁵⁰⁸Ibid., 59.

3.2 BOESAK'S *FAREWELL TO INNOCENCE*

In a recent article on theological developments in South Africa, John de Gruchy notes six different strands of theology that have evolved in the struggle against apartheid.⁵⁰⁹ Although they are all important, we will briefly mention only three of these strands because of their relevance to our discussion on

5 Boesak. The first is "Black Theology." This has its roots in the Black Conscious Movement which, as we have already seen, has been associated with Steve Biko. Black theology sought to raise the awareness of blacks and show them their potential to change their circumstances. It gave attention to the psychological dimension of black people as well as the material dimension, providing an
10 assurance that each individual should actualise his/her own being.⁵¹⁰ Black theology, therefore, was "an attempt to characterise by means of a word or phrase the reflection upon the reality of God and his Word which grows out of that experience of life in which the category of blackness has some existential decisiveness."⁵¹¹

15 A second strand of theology, which de Gruchy notes, is "Confessing Theology," by which de Gruchy does not mean confessional theologies of various ecclesial traditions, but rather a type of theology that is similar to the *Barmen Declaration* and the testimonies of Karl Barth and Dietrich Bonhoeffer. In South Africa this confessing theology has been expressed in the Christian Institute,
20 with its *The Message to the People of South Africa* and the *Belhar Confession of Faith*, which was adopted by the Dutch Reformed Mission Church in 1986. Both these confessions rejected apartheid as a false faith in conflict with the Gospel of Jesus Christ and made the rejection of apartheid a key element in the dogmatic constitution of the Church.

⁵⁰⁹de Gruchy, "Theology in Transition in South Africa," in *Modern Theology*, 9:2 April, 1993.

⁵¹⁰de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle*, 1986, 155ff.

⁵¹¹Buthelezi, "An African Theology or a Black Theology," in Moore, ed., *Black Theology: The South African Voice*, 1973, 29.

A third strand is “Prophetic Theology,” which was expressed in 1986 through the *Kairos Document*. At the heart of this document is the concept of ‘prophetic theology’, which is a “theology of critical engagement which recognises the ‘signs of the times’ and the demand which this makes upon the life and witness of the church.”⁵¹² Following Albert Nolan, de Gruchy distinguishes this strand from black theology because the *Kairos Document* goes a step further than black theology. Black theology attempted to reformulate the Gospel in terms of the black experience of oppression, while the *Kairos Document* started from a particular political crisis and attempted to understand what the Gospel meant for a group of people in specific conflict and crisis.⁵¹³ Also, prophetic theology moves beyond black theology because prophetic theology is aligned with the nonracial ideology of the Freedom Charter of the African National Congress.⁵¹⁴

The distinction between these three strands will become more clear as we discuss Boesak’s theology. We draw attention to them now because they provide us with an excellent way to organise our discussion of Boesak’s work. We can speak of Boesak’s theology as developing in three stages that correspond to de Gruchy’s three strands. Through the 1970s, Boesak’s main concern was black theology. In 1976 he published his Ph.D. thesis on that subject, *Farewell to Innocence*, and wrote several articles concerning the relation of black theology to the black struggle in South Africa, including the banning of black theology by the South African government in 1972.⁵¹⁵ Thus, the first stage of his

⁵¹²de Gruchy, “Theology in Transition in South Africa,” 1993, 205.

⁵¹³Nolan, *God in South Africa*, 1988, 25.

⁵¹⁴*Ibid.*, 4. de Gruchy, “Theology in Transition in South Africa,” 1993, 205. “The Freedom Charter adopted in 1955 by the ANC and other groups constituting the Congress Alliance conceded that South Africa belonged to all who lived in it. All were to share equal rights, with no special privileges given to either whites or blacks. The implication of this affirmation—hence the long-term goal of black opposition—was that government should be by the majority (i.e., democratic), without any reference to colour, race, or creed.” Motlhabi, *Challenge to Apartheid*, 1988, 8.

⁵¹⁵In that year the South African government banned the first major publication on Black Theology, *Essays on Black Theology*, which had been edited by Dr. Basil Moore. See Mosala and Tlhalagale, *The Unquestionable Right to be Free*, 1986, viii-xii.

theological career is characterised by a concern for black theology. In the 1980s we see Boesak's theology change because of his involvement in the Alliance of Black Reformed Christians in Southern Africa (ABRECSA), the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC), and the World Council of Churches (WCC). In this

5 second stage Boesak sought to relate black theology with confessing theology. His book *Black and Reformed* (1984) demonstrates this attempt. And finally, in his many sermons and articles he shows a deep biblical and prophetic understanding of contemporary issues and what it means to be obedient to God, de

Gruchy's third strand, prophetic theology. We have organised this chapter and

10 the next, to correspond to these three stages or strands of theology that run throughout Boesak's work. In this chapter we will look at Boesak's *Farewell to Innocence*. In the following chapter we will focus on his other sermons and articles in relation to his involvement in ecclesial confessions and ecumenical movements.

15 In *Farewell to Innocence*, Boesak demonstrates that he is well aware of the early criticisms of black theology and the reservations of it held by most white church leaders in the late 1960s to the mid-1970s. As he worked on his thesis at Union Theological Seminary in New York City and the Theological Academy of Kampen in the Netherlands, he was well aware that black theology was

20 considered by most people of the white community back in South Africa to be the uncritical buttressing of the needs, aspirations and political interests of the black community. He was mindful of the fact that black theology was being accused of racism because it made no room for white people. It was believed to be more of an ideological justification for violence than a serious theological effort

25 because of its close association with particular political programs. The purpose of Boesak's thesis, then, was primarily to answer these criticisms and to attack the philosophy of the Afrikaner Christian Nationalism. He wanted to draw a distinction between black theology and Afrikaner theology in order to show that the former was really an expression of the Gospel while the later was

ideologically flawed by racism. We have therefore divided this chapter into three sections. The first two sections define black theology and Black Power, respectively, and third section compares black theology and Afrikaner theology.

What is Black Theology?

5 Boesak begins *Farewell to Innocence* by defining black theology and establishing its framework. He does this in three stages: first, he proposes its method of reflection, then its content, and finally, he discusses the importance of the name *black* theology.

The Method of Black Theology

10 Boesak defines black theology in the same manner as Gutiérrez: theology is the critical reflection on Christian praxis in light of the Word of God.⁵¹⁶ For Boesak this means that “theology comes to mean man's critical reflection on himself, on his basic principles, a clear and critical attitude regarding economic socio-cultural issues in the life and reflection of the Christian community.

15 Theology is a critical reflection on society and the life of the church is ‘worked out in the light of the Word (of God), accepted in faith and inspired by a practical purpose—and therefore indissolubly linked to historical praxis.’”⁵¹⁷ In other words, black theology is a critical reflection on the experiences of black people; it is an attempt to formulate and to live the Gospel in terms of the black situation.

20 In this sense it is a “contextual” theology:

25 Each theological concept develops within a particular context, and our theological thinking—the way we read the Gospel, the way we understand the Gospel, the way we interpret the Gospel, the way we interpret our situation in the light of the Gospel—has everything to do with what we eat and how many times a day we eat, what salary we earn, whether we own a home, whether we live happily with our family, and so on. The situation in which we live, the context in which we live, profoundly influences the way we do our theology.⁵¹⁸

⁵¹⁶Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 1988, Chapter one.

⁵¹⁷Boesak, *Farewell to Innocence*, 1986, 11.

⁵¹⁸Boesak, “Liberation Theology in South Africa,” in Pan African Conference of Third World Theologians, *African Theology En Route*, 1979, 171-172.

Boesak recognises that such a formulation has its dangers. He sees a very subtle but fundamental difference in the way Gutiérrez defines theology and the way James Cone does. Cone speaks of theology as a critical reflection on the being of God “in light of the black situation.”⁵¹⁹ Here there is a reversal of terminology that Boesak is not comfortable with. In Gutiérrez’s formulation, God’s Word is the guiding principle that a theologian uses when reflecting on his/her experience; while with Cone’s formulation, experience is the guiding principle that the theologian uses to reflect on God’s being. Or another way of stating it: Gutiérrez’s formulation takes the *shape* of the Gospel from the Bible in order to discover the *contents* of the Gospel in a contextual situation, while Cone’s formulation takes the *contents* of the Gospel from the Bible and gives it a new *shape* in terms of human experience.⁵²⁰ The former *discovers* the contents of the Bible in historical experiences, while the later *forms* the contents of the Bible to the experience. Boesak wonders if Cone’s formulation is adequate:

15 Cone, we have noted, speaks of reflection “in the light of the black situation.” This formulation calls for caution. The black situation is the situation within which reflection and action take place, but it is the Word of God which illuminates the reflection and guides the action. We fear that Cone attaches too much theological import to the black experience and the black situation as if these realities *within themselves* have revelational value on par with Scripture. God, it seems to us, reveals himself *in* the situation. The black experience provides the framework within which blacks understand the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. No more, no less.⁵²¹

Boesak dismisses any attempt to shape God’s revelation from the human experience. Boesak insists that black theology cannot interpret God’s Word in light of human experiences, as we see Cone doing. Instead, it should perform the opposite task of reflecting on a historical situation in light of God’s Word. In the words of Albert Nolan, a Dominican priest in South Africa: we do not have to

⁵¹⁹Boesak, *Farewell to Innocence*, 1986, 11.

⁵²⁰Nolan, *God in South Africa*, 1988, 25-26.

⁵²¹Boesak, *Farewell to Innocence*, 1986, 12.

make God's Word incarnate in our situation, God has already entered into our human situation. All we have to do now is discover what God is already doing.⁵²²

It seems that Cone is looking at the black experience and attempting to introduce God's will into it, while Boesak and Nolan are convinced that God is already at work in the historical situation, and they wish to discover the direction of that work. Here we can see that Boesak draws generously from his Western Reformed theological background. He, like other Reformed theologians, wants to maintain the centrality of the Word of God in theology. Boesak coheres with Calvin's insistence that our knowledge of God is not dependent on any assumptions and experience we might bring to Scripture, but upon the Word alone addressing us.⁵²³ This does not mean that Boesak contradicts his Reformed roots by insisting that theology is "man's critical reflection on himself in light of the Word of God." For Calvin, confessing that our knowledge of God rested only in the Word of God did not close the door to interpreting Scripture in one's situation. Summarising Calvin's hermeneutical principles, de Gruchy tells us that Calvin always stressed that God's Word needed to be discerned in each situation within the local community of faith:

Hence we have the hermeneutical principle that the Bible interprets itself when believers earnestly search the Scriptures, open to the guidance of the Spirit. Calvin's understanding of this "inner testimony of the Spirit," whereby we come to know God through the Scriptures and thus discover the Word authenticating itself in our experience and obedience, was one of his unique contributions to Reformation and ecumenical thought.⁵²⁴

Calvin's hermeneutical principle had two effects: "it ensured that the voice we hear in Scripture is not simply our own," and secondly, "it opened the way for a local church to discern the Word of God for its own time and place, and thus for the contextual character of the various Reformed confessions that were to follow later."⁵²⁵ In this sense, liberation theology is not that different from Calvin:

⁵²²Nolan, *God in South Africa*, 1988, 25-28.

⁵²³de Gruchy, *Liberating Reformed Theology*, 1991, 53.

⁵²⁴Ibid.

⁵²⁵Ibid.

5 Gutierrez's stress that theology is critical reflection on praxis "in the light of the Word" is highly significant in its clear indication that the Word is not only normative, but that the object of its critical scrutiny is action informed by faith. This was precisely what Calvin himself attempted in his own work as a Reformer. His theology was highly critical of the praxis of the church of his day. He placed, as we have seen, "the tyranny of tradition" under the spotlight of the Word.⁵²⁶

10 Boesak uses the same hermeneutical principle for interpreting Scripture and critiquing Cone's formulations. Boesak, like Míguez-Bonino and Severino Croatto, examines the direction of the biblical text, particularly of the witness of the basic, germinal events of faith, in order to discover the concepts of liberation, righteousness and justice.⁵²⁷ The liberative direction of these events become "the source of black humanity . . . the inspiration for the struggle to
15 liberate blacks."⁵²⁸ Boesak remarks:

20 . . . although the Bible is not a handbook for economics and politics, it nonetheless reveals all we need to know about God's will for the whole existence of human beings, including their spiritual, political, economic, or social well-being. The church believes that the Bible provides us with the fundamental principles of love, justice, and peace which we, in the making of our societies, ignore only at our peril. It is the Word of God which is the critique of all human actions and which holds before us the norms of the kingdom of God.⁵²⁹

25 Like Calvin, then, Boesak believes that through the guidance of the Spirit, we can know God through the Scriptures and thus discover the Word authenticating itself in our experience and obedience. The Word of God is made relevant to our situation; it is not other worldly but a calling to share and experience history with God. This means that for Boesak, the historical situation
30 and experience is important for theology, but that experience is understood in light of the Word of God incarnate in Jesus Christ, meaning God's Word illuminates the reflection and guides praxis. The black situation is merely the framework within which blacks can make sense of God's revelation in Jesus

⁵²⁶Ibid., 89.

⁵²⁷See discussion above on Míguez-Bonino and Croatto, Sec. 2.2. Also Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics*, 1992, 425.

⁵²⁸Boesak, *Black and Reformed*, 1984, 9.

⁵²⁹Boesak, *If this is Treason, I am Guilty*, 1987, 14.

Christ. Thus, black theology should retain the primacy of God's Word as revelation in concrete situations and not elevate any particular situation as God's revelation. This means that the black situation and experience are therefore not absolutised but are illuminated critically and prophetically—and this means “that
 5 the praxis of liberation is ultimately judged not by the demands of the situation but by the liberating Gospel of Jesus Christ.”⁵³⁰ This point is important for Boesak because he wants to refute any criticism that argues black theology undermines the authority of the Bible and makes human experience rather than God's revelation the normative criterion of Gospel truth.

10 *The Content of Black Theology*

From what Boesak has said concerning the method of black theology, we can conclude that black theologians are not free to make what they will of the sources of the Christian faith. While it is true that the black experience contributes to the theological task, it is not *the* source. The Bible is the only
 15 source that can provide black theology with its content, and that content is fundamentally liberation from oppression:

The gospel of Jesus Christ *is* the gospel of liberation. Again, liberation is not merely part of the gospel, nor merely "one of the key words" of the gospel; it is the content and framework of the
 20 whole biblical message.⁵³¹

Boesak tells us that the history of God's liberation is clear enough. This history began specifically with the Exodus in three events. First, God heard the cries of the poor and oppressed: “I have seen the miserable state of my people in Egypt. I have heard their appeal to be free of their slave-drivers. Yes, I am well
 25 aware of their sufferings. I mean to deliver them out of the hands of the Egyptians. . .” (Ex. 3:7,8). Second, God responded to those cries by taking the side of the oppressed against the oppressor: “May he defend the cause of the poor of the people, give deliverance to the needy, and crush the oppressor!” (Ps. 72:4). And finally, God showed his love for the oppressed people of Israel by liberating

⁵³⁰Quoted in Witvliet, *A Place in the Sun*, 1985, 78.

⁵³¹Boesak, *Farewell to Innocence*, 1986, 17.

them: "If Yahweh set his heart on you and chose you, it was not because you outnumbered other peoples. It was for love of you and to keep the oath he swore to your fathers that Yahweh brought you out with his mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh, the king of Egypt." (Duet. 7:7).⁵³² God performed this liberation openly, thereby challenging the powerful people who dared to defy him. In similar language Nolan summarises the Exodus events:

10 God takes sides with the oppressed and against the oppressor in no uncertain terms. And this is precisely what counts in Exodus as the fundamental revelation about Yahweh. There is no sense whatsoever in which he can be seen as a God who tries to reconcile or make peace between Pharaoh and his slaves. God rescues or liberates the oppressed from the oppressor, and this is what he continues to do throughout the Bible.⁵³³

15 For Boesak, the three Exodus events—hearing the cries of the oppressed, taking their side over against their oppressors, and performing liberating deeds—forms a paradigm which repeats itself throughout the entire Bible, and particularly in the ministry of Jesus. Jesus did not come offering salvation only in a spiritual sense. In Luke 4, Jesus tells us he was sent to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and to set the oppressed free. The terms "poor," "captives" and "oppressed" represent those who are materially poor and actually oppressed. Thus, Boesak tells us, Jesus' ministry was all about responding to the cries of the poor and oppressed in favour of their liberation.

25 We can see how Jesus hears the cries of the poor in the incarnation, for that is when God "took upon himself the condition of oppression and poverty. Jesus Christ sides with the poor and the weak. . . He is a man without majesty, a man of sorrows and familiar with suffering, whose life reflects so much of the life of oppressed peoples today."⁵³⁴ Jesus was materially poor in his birth and he maintained this humble status throughout his life; he lived and worked among

⁵³²Ibid., 18-19.

⁵³³Nolan, "The Option for the Poor in South Africa," in Villa-Vicencio and de Gruchy, eds., *Resistance and Hope*, 1985, 192.

⁵³⁴Boesak, *Black and Reformed*, 1984, 73.

the poor. Boesak insists that Jesus, therefore, heard the cries of the poor and lived a life of solidarity with them.⁵³⁵

Yet, Boesak also reminds us that Jesus was called Yeshua: liberator. He brought a new message to the oppressed people, a message of hope and liberation from the oppressors. Boesak says that Jesus lived among the oppressed with a heavenly radicalism.⁵³⁶ "His life was an example of divine radicality, a profound disturbance of the existing order. . . Jesus' revolutionary projection went beyond the dream of recovering a nationalistic, politico-religious kingdom whose very core was a legalism that he denounced as oppressive. Indeed, he did not come to save a legal system. He came for the sake of poor, oppressed, blind, weak persons: the lowly who had no value at all except insofar as they were useful to the power elites."⁵³⁷ Jesus is both suffering servant and liberator. Thus, "Jesus stands as if slain, and yet he is Lord. He is Lord in his suffering, not in spite of it."⁵³⁸ Because Jesus is Lord and Liberator in his suffering with the poor and oppressed he is victor over his enemies and the evils of this world.

Jesus, then, struggled on behalf of those who would be entering the kingdom, namely, the poor and oppressed. Jesus entered that struggle by associating himself with God's longing for *shalom*. "Shalom is the wish that things may go well with others. It is concern for the welfare of one's fellow beings. It is a sign of solidarity, of commitment to one another, of standing in for each other."⁵³⁹ It is taking responsibility for the other. Thus, argues Boesak, Jesus entered the struggle and associated himself with God's authentic peace. "Not the sort of peace in which differences are patched over, sins are concealed, and irreconcilables are reconciled," but a peace that is always associated with right and justice. The concept of peace in the Old Testament is a *socio-political* reality:

⁵³⁵Ibid., 11.

⁵³⁶Ibid., 12.

⁵³⁷Ibid., 73.

⁵³⁸Boesak, *Comfort and Protest*, 1987, 58.

⁵³⁹Boesak, *The Finger of God*, 1979, 79.

The peace of God is different from the peace of the world. It is not only the absence of war, but the *active presence of justice*. And as long as injustice rules, no church and no Christian may be at peace with themselves and the world.⁵⁴⁰

5 In this way, struggling for God's kingdom is to fight for peace and justice in the world and in history on the side of the poor and oppressed. God's peace, according to Boesak, is a summons to battle with the sinful structures, with those who resort to injustice. This is exactly what Jesus did.

Boesak tells us, then, that the Bible clearly gives us the message that the
 10 continued exploitation of the poor shall not go unchallenged or unpunished. God does indeed judge the nations, and his judgement will destroy those who resist his righteousness and justice. God destroyed those who opposed Israel, he destroyed those who opposed the message of the prophets, and God will continue to destroy all those who do not side with the poor. For those who question this
 15 understanding of God's judgement, Boesak replies:

Christians some times advance a theory of "tolerance" that is in fact alien to the Bible. In contradistinction to our pious nuances, the God of the Bible is partial. He takes sides. He chooses for Israel against the pharaoh; for the oppressed against the oppressor. We might
 20 then say: "How sad for the pharaoh," or "What about the oppressor?" But if oppressors do not understand and do not change their lives accordingly, then they too will not enter the kingdom of God.

25 There is nothing to be done about it; this is the way the God of the Bible is: he dethrones the powerful and elevates the humble. He fills the hungry with good things and sends the rich away empty handed (Luke 2:52-53).

The witness of the Bible is clear. This is the God of Israel; he restores the oppressed to justice and he confuses the path of the godless (Ps. 146). And if the rich and powerful do not comprehend
 30 this, they will not enter the kingdom of God.⁵⁴¹

Black theology takes its content from this biblical message. It maintains that one cannot talk about God's love without talking about God's righteousness or justice. These two concepts, of course, are indissolubly linked to the concept
 35 of the "covenant." If Christians are to be God's covenantal people, then they must act in justice vis-à-vis other people. This means that one must enable

⁵⁴⁰Ibid., 80.

⁵⁴¹Ibid., 73.

others to realise their potential and give recognition to the other's humanity. God does not just liberate people from their oppression, but liberates them so that they are able to do justice to one another. This, Boesak insists, is the source of black theology.

5 Why "Black" Theology

To clarify the concept of black theology even further, Boesak ends chapter one of *Farewell to Innocence* with a discussion on why black theologians use the term *black* theology. He insists that in order to understand the emphasis on blackness, we must realise how much black people were being dehumanised because of the colour of their skin in South Africa. An example of this is the resettlement policy of the government. At the end of the 1960s, the government declared houses in residential areas as exclusively white and thus began to forcibly remove millions of black people from their homes and compel them to live in black resettlement areas. Because businesses in the white areas could not survive without black labour or black patronage, black adults were allowed to live in "white" areas in order to work, but they were not allowed to bring their children with them to live. Between 1967 and 1976, not a single house for an African family was constructed in the areas reserved for whites.⁵⁴² Boesak therefore reports:

20 Black women who, because of poverty and unemployment, are not
 able to survive in the "native homelands" (Bantustans) are forced
 to go to the "white" cities for employment. In addition to their
 employment contract, in Johannesburg they must sign another
 25 contract: their children will never come to live with them. A visit
 from the children, even during a vacation period, can cost the
 mother her job. This report is found in *The Star*, September 18,
 1973.⁵⁴³

Such atrocities proved to Boesak that the black people of South Africa were doomed to live the life of second-class citizens. They were being marginalised and forced to live on the periphery of white society. This marginalisation was

⁵⁴²Price, *The Apartheid State in Crisis*, 1991, 54.

⁵⁴³Boesak, *Black And Reformed*, 1984, 1-2.

teaching blacks that they were not important.⁵⁴⁴ Nothing mattered about them except the colour of their skin, because it determined who could be their friends, who they could marry, and what work they could do. In other words, black people were being taught to hate and despise themselves:

5 People's personhood can be so effectively undermined, even
 destroyed, that in time they learn to despise themselves and regard
 themselves as incapable of leading normal, human lives. This
 abnormal situation, provided it lasts long enough, becomes for them
 10 the accepted, normal way of life. When this happens, any
 meaningful relationship with others is effectively ruled out.⁵⁴⁵

If blacks were to have any hope of maintaining their humanity, they needed to break out of the mould which whites put them into. They needed to stop being defined as the opposite of white and find pride in themselves as black people. The only way to do this was to reject whiteness:

15 White values shall no longer be thought of as "the highest good."
 Blacks shall no longer hate themselves and wish that they were
 white. No longer shall blacks define themselves in terms of others.
 They shall, rather, move toward their own authentic blackness out
 20 of their Negroid and non-white character. In this way they shall
 force whites to see themselves in their whiteness and to perceive
 the consequences of this whiteness for others.⁵⁴⁶

Against whiteness, blacks had to affirm their blackness. They had "to become reconciled with themselves" by "sharing in God's creation, participating in a new Exodus, creating a new black being, thereby demythologising white
 25 superiority."⁵⁴⁷ Blacks had to affirm for themselves that they were human, that they had dignity. It was necessary, according to Boesak, that they learn to love themselves.

30 We speak about a rebirth, a re-creation, a renewal, a reevaluation of
 our self. In this connection black theology frequently uses the
 word *self-love*. . . . Jesus did not prescribe a law when he gave his
 followers the command meant to love your neighbour "*as yourself*."
 He began with a fact that is universally accepted. Everyone values

⁵⁴⁴Boesak, "Liberation Theology in South Africa," in Pan African Conference of Third World Theologians, *African Theology En Route: Papers from the Pan-African Conference of Third World Theologians, December 17-23, 1977, Accra, Ghana*, 1979, 170.

⁵⁴⁵Boesak, *Farewell to Innocence*, 1986, 28-29.

⁵⁴⁶Boesak, *Black and Reformed*, 1984, 17.

⁵⁴⁷Boesak, *Farewell to Innocence*, 1976, 30.

one's own self. Everyone desires to live a life that has significance and value. Everyone is driven to preserve one's own self.⁵⁴⁸

If we put black theology into the context of black dehumanisation, we can understand why black theologians promote self-love and the affirmation of blackness. In this context, we are also able to understand why black theology speaks of the need for a "Black Messiah." Black theologians insist that black people cannot understand the white person's Gospel, because for centuries whites had appropriated Scripture for their needs and used it to justify the dehumanisation of blacks. But to see Jesus as the Black Messiah allows blacks to see Jesus in the true light:

The importance of the concept of the Black Messiah is that it expresses the concreteness of Christ's continued presence today. Jesus came and lived in this world as the Oppressed One who took upon himself all the suffering and humiliation of all oppressed peoples.⁵⁴⁹

Boesak denies that the concept of Black Messiah means that Jesus' skin was actually black, as Albert Cleage, a radical American black theologian affirms. Instead, "Black Messiah" symbolises what we have already said above, that Jesus is on the side of the poor and oppressed and concerned with their liberation:

This black understanding of the gospel meant not only that blacks believed that the gospel and Jesus Christ were all about liberation; they also refused to believe that the biblical message could be anything else. . .⁵⁵⁰

Black theology, Boesak insists then, is not a "new theology," but "the proclamation of the age-old Gospel."⁵⁵¹ It is true that black theology is "new" in the sense that it broke away from the type of epistemology where God is objectivised into a theory and thus becomes the object of abstract speculation. It is also new in the sense that it did not start with a detailed and academic study of the major sources of Christian doctrine in order to explore God's self-revelation. Instead, black theology interpreted God's word in light of the situations in which

⁵⁴⁸Boesak, *Black and Reformed*, 1984, 16.

⁵⁴⁹Boesak, *Farewell to Innocence*, 1986, 42.

⁵⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 37.

⁵⁵¹*Ibid.*, 10.

people live by beginning with “specific people, in a specific situation and with specific problems to face.”⁵⁵² In this way black theology was a “new way of doing theology” or a “new way of believing,” but it was not a new theology.

Mokgethi Motlhabi defined the basis for black theology four years before

5 Boesak’s thesis was finished:

10 Black Theology is not a new theology nor is it a proclamation of a new gospel. It is merely a revaluation of the gospel message, a making relevant of this message according to the situation of the people. It is a re-interpretation of the Scriptures in the light of the existential situation of our daily black experience.⁵⁵³

Black theology is not new in the sense of presenting an alternative to the way theology is done in the Gospels, because black theology follows the pattern of interpretation that is found there. Black theology proclaims “the gospel in its original intention: as the gospel of the poor.”⁵⁵⁴ Proving this is of extreme
15 importance to Boesak’s thesis because he wants to establish that black theology breaks with other contemporary theologies in that it follows a new methodology by being passionately involved in the actual struggles, suffering and joys of a particular community of believers. But at the same time, in this break, black theology seeks to establish a continuity with the past by creating a new form of
20 universality which, on the one hand affirms different experiences of faith that are found in different situations, and on the other hand, is capable of speaking to all people:⁵⁵⁵

25 [Black Theology] is in the first place a theology for oppressed people. But not only that. It is a theology of liberation and it is this focus on liberation which makes the contextuality of Black Theology truly ecumenical and universal. In this sense, Black Theology is not an exclusive, theological *Apartheid* in which whites have no part. On the contrary, blacks know only too well the
30 terrible estrangement of white people; they know only too well how sorely whites need to be liberated—even if whites themselves don’t! Black Theology is a passionate call to freedom, and although it

⁵⁵²Moore, “What is Black Theology,” in Moore, ed., *Black Theology: The South African Voice*, 1973, 5-6.

⁵⁵³Motlhabi, “Black Theology: a Personal View,” *Ibid.*, 78.

⁵⁵⁴Boesak, *Farewell to Innocence*, 1986, 10.

⁵⁵⁵See Theo Witvliet’s discussion on “break and continuity” in liberation theologies of the third world in Witvliet, *A Place in the Sun*, 1985, 31-40.

directs its voice to black people, it nonetheless hopes that white people will hear and be saved.⁵⁵⁶

What is Black Power?

Defining Power

5 In the second and third chapters of *Farewell to Innocence*, Boesak defines Black Power and wishes to correct people who reject it because they assume that it is primarily about hate and violence. Two years before Boesak finished his study on black theology and Black Power, David Bosch, a white South African theologian, attempted to show that American black theology was not the same as
10 South African black theology.⁵⁵⁷ There was a difference between James Cone, whom Bosch described as a radical militant, and Ernest Baartman, a black theologian from South Africa. For Cone, "Black Theology will accept only a love of God which participates in the destruction of the white enemy."⁵⁵⁸ Cone gives the impression that theology should be the handmaid of black revolution and
15 that this revolution necessarily must be violent. In Cone's work the Gospel notions of love and reconciliation, then, are absent. But Baartman, on the other hand, insists: "It is difficult to love whites. It is costly to love whites, yet the black man must."⁵⁵⁹ Bosch tells us Baartman had a genuine concern for white people and wanted reconciliation. Because of this difference between Cone and
20 Baartman, Bosch concludes that American black theology, which is closely associated with Black Power, is foreign to South African theological thought and must be rejected. In *Farewell to Innocence*, Boesak expresses his uneasiness with this conclusion.⁵⁶⁰

Boesak tells us that the West rejects power because it misconceives power.
25 There, power is understood negatively; it "is always acknowledged by the

⁵⁵⁶Boesak, *Farewell to Innocence*, 1986, 16.

⁵⁵⁷Bosch, "Currents and Crosscurrents in South African Black Theology," in Wilmore and Cone, eds., *Black Theology: A Documentary History, 1966-1979*, 1979, 220-237.

⁵⁵⁸Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 1970, 136.

⁵⁵⁹Bosch, "Currents and Crosscurrents in South African Black Theology," in Wilmore and Cone, eds., *Black Theology: A Documentary History, 1966-1979*, 1979, 222, 231.

⁵⁶⁰Boesak, *Farewell to Innocence*, 1986, 79.

seriousness of the threat, the amount of money, or the destructiveness of the violence it constitutes or represents.”⁵⁶¹ In this sense power is seen as the ability to force one's will on others, or as the ability to confine others to a certain behaviour. We have already seen an example of this understanding of power in our discussion on H. M. Kuitert.⁵⁶²

While recognising that power can certainly entail the possession of control or command over others, Boesak wishes to give it a more positive, constructive meaning. Power is "the ability to achieve a purpose" or the ability to create, help, affirm, and encourage.⁵⁶³ It is what Paul Tillich called the “courage to be” and effects both inner and outer realities.⁵⁶⁴ On the inner, personal level, it is the ability to affirm one's own beingness and to create one's own resources. It is an expression of self-determination and self-affirmation. On the outer, social level it is the ability to affirm another person's beingness and the ability to transform society. It is the search for a totally new social order in which justice is given priority.

This understanding of power, Boesak says, is not new, for we find this understanding in the Bible. In Genesis 1 and 2, human beings were given power when God allowed them to have “dominion over creation,” but this was not unlimited power. It was given with clear qualifications. Power was given to humanity by God, meaning it is not something humanity naturally possesses. It was also given in relation to protection and service—having dominion over creation meant to serve it and ensure its prosperity. Such qualifications mean that all power “must reflect the character of the divine power in order to be genuine.”⁵⁶⁵ God's power is liberating and creative; therefore, human power must be a liberating and creative power which is always in service to others.

⁵⁶¹Ibid., 46.

⁵⁶²See Section 2.4.

⁵⁶³Boesak, *Farewell to Innocence*, 1986, 47.

⁵⁶⁴Ibid., 49.

⁵⁶⁵Ibid., 51.

Power in its purest form, then, is obedience to God. It is never the desire to “rule over” but to “share in power” with others.

Black Power

But what about Black Power? Above we stated that in order to understand
 5 black theology’s emphasis on “blackness” we had to realise how much black
 people had been dehumanised because of their colour. In a similar way, if we are
 to understand Black Power, we must realise that black people had very few other
 options open to them. In the last chapter, we said that King was a conservative
 militant. We saw how he was conservative, but said nothing about him being
 10 militant. He was militant in the sense that he never denied the necessity of
 tension, conflict and confrontation. He considered such conflict always in
 relation to love, so that even within a conflict situation, confrontation was also to
 lead to eventual reconciliation; but he never compromised the need for
 confrontation to enable a quick solution that would result in a “cheap”
 15 reconciliation. This can be seen toward the end of his life when his passive
 resistance met with failure. It was then that King realised he had
 underestimated what lengths white racism would go to protect white
 socioeconomic and political privileges. When his nonviolent protests were met
 with force, King decisively changed his strategy. Witvliet remarks:

20 He discerned more and more clearly the injustice of economic
 structures, both national and international. He argued for a
 revolution, directed against structures which prevented society
 from ‘lifting the load of poverty’. . . . He began to speak of massive
 25 civil disobedience, of a non-violent army. He no longer sought
 white progressive intellectuals but poor whites as his allies in the
 struggle against an unjust society.⁵⁶⁶

As in the United States, Boesak tells us, the whole structure of South
 African society is governed by racism. If it were simply the case of a few white
 people having bad feelings toward blacks, then blacks could probably continue
 30 with moral appeals; but in South Africa that is not the case. There the entire

⁵⁶⁶Witvliet, *The Way of the Black Messiah*, 1987, 119.

system has been carefully planned around racism so that no one in South Africa can escape it. Boesak describes the extent of this system:

5 The “white power structure,” far from being just a term, represents a reality blacks encounter every day. It represents the economic, political, cultural, religious, and psychological forces which confine the realities of black existence. Concretely, for black South Africans the white power structure is manifested in *apartheid*.
 10 Whatever grandiloquent ideal this ideology may represent for white people, for blacks it means bad housing, being underpaid, pass laws, influx-control, migrant labour, group areas, resettlement camps, inequality before the law, fear, intimidation, white bosses and black informers, condescension and paternalism; in a word, black powerlessness.⁵⁶⁷

15 Because racism has been institutionalised in South Africa, the only option open to black people was to establish solidarity with each other, expose the white power structure and confront it through political means.

Of course, black theologians in South Africa, as well as in America, did not always agree on what it meant for blacks to have power, to be in solidarity with each other, or to confront the white power structure. Would it mean, for
 20 example, the exclusion of white people from the movement, or even violence against whites? In America James Cone and J. Deotis Roberts generated much discussion on the meaning of Black Power and whether or not it entailed using violence. They asked: was Black Power, as a political movement, really an
 25 antithesis to the Gospel notions of love and reconciliation?⁵⁶⁸ Boesak studied this debate while he attended Union Theological Seminary in New York City, and he tells us that “although Cone never explicitly says that Black Power *is* the gospel, he does come perilously close to identifying the two.”⁵⁶⁹ For Cone, to understand what God is doing in the world one must first know what Black Power is doing. Black Power is not, as many white people suspect, “the antithesis of Christianity,
 30 but rather God’s central message to twentieth-century America.” Cone insists

⁵⁶⁷Boesak, *Farewell to Innocence*, 1986, 57.

⁵⁶⁸Cone outlines this debate in Wilmore and Cone, eds., *Black Theology: A Documentary History, 1966-1979*, 1979, 609-623.

⁵⁶⁹Boesak, *Farewell to Innocence*, 1986, 73.

that the black struggle “is a manifestation of God himself involved in the present-day affairs of men for the purpose of liberating a people.”⁵⁷⁰

Furthermore, in a section entitled “Black Theology and Revelation” in Cone’s book *A Black Theology of Liberation*, we read:

5 . . . we immediately realise that the black revolution in America is the revelation of God. Revelation means Black Power, i.e. the “complete emancipation of black people from white oppression by whatever means black people deem necessary.”⁵⁷¹

For Cone, Black Power meant a radical break with the existing political and
10 societal structures “by any means necessary.” In other words, he was not willing to rule out violence. In fact, Black Power did not entail the choice between violence and nonviolence, but between black violence and white violence:

15 the Christian does not decide between violence and non-violence, evil and good. He decides between the less and the greater evil. . . . If the system is evil, then revolutionary violence is both justified and necessary.⁵⁷²

But Cone did not believe this to be in opposition to love. “What is needed, according to Cone, is the divine love expressed in Black Power which is the
20 power of black people to destroy their oppressors, here and now, by any means at their disposal. This is why Cone can state that ‘love is not to accept whiteness,’ but rather ‘to make a decision against white people.’ God’s love is God’s liberation of black people expressed in Black Power.”⁵⁷³

This, of course, has consequences for Cone’s views on reconciliation. For
25 him, blacks cannot be reconciled on white terms. This means that “it is impossible to talk about reconciliation until ‘full emancipation has become a reality for all black people’ so that white people will address black people as black people.”⁵⁷⁴ Blacks and whites can only be reconciled, he insists, on God’s terms, which involves first the liberation of blacks from oppression. Thus, Black

⁵⁷⁰Ibid.

⁵⁷¹Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 1970, 92.

⁵⁷²Ibid., 143.

⁵⁷³Boesak, *Farewell to Innocence*, 1986, 126.

⁵⁷⁴Ibid., 127.

Power “is an authentic historical embodiment of the Christian faith in our time,” because it is not about “cheap” reconciliation but is concerned with liberation from oppression.⁵⁷⁵

With his publication of *Liberation and Reconciliation: A Black Theology*, Roberts challenged Cone’s understanding of Black Power, because it appeared that Cone, in his attempt to associate God’s revelation with the black revolution, had overlooked an essential element of the Gospel: love. Roberts argued that the Gospel was about liberation *and* reconciliation. For Roberts these two concepts could not be separated for “there is no shortcut to reconciliation that does not pass through liberation, and there is no reconciliation that does not include equity.”⁵⁷⁶ Black Power is about revolution, but revolution is defined as rapid social change based on love:

A good reason for not becoming a black racist is to observe what discrimination had done to the souls, minds and spirits of whites who hate blacks. To hate someone at sight without ever getting to know him is a form of sickness.⁵⁷⁷

Roberts insisted that revolution did not necessarily mean violence. Instead, it meant changing society with reconciliation as the goal. Of course, this meant blacks should engage in sensitivity, forgiveness and obedient love. There had to be a balance between love, power and justice.⁵⁷⁸ Because Cone failed to incorporate an understanding of revolution based on reconciliation into his theological perspective, Roberts accused Cone of “the religion of Black Power” which “seeks to be a theological justification for the political, ideological, pseudoreligious elements of black nationalism.”⁵⁷⁹

In his discussion on Cone and Roberts, it seems Boesak wants to balance the two perspectives and forge a path between them. In light of his definition of power, Boesak does not wish to justify any understanding of power as having the

⁵⁷⁵Cone “Epilogue,” in Wilmore and Cone, eds., *Black Theology: A Documentary History, 1966-1979*, 1979, 612.

⁵⁷⁶Roberts, *Liberation and Reconciliation*, 1970, 191.

⁵⁷⁷*Ibid.*, 101.

⁵⁷⁸Boesak, *Farewell to Innocence*, 1986, 131-133.

⁵⁷⁹Roberts, *Liberation and Reconciliation*, 1970, 98.

ability to force, control or manipulate another; but the power to confront is not the same as the power to control. When one person confronts another, it does not mean that the first person gains control over the second, but rather the two challenge each other equally. Political confrontation, therefore, is not
 5 unchristian, because “true reconciliation cannot take place without confrontation. Reconciliation is not feeling good; it is coming to grips with evil.”⁵⁸⁰ In the Bible true reconciliation is established only after injustice is confronted. “Reconciliation,” for Boesak then, “is possible only after the establishment of righteousness and social justice.”⁵⁸¹ Thus, while some people
 10 want to reject power because they believe that Christianity is about reconciliation, Boesak argues the opposite: the Christian faith should accept power because Christianity is about reconciliation. Power and reconciliation are not opposites.

Power and love are not in contrast either. Boesak supports Martin Luther
 15 King’s dictum: “‘Love without power is sentimental and anaemic; power without love is reckless and abusive.’ Power without love is essentially unauthentic; it becomes cruel and ultimately demonic.”⁵⁸² In Paul Tillich’s words: “love is the foundation, not the negation, of power.”⁵⁸³ It is true that Jesus rejected violence, aggression and manipulation, but he did not reject power as the ability to
 20 change, renew and encourage. Jesus had the power to liberate:

This view on power is diametrically opposed to that of the existing order. The Messiah is Lord to people. His power liberates people; it does not subjugate and humiliate them. It gives life; it does not destroy. His is the power of love, justice, and liberation.⁵⁸⁴

25 Power, Boesak concludes, is the ability to love. In this sense it is not the antithesis to the Gospel. The basic concern of Black Power is the humanity of black people. “Its concern is self-affirmation, self-respect, pride, participation

⁵⁸⁰Boesak, *Black and Reformed*, 1984, 29.

⁵⁸¹Boesak, *Farewell to Innocence*, 1986, 93.

⁵⁸²*Ibid.*, 95.

⁵⁸³*Ibid.*

⁵⁸⁴*Ibid.*, 96.

in and control of the black's own human destiny."⁵⁸⁵ It is not about gaining power to control, oppress or exploit, but having the ability to create and expose injustice. For it is when the poor and oppressed struggle for the sake of liberation and justice, they are instruments of God's power. They are able to

5 "unmask in their struggle the real nature of the power structure . . . revealing the estranged humanity, the distorted being of the oppressor." In their struggle, the powerless are able to deliver "the truth about the inhumanity of the oppressor which exposes the lies, injustice, and fear on which the demonic power structure parasitizes in order to survive." In this way, Boesak concludes,

10 Black Power exercises God's liberating, creative power, because it defends the poor and oppressed who are exposing the truth about the white power structure.⁵⁸⁶ In other words, Black Power is "a clear, cool-minded realisation of the cultural, political, and economic reality of contemporary society."⁵⁸⁷

In this light the accusation that Black Power promotes violence in society

15 is absurd. It is true, Boesak recognises, that many Black Power leaders believe that violence is the only way to resist the white power structure, and he defends the right of black people to determine *for themselves* whether violence or nonviolence is the only possible solution for blacks to follow. But for the black situation in South Africa, Boesak insists King's argument for nonviolence is the

20 correct path to follow. Boesak rejects solutions that promote violence, because they do not consider seriously that "violence does beget violence and hate an ever new spiral of hatred and violence."⁵⁸⁸ Furthermore, Boesak remarks:

25 Whereas we do not deny that a situation may arise where retaliatory violence is forced upon the oppressed and no other avenue is left open to them, we do so with clear hesitancy, knowing full well that it will probably prove a poor "solution" and that violence can never be "justified."⁵⁸⁹

⁵⁸⁵Ibid., 68.

⁵⁸⁶Ibid., 56.

⁵⁸⁷Ibid., 69.

⁵⁸⁸Ibid., 70.

⁵⁸⁹Ibid.

We can conclude, then, that Boesak saw nothing wrong with an attempt to gain power, because it is not power built on force, manipulation or violence. That type of power is not authentic power. Authentic power comes from God and insists on creative, liberating discipleship. “Black Power,” Boesak insists, “is commensurate with the Gospel to the extent that it serves the liberation and the authentic humanity of black people. Inasmuch as Black Power serves the new humanity through liberation and the wholeness of life out of which flow justice, peace, reconciliation, and community, Black Power is God's work and an authentic Christian witness to God's presence in the world today.”⁵⁹⁰

10 *Afrikaner Christian Nationalism and Black Theology*

Is black theology not really an ideology of blackness like Afrikaner Christian Nationalism is an ideology of whiteness? To answer this Boesak relies on Albert Stüttgen's five criteria by which to recognise an ideology:

- 15 1. It claims absoluteness and exclusiveness—a holistic pretension, Stüttgen calls it, to know all of reality, an unwillingness to be corrected, and a certainty that it could never be wrong.
2. There is a complete schism with the real world, the world in which people have their daily experiences. The experiences of others do not affect the ideology; neither do the results of scientific research.
- 20 3. The third is complementary to the second: The ideology does not allow for the possibility of new experiences. It lives within a closed, isolated, fossilised system of ideas and has a mortal fear of change.
4. The ideology lives on presuppositions, but these are purposely kept unclear and vague. They are neither illuminated nor subjected to honest criticism.
- 25 5. The ideology needs prejudices and clichés to survive.⁵⁹¹

From these criteria Boesak derives a definition of ideology: it is a system of ideas and praxis used to justify and perpetuate existing structures of injustice. This system is usually hidden from the group using it, and it legitimises the use of “power-over-others” to maintain it.

Boesak argues that Afrikaner Christian Nationalism is an ideology, but black theology is not. Following the work of an Afrikaner who is critical of apartheid, Dr. André Hugo, Boesak argues that Christian Nationalism matches

⁵⁹⁰Ibid., 97-98.

⁵⁹¹Ibid., 102.

Stuttgart's five criteria for an ideology perfectly. First, the Dutch Reformed Church is convinced that it preaches "the pure gospel," which has been manifested in the system of apartheid. Thus, that church gives apartheid absolute and almost divine authority. Second, Christian Nationalism is silent with regard to the "massive human suffering of the black community." It exists within an ideal world which does not take into account the reality that the vast majority of people of South Africa live under. Third, within Christian Nationalism there is an "aversion to anything 'not our own.'" This aversion has been manifested in a fearful isolationism and an almost neurotic fear of change. Fourth, Christian Nationalism serves a Christian National State that is authoritarian in nature and does not allow honest criticism. "Indeed, Hugo considers the South African government to be totalitarian because 'a small (white) minority rules with absolute and totalitarian powers over 22 million people.'"⁵⁹² These four points prove that Christian Nationalism is an ideology which fosters a "false consciousness" that hides reality and is an idealisation which consolidates the existing power structure.

Christian Nationalism is an ideology alien to the Christian ethic. It is cruel and inhuman for it lives in terms of myths, "principles," grandiloquent ideals, and programs instead of in terms of human reality; and therefore it has no room for (or does not understand) human suffering.⁵⁹³

Therefore, Christian Nationalism is unacceptable because it promotes an ideology that serves the interests of a small group of people who ignore the plight of the poor and oppressed in order to maintain the status quo.

But is black theology any different? Does it not serve the interests of one particular group at the expense of other groups? Boesak does not deny black theology faces this danger. In fact, he argues that the theology of Rev. Albert Cleage, a minister from Detroit, Michigan, is "disturbingly reminiscent" of Christian Nationalism. Cleage portrayed Christ as a black Jew whose main

⁵⁹²Ibid., 115.

⁵⁹³Ibid., 116.

mission was to form a Black Christian Nation for the purpose of uniting black people against white oppression. Jesus was a black leader of a black people struggling for national liberation. The salvation that Jesus offered was to be found only *within* the Black Nation. All Jesus' teachings about loving one's neighbour and turning the other cheek were applicable only *within* the Black Nation. Blacks must learn to love and forgive their black enemies; they did not have to love white people who are on the outside of the Black Nation. Therefore, Boesak describes Cleage's theology as "a black nationalistic, revolutionary theology." Cleage found theological justification for a separate political program for black people in which blacks would control economic, social and political institutions.⁵⁹⁴

Boesak regards Cleage's Black Christian Nationalism as unacceptable for the same reasons he rejects Afrikaner Christian Nationalism. God cannot be claimed solely for the black people, as Cleage wants to do. God cannot be reduced to a mere symbol of nationalistic aspirations.

The New Testament makes it abundantly clear that God in Christ has transcended all national, racial, and cultural barriers to gather his people into a new *koinonia*.⁵⁹⁵

Black Christian Nationalism makes the same mistake as Afrikaner Christian Nationalism in that they both force God into the form of a tribal God, which confines God to the will of their own interests and condemns everyone not within their nation. They both maintain a theological exclusivism which rests on the concept of "for the *Volk* only." There is no critical distance, Boesak argues, between the Gospel and the ideology of Nationalism, between the will of God and the desires of the Nation.

Against both Afrikaner and Black Christian Nationalism, Boesak argues that the "Christian faith transcends all ideologies and all nationalistic ideals. It transcends specific groups and nations with their specific ideals and

⁵⁹⁴Ibid., 116-121.

⁵⁹⁵Ibid., 121.

interests.”⁵⁹⁶ By arguing this, Boesak is able to maintain that the Christian faith can “continually test programs by the criteria of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, discerning where they serve liberation, justice, and the wholeness of life within every situation.”⁵⁹⁷ This is exactly what the purpose of black theology is in the context of the black experience. If black theology is not to fall into the trap of becoming an ideology of black nationalism, then it must be constantly cultivating a self-critical reflection under the Word of God. One element that makes Afrikaner and Black Christian Nationalism an ideology is that they refuse to be subjected to judgement and criticism. “Black theology,” Boesak insists, “must ask whether the actions of blacks for gaining their liberation are in accord with the divine will of God, a thing that can be done only if the Word of God retains its critical and fulfilling function vis-à-vis all human activity.”⁵⁹⁸ In other words, Boesak wishes to maintain a critical distance between the Gospel and human activity so that the Word of God can properly judge that activity to make sure that it is not seeking nationalist interests but the promises of Christ, which is liberation of the poor and oppressed. Boesak summarises:

Black Theology’s situation is the situation of blackness. We have warned earlier that a contextual theology should remain critical and prophetic with regard to its own situational experience, because it is critical reflection under the Word of God. This means that the liberation praxis is finally judged not by the demands of the situation, but by the liberating gospel of Jesus Christ. The danger of a contextual theology being overruled by the situational experience and as a result succumbing to absolutistic claims is very real.⁵⁹⁹

Boesak has difficulty with Cone’s early formulations because he claims God *solely* for the black experience. His mistake is that he absolutises the black situation and thus takes “Black Theology out of the framework of the theology of liberation, thereby making his own situation (being black in America) and his own movement (liberation from white racism) the ultimate criterion for all

⁵⁹⁶Ibid.

⁵⁹⁷Ibid.

⁵⁹⁸Ibid., 122.

⁵⁹⁹Ibid., 143.

theology. By doing this, Cone makes of a contextual theology a regional theology, which is not the same thing at all.”⁶⁰⁰ For Boesak, Cone comes too close to making the American black experience the ultimate criterion for all liberation theology. The difficulty Boesak has with Cone’s formulation is that it seems to
 5 exclude other forms of liberation theology, such as Latin American liberation theology.⁶⁰¹ In Boesak’s mind this is being too susceptible to ideology.

What Boesak’s rejection of Cone shows us is that Boesak could not agree with any interpretation of black theology that was exclusivistic. Boesak affirms that it is true that black theology of liberation is concerned with the black
 10 experience, but black theology is done “*only within the framework of the theology of liberation.*”⁶⁰² This means that black theology’s focus is, first, on liberation of the poor and oppressed, and second, on the black situation. This places black theology alongside the other forms of liberation theology in different parts of the world. In this sense black theology is a liberation
 15 theology. Its concern is not just with the situation of blacks, but with all situations in which people are oppressed:

[Black Theology] focuses on the dependency of the oppressed and their liberation from the dependency in all its dimensions—
 20 psychological, cultural, political, economical, and theological. It expresses the belief that because Christ’s liberation has come, total human liberation can no longer be denied. It follows that this ethic is an ethic of liberation. Its character is situational, social, and eschatological. It does not, however, arise out of the situation, but
 25 in the situation. The situation is never an entity *an sich* which autonomously determines the ethic of liberation. It has a history, and the results of the action within a given situation will have some bearing on its future. A black ethic will arise, therefore, in the black situation; it will be determined by the black experience in
 30 order to be authentic, but it will not be confined to the black experience, neither will black situational possibilities and impossibilities be its only determinant.⁶⁰³

⁶⁰⁰Ibid.

⁶⁰¹Cone admits to this mistake in later work. He writes: “. . . during the early development of black theology, we blacks were much too suspicious to learn as much as we should have. An early incorporation of class analysis [from Latin American liberation theology] into black theology could have prevented some of its most obvious and excessive weaknesses. . .” Cone, *For My People*, 1984, 73-74. Cone corrects this mistake in later work. See also Cone, *Speaking the Truth: Ecumenism, Liberation, and Black Theology*, 1986.

⁶⁰²Boesak, *Farewell to Innocence*, 1986, 144.

⁶⁰³Ibid.

Black theology is, then, a liberating theology for four reasons: 1) It reflects upon the human condition in light of God's Word. 2) Its goal is to be an instrument of God's love and justice by defending the rights of the poor and oppressed. 3) It lends its support to the need of the poor and oppressed to affirm themselves as persons. 4) It seeks the liberation of all people.

Because black theology is concerned with liberation, Boesak tells us that it takes love very seriously. It always links love with righteousness and justice. Love can never be separated from righteousness because to do so would make love into an ineffective sentimentality; that is, one could love a starving person and at the same time feel no need to change the sociopolitical, economic structures that had caused that person's situation. "Liberation theology," Boesak insists "seeks a church that ministers to the poor not merely with a sense of compassion but with a sense of justice. This means that the church ought to discover that the state of poverty and oppression is ugly, impermissible, and unnecessary; that conditions of poverty and underdevelopment are not metaphysical but structural and historically explicable."⁶⁰⁴ In other words, because black theology is concerned with liberation and removing the structures that cause oppression, it is concerned with love.

Boesak is critical of black theologians who interpret the black situation only in racist terms and fail to consider a social analysis. Both conservative and radical blacks make this mistake. Conservative blacks believe that whites need to overcome their racism and thus appeal to white morals. Radical blacks believe whites can never overcome their racism and thus the separation of blacks is the only solution. Neither group, Boesak argues, really addresses the problem, because they leave the socioeconomic and political system intact. They do not address the social structure which is the cause of black dependency. "Black Theology, as an integral part of the theology of liberation," Boesak writes, "realises this and in its ethic seeks solidarity (true solidarity!) with oppressed

⁶⁰⁴Ibid., 147.

people all over the world. In this way it will become clear that racism is but one incidental dimension of oppression against which the total struggle should be waged.”⁶⁰⁵ Thus, black theology searches for a totally new social order.

Included in this new social order, Boesak tells us, is the liberation of
5 blacks as well as whites. Boesak disagrees with Cone that “to love is to make a decision against white people.” Because black theology is serious about love and liberation, it also seeks the liberation of white people. Boesak remarks:

10 We would have thought that to be able to love white people would mean precisely to make a decision *for* them! For their humanity, however obscure, against their inhumanity, however blatant. For their liberation, and against their imprisonment of themselves. For their freedom, against their fear; for their human authenticity against their terrible estrangement.⁶⁰⁶

As we have already seen, Boesak insists that “blackness” does not designate skin
15 colour. Instead it is “a discovery, a state of mind, a conversion, an affirmation of being, which is power. It is in an insight which has to do with wisdom and responsibility.”⁶⁰⁷ Therefore, both whites and blacks can share in blackness—being concerned for both love and justice, being concerned for others:

20 The real black people are those who embrace the positive description of “black” as opposed to “non-white,” which is a definition in terms of others, not in terms of yourself. . . . This forces white people to recognise their whiteness and all its consequences.

In other words, black theology is concerned with total liberation, including the
25 liberation of white people. This is why at the beginning of *Farewell to Innocence* Boesak is able to say that “Black Theology is not exclusive, theological *Apartheid* in which whites have no part. On the contrary, blacks know only too well the terrible estrangement of white people; they know only too well how sorely whites need to be liberated—even if whites don’t! Black theology is a
30 passionate call to freedom, and although it directs its voice to black people, it nonetheless hopes that white people will hear and be saved.”⁶⁰⁸ At the end of his

⁶⁰⁵Ibid., 151.

⁶⁰⁶Ibid., 147.

⁶⁰⁷Ibid., 139.

⁶⁰⁸Ibid., 16

book, Boesak is able to conclude that black theology wants both blacks and whites to share a new future, a future in which Christian theology is never used again for a particular aggressive cultural imperialism. Black theology is about “solidarity, respect for life, humanity, and community.”⁶⁰⁹

5 Thus, we can conclude that black theology, unlike Afrikaner Christian Nationalism, is not a racist ideology. Like other black theologians and members of Black Consciousness, Boesak doubts the ability of white people to participate in any movement for black liberation effectively, because racism in South Africa is so structurally based that political integration in black and white coalitions
10 cannot be realistically discussed. For we read in *Farewell to Innocence*:

In the socio-political field Black Consciousness and Black Power imply that whites can no longer play the role they have played traditionally with regard to “black politics.” This means that blacks must do their own thing and that whites, “conservatives” as well as
15 “liberals,” can no longer make a decisive contribution. As far as we are concerned, there is only room for those whites who share so deeply the concern of black people that they are willing to work for the radical change of oppressive societal structures wherever this is needed.⁶¹⁰

20 But as we can see, he does not want to make the liberation movement exclusively black either. This means that for Boesak black theology is not racist. Johann Kinghorn of the University of Stellenbosch agrees. Referring to the development of Christian Nationalism, he writes:

. . . for some Afrikaners it did then what Black Theology has done for some blacks since the 1970s: it affirmed the humanity of the outcasts and served to spark some measure of self-respect. But, *unlike* Black Theology, and typical of all racism, it accomplished this by denigrating others and legitimising their subjugation. The racially defined ideology of nationalism is after all inherently
25 incapable of affirming an equal and inclusive humanity. It can only affirm one’s humanity by stressing other people’s inferiority.⁶¹¹

⁶⁰⁹Ibid., 152.

⁶¹⁰Ibid., 66.

⁶¹¹Kinghorn, “The Theology of Separate Equality: A Critical Outline of the DRC’s Position on Apartheid,” in Prozesky, ed., *Christianity Amidst Apartheid*, 1990, 62.

Conclusion

To understand Boesak's book *Farewell to Innocence*, we must set it in the context of the Black Consciousness Movement. Boesak believed it necessary that black theology adopt Black Power's focus on the need for black self-realisation, black solidarity and black leadership. But, Boesak was also aware of the criticisms that by linking black theology to Black Power, black theology was simply an ideology which promoted a political program and it was also racist. Boesak wanted to refute these criticisms so he argued that black theology was not ideology and it was not racist.

3.3 BOESAK AND THE BLACK STRUGGLE IN THE 1980S

Changed Political Context

On 16 June 1976, 15,000 African schoolchildren protested in the streets of the black township of Soweto against the introduction of Afrikaans as the medium of instruction in secondary school courses. The police responded to the children's protest with teargas and rifles. They opened fire into a crowd of children, killing two and injuring several others. Within hours violence spread into the neighbouring townships as the security forces moved into Soweto. The most exhaustive study of the uprising concluded that the death toll of blacks from June to December 1976 was likely to have been over 1,000, with the number of injured exceeding 5,000.⁶¹² This harsh treatment—including not only the police repression in the townships but also the banning of the Black Conscious Movement and the death of Steve Biko while in police custody—produced an international reaction against South Africa which isolated it militarily and pressured it economically. Within the year the United Nation's Security Council unanimously adopted a mandatory arms embargo against South Africa. American companies withdrew nearly two-thirds of their earnings from South Africa and pledged that their future operations would reflect adherence to what became known as the "Sullivan Code." This code promoted the nonsegregation of all work facilities and equal employment, pay and benefits for all employees. Companies belonging to the European Economic Community went even further and insisted on recognising black trade unions.⁶¹³

In response to this international pressure, which undermined South Africa's access to global markets for vital economic resources, important segments of the Nationalist Party concluded that aspects of apartheid had to be

⁶¹²Price, *The Apartheid State in Crisis*, 1991, 47-48.

⁶¹³*Ibid.*, 62-70.

reformed to regain international support. The leader of this initiative was P. W. Botha, who became Prime Minister in 1978 by making reform the centre of his rhetoric. His primary objectives were to remove economic restraints associated with apartheid, create an African middle class and allow blacks to have some political control over their own affairs.⁶¹⁴ These objectives entailed several reforms, including the upgrading of black living conditions; the removal of laws mandating segregation in social, personal and public life; the decentralisation of the government; and the introduction of a new constitution.

With these reforms, however, Botha was careful to end only “unnecessary” racial discrimination. He did not wish to remove those racial laws that were needed to continue the political, economic and social position of whites. Botha conceived reform always in relation to white political control. He argued: “The right of self-determination of the White nation must not be regarded as being negotiable.”⁶¹⁵ In other words, he wanted a “devolution of power,” but not the relinquishing of it. As F. W. de Klerk, a member of Botha’s cabinet in 1979, stated: “Separation that is necessary to maintain self-determination and to protect the rights of minorities will always remain. But separation that is irritating and unnecessary discrimination will go.”⁶¹⁶ Therefore, in the 1980s the government’s new policy was to abolish petty apartheid laws such as race segregation in public amenities but still maintain legislation which was deemed “necessary” in order to control black settlements, such as the policy of orderly urbanisation which removed urban blacks to commuter townships.

As part of its reforms the government established township councils in 1982, which were to be elected by local black residents and were to have the responsibility of administering a particular black area. “Pretoria’s goal in the creation of these Councils,” Borer explains, “was to shift control over the black population from the central government to representatives of this population,

⁶¹⁴Ibid., 85-95.

⁶¹⁵Ibid., 82.

⁶¹⁶Ibid., 119.

and in so doing reduce the political costs to the state of exercising such control. As Robert Price points out, 'indirect rule—blacks controlling blacks—would then have been substituted for the coercive fist of the white state.'⁶¹⁷ On the international level this transfer of power would appear to other nations as though the South African government was giving blacks political power and the right to vote. But inside South Africa, as with all the reforms, the township councils were established in relation to the continued maintenance of white political control, meaning that blacks would be given no power in the central government. Borer remarks:

10 The primary goal of these reforms was always the cooptation of blacks, and the government never intended to forfeit control of the political system, which was deemed essential to the economic, social, and cultural survival of white South Africans.⁶¹⁸

 This plan is most obvious in the creation of the new constitution of 1983, which offered no fundamental change in the apartheid system as far as blacks were concerned. It allowed Indians and coloureds to elect candidates to two newly created, but still racially segregated, houses of Parliament. In the new tricameral parliament, whites would elect 178 members to the House of Assembly, the largest chamber; coloureds would elect 85 members to the House of
20 Representatives; while the Indians would elect 45 members to the House of Delegates. With this 4:2:1 ratio, parliament members would elect the electoral college, which was comprised of 50 whites, 25 coloureds, and 13 Indians. This would therefore guarantee white control over both the state presidency and the president's council. Most importantly, Africans were given no role in this new
25 constitution. Instead, they were to turn to the homeland political structures or to the local township councils to exercise their political rights.⁶¹⁹

⁶¹⁷Borer, "Challenging the State: Churches as Political Actors in South Africa," in *Journal of Church and State*, Spring 1993, 312.

⁶¹⁸Ibid.

⁶¹⁹Price, *The Apartheid State in Crisis*, 1991, 136-138.

The Rise of Black Leadership

While the government's reforms were supposed to produce cooptation, collaboration and acquiescence, they failed to do so. The introduction of the new constitution, more than any other reform, served as a stimulus for insurrection by government opponents. The reforms were rejected by the very groups that they were designed to placate—including trade unionists, students, church people, community workers, teachers and journalists. A variety of new organisations, such as civic, women's and youth organisations, were formed to oppose the government's reforms. These associations promoted a new self-confidence among blacks, which set the stage for a new nationwide liberation movement.⁶²⁰

To understand the rise of these mass organisations we must continue our discussion from the two previous chapters on the Black Consciousness (BC) Movement. After the Soweto uprisings and the banning of the BC, the movement split into two ideological groups: the Azanian Peoples Organisation (AZAPO) and the African National Congress (ANC) Charterists. Using BC rhetoric, the AZAPO appealed exclusively to blacks and argued that racial identity was the sole motivating force for active opposition to government policies. The Charterists, on the other hand, supported the principle behind the ANC's 1955 Freedom Charter that South Africa belonged to all its people, both black and white. They wished to unite all opposition to apartheid and therefore believed that BC's focus on race was no longer appropriate. They argued that BC had been an appropriate response to the black situation in the early and mid-1970s with its programmes to build self-confidence and self-affirmation, but after 1976 the situation called for a more actively organised form of opposition. BC had provided a psychological liberation among blacks, but this was no longer enough, because that form of liberation failed to motivate people to work for political change. The situation in

⁶²⁰Ibid., 159-175.

the 1980s called for a new strategy for political liberation through mass action.⁶²¹

The Charterists' position soon gained strength over the AZAPO's for several reasons. The Charterists recognised that if they were going to truly
 5 bring about political change in South Africa they would have to organise mass action campaigns. To do this they would have to start by coordinating the efforts of the grassroots organisations that had sprung up in response to the government's reforms. Area civic associations were therefore established to orchestrate peaceful protests, which included rent strikes, work "stayaways" and
 10 consumer boycotts against white companies and retailers. At first these protests were aimed only at local governments and businesses, but after they proved a small degree of effectiveness, it did not take long before area associations were lead into broad alliances with other associations in order to protest against the central state government. The people adopted what they termed as the "politics
 15 of refusal." The purpose of these campaigns was to "impose direct costs on the state or those it relies on, such as the business community, and thus they represent potentially more efficacious means for asserting demands."⁶²² In this way, local associations became "local political centres [functioning] as the heart and engine of a united front."⁶²³ Local protests turned into mass protests which
 20 affected the national security of white political control.

Through these community associations blacks felt for the first time in their lives that they had some degree of control over their own destinies. For the first time their challenges to the local political structures were making a difference. This process, of course, strengthened leadership in the black
 25 community so that by the middle of the early 1980s, many blacks did not see white liberals as a threat to their alliance and thus promoted white participation. Budlender remarks:

⁶²¹Marx, *Lessons of Struggle*, 1992, 73-105.

⁶²²Price, *The Apartheid State in Crisis*, 1991, 175.

⁶²³Marx, *Lessons of Struggle*, 1992, 111.

There was a new self-confidence afoot. White students were no threat to this: there was not the remotest possibility that in this new context the whites would again be able to take over and speak 'for' black South Africans, or that they would dominate the agenda. And so (having proved their bona fides) they could be invited to participate, as a minor but welcome ally. The truth is, therefore, that this shared political activity was not the result of changes in NUSAS: it was the result of changes in black political activity.⁶²⁴

This was an important psychological transition for the Charterists if they were going to move to the second phase of their plan to bring about real change in South Africa—the formation of a national organisation.

In 1983 the first nationally organised mass movement of black opposition since the ANC and PAC had been banned in 1960 was established as the United Democratic Front. Boesak played a key role in the creation of this organisation.

He was the first to publicly call for a united movement of community organisations in opposition to the reforms of the government. At a political gathering in January 1983, he stated: "In order to succeed we need a united front. . . . There is no reason why the churches, civic associations, trade unions, student organisations, and sports bodies should not unite on this issue, pool our resources, inform people of the fraud that is about to be perpetuated in their name, and on the day of the election, expose their plans for what they are."⁶²⁵

Thus, the impetus for the UDF's formation was to bring together civic associations in order to coordinate their action. To do this the UDF had to assure the participation of all anti-apartheid groups and to accommodate the broadest possible array of ideas. The UDF was organised, then, as "a non-racial, unitary state undiluted by racial or ethnic considerations."⁶²⁶

Boesak and Confessing Theology

The changes that occurred in the black community in the 1980s from a BC to a Charterist position are important because they explain the changes in

⁶²⁴Budlender, "Black Consciousness and the Liberal Tradition: Then and Now," in Pityana, ed., *Bounds of Possibility*, 1991, 235.

⁶²⁵Boesak, *Black and Reformed*, 1984, 118.

⁶²⁶Price, *The Apartheid State in Crisis*, 1991, 177.

Boesak's theology. In the early 1980s, he began to turn his focus from the black experience and the need for black liberation in South Africa to the liberation of the white churches and the liberation of South African society as a whole (both black and white). We see him almost cease to use BC terminology and instead

5 speak more of "the struggle for a nonracist, open, democratic South Africa, a unitary state, one nation in which all citizens will have the rights accorded them by the ordinance of almighty God."⁶²⁷ Gone are his remarks about the necessity of black power and the need for black self-affirmation. In fact, in 1983 on a visit to the Netherlands, he said:

10 In South Africa, therefore, dear brothers and sisters, we are not concerned in the first place with the life of blacks, important as that may be. We are not concerned, in the first place, with the future relationships of blacks and whites in South Africa, important as that may be. In South Africa we are concerned, primarily, with

15 apartheid, and therefore with the word of God, with the gospel of Jesus Christ, with the integrity of the church of the Lord's witness.⁶²⁸

He is not simply concerned with the interests of the BC movement, but more with the relationship of the Church to the apartheid political system. His theological

20 energies are concentrated on the internal politics of the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) and its justification of apartheid. We can say, then, that his theology was changing from being exclusively about black theology and black concerns to a confessing theology that would enable him to address the liberation of the churches by distinguishing the true Church from the false. By confessing

25 theology we do not mean confessionalistic theology in which a particular church sets forth a religious doctrine to distinguish itself from other confessional bodies. Instead, confessing theology attempts to provide the substance for a confession of faith to which most, if not all, churches could give their allegiance.

⁶²⁷Boesak, *Black and Reformed*, 1984, 118.

⁶²⁸*Ibid.*, 131.

Therefore, in the early 1980s Boesak's shift toward a confessing theology allowed him to focus more on ecclesial issues. This is evident in the speeches he gave at the many ecumenical conferences he attended.

All Africa Conference of Churches

5 The All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) was inaugurated in 1963 as a regional Christian agency of the WCC with the purpose of promoting fellowship, consultation and cooperation among Africa's churches. Its initial programs were similar to those of other ecumenical bodies in other areas of the world. Since its first meeting in Uganda it has focused on issues of worship,
10 evangelism, the search for a Christian family life in the African context and the indigenisation of the Gospel.⁶²⁹ As a member of the South African Council of Churches' Executive Committee, Boesak was elected to attend the AACC-sponsored Pan-African Consultation on Racism in April 1980 and the AACC's Fourth General Assembly in 1981.

15 The 1980 Consultation was held in response to the WCC's 1979 Central Committee meeting which asked member churches to consider what steps should be taken in order to combat racism in the 1980s. Although we do not know Boesak's personal contribution to this conference, we do know that he, along with his fellow delegates, asked the WCC to support disinvestment and boycotts
20 and called on AACC's 118 member churches to affirm their solidarity with the South African students protesting against discriminatory education and request that the South African government release its political prisoners. They invited the churches from around the world to withstand political neutrality and to start addressing political, social and economic issues.⁶³⁰

25 Boesak took these resolutions concerning church political involvement with him to the fourth assembly of the AACC in 1981. The theme of this conference was "Following the Light of Jesus Christ," with an underlying focus

⁶²⁹*Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*, 1991, 14-15, 233,

⁶³⁰*Ecumenical Press Service*, No. 12 - 1 May 1980, 7.

on healing and reconciliation within the churches and all African countries. With this theme in mind, several of the conference's participants raised the question of whether the Church should be involved in politics, because politics caused division and not reconciliation within the body of Christ. Addressing this issue, Rev. John Gatu, the General Committee Chairman, said that those who were critical of the AACC's political stance needed to be told "that the gospel of Jesus Christ does not recognise the separation between politics and religion per se. Our commission would not be fulfilled if we did not deal with all matters that pertain to the life of our people in this continent."⁶³¹

Boesak's address to the conference also dealt with the issues of church reconciliation and the place of politics. He began by telling the participants that the theme "Following the Light of Jesus Christ" had to be defined in relation to "the cry of the poor, the dejected, the cry of the children of Africa who, like those in South Africa, are giving their lives in the struggle for liberation and God-given humanity."⁶³² He continued by insisting that the African churches address political problems if they were to be authentic and remain the body of Christ. The churches must proclaim the Bible's liberating message, that God does not remain unmoved concerning the plight of the oppressed. Boesak said that God sees the people's oppression. God hears the people's cry and liberates them from slavery, meaninglessness and alienation. God takes sides—for the oppressed people and against the power and military might of the state.⁶³³ This message of liberation is the message of the Church for the world:

The liberation the church proclaims is total. It is liberation from sin in all its manifestations of alienation from God and neighbour. It is liberation from economic exploitation, dehumanisation, and oppression. It is liberation from meaninglessness and self-alienation, from poverty and suffering. It is liberation toward a meaningful human existence seeking freedom and human fulfilment.⁶³⁴

⁶³¹*Ecumenical Press Service*, No. 22 - 13 August 1981, 3.

⁶³²Boesak, *Black and Reformed*, 1984, 71.

⁶³³*Ibid.*, 72.

⁶³⁴*Ibid.*, 74.

Thus, the churches cannot remain neutral if they want to be the true body of Christ. They must take sides by “joining the struggle against political oppression and economic exploitation; against racism and all forms of human degradation; against the destruction of human-beingness wherever it may occur on the continent.”⁶³⁵ Of course, this did not mean, Boesak insisted, that the churches should be “christianising the struggle” or “taking it over.” Instead, it meant “taking responsibility for the historical reality into which the kingdom of God has entered. It does mean being a Christian presence in the midst of that struggle, keeping alive and witnessing to the goals of the kingdom of God for our world. . . . It means being the embodiment of God’s demands for love, justice, reconciliation, and shalom for the world that has been reconciled with God in Jesus Christ.”⁶³⁶ In other words, for Boesak, the political struggle and God’s demand for reconciliation were not opposites as many people assume. By being involved in the political struggle the churches could ensure that God’s reconciliation and the struggle were not headed in opposite directions, but rather travelling the same path. Boesak recognised that reconciliation and the struggle could very well be opposites, but they did not have to be.

What is important about this particular address is that Boesak understood that the churches could not affect reconciliation between people and nations from outside the political struggle. They had to be involved. He writes:

To recognise the hurt and brokenness in African churches and nations means to identify the causes of that brokenness. It means understanding that brokenness in terms of political, economic, and social realities as well as in terms of human alienation and suffering.⁶³⁷

He wonders how the Church can really offer the ministry of healing unless it identifies itself with the struggles of broken people. Or, in other words, how can the Church be truly the Church if it is not involved in political struggles. Therefore, he concluded that the Church in Africa must become liberated,

⁶³⁵Ibid.

⁶³⁶Ibid., 74-75.

⁶³⁷Ibid., 75-76.

liberated from “a pietistic, other-worldly religiosity that has no bearing on the present situation in the world.” This will mean that the Church will no longer use “reconciliation and healing” as “an excuse to emigrate out of history but, rather, a commitment to [Jesus Christ] *in* history: a commitment to challenge, to shape, to change, to subvert, and to humanise human history until it conforms to the terms of the kingdom of God.”⁶³⁸

ABRECSA

Boesak raised an issue at the AACC that he was to build upon at other ecumenical conferences: When is the Church really the body of Christ? The AACC meeting in 1981 was not the first time he raised this question. In September 1980, Boesak travelled to the United States where he had been invited as a guest lecturer to the universities of Princeton and San Francisco. During this trip he also addressed the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan. In his address, Boesak attacked the Afrikaans-speaking Reformed churches in South Africa and accused those churches of jeopardising the Gospel. “The struggle against apartheid and all that it stands for,” Boesak said, “is more than merely a struggle against an evil ideology. It is more than a struggle for the liberation and wholeness of persons, white as well as black, in South Africa. It is also, finally, a struggle for the integrity of the gospel of Jesus Christ.”⁶³⁹ It is without doubt that this statement influenced the CRC so that within the year it decided to end dialogue with the white DRC of South Africa.

In the early 1980s, Boesak addressed other churches and organisations affiliated with the Reformed tradition. His influence can be seen in the decision of the Federation of Protestant Churches in Switzerland to end dialogue with the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk (NGK) in 1982 and in the decision of the

⁶³⁸Ibid., 77.

⁶³⁹Ibid., 48.

Alliance of Black Reformed Christians in Southern Africa (ABRECSA) to declare apartheid a heresy at its first conference in Hammanskraal on 26 October 1981.

5 Details of the origins of ABRECSA cannot be traced, but we are told in the organisation's charter that it was formed in order to prepare black Reformed Christians for the next Assembly of World Alliance of Reformed Churches in Ottawa, Canada, in 1982. In the white Reformed churches it was believed that to reject apartheid was to also reject the Reformed tradition. ABRECSA was formed so that black Reformed Christians could discuss what it meant to reject the apartheid system while being both black and Reformed. The conference was
10 attended by 50 participants from eight churches, including the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Sendingkerk (NGSK—"coloured" mission church), the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk in Afrika (NGKA—black mission church), and the Reformed Church in Africa (Indian mission church).⁶⁴⁰

Boesak was elected as ABRECSA's first Chairman and gave the opening
15 address. In his speech, he showed how the Reformed tradition in South Africa had become a travesty of what it was clearly meant to be. Reformed Christianity in that country had traditionally meant claiming that apartheid was "based on Christian principles" and using the Gospel to justify white supremacy, economic exploitation and the misuse of political power. Boesak writes:

20 Apartheid was born out of the Reformed tradition; it is, in a very real sense, the brainchild of the Dutch Reformed churches. It is Reformed Christians who have split the church on the basis of race and colour, and who now claim that racially divided churches are a true Reformed understanding of the nature of the Christian
25 church. It is Reformed Christians who have spent years working out the details of apartheid, as a church policy and as a political policy. . . .It is Reformed Christians who have created Afrikaner nationalism, equating the Reformed tradition and Afrikaner ideals with the ideals of the kingdom of God.⁶⁴¹

30 But as a Reformed theologian, Boesak argued that using the Reformed faith in this way is unacceptable because it betrayed the Reformed tradition. First, it denied the supremacy of the Word of God. When white Reformed churches used

⁶⁴⁰de Gruchy and Villa-Vicencio, eds., *Apartheid is a Heresy*, 1983, 162-163.

⁶⁴¹Boesak, *Black and Reformed*, 1984, 85-86.

the Bible to justify black oppression, to divide churches and to produce a nationalistic racist ideology, they failed to allow the Bible to shape their lives and effect their witness. Alternatively, maintaining the supremacy of God's Word in the true Reformed tradition meant allowing the Bible to provide us "with the
 5 fundamental principles of justice, love, and peace" and a "critique of all human actions," which "holds before us the norms of the kingdom of God." The Bible shapes lives and provides the Church with a basis on which to stand.

Second, the white Reformed churches abuse the Reformed tradition because in justifying apartheid they deny the Lordship of Jesus Christ. In fact,
 10 Boesak insists, that they come very close to paganism in that they divide the various concerns of life into compartments. Certain portions of life they call religious and other parts they call worldly. Like Calvin, Boesak believes that "there is not a single inch of life that does not fall under the Lordship of Christ. All life is indivisible, just as God is indivisible and in all of life—personal and
 15 public, politics and economics, sports and art, science and liturgy—the Reformed Christian seeks the Lordship of Christ."⁶⁴² Because Christ is Lord of our lives the way we live in the world is affected. We see ourselves as responsible for our world.

Third, the white Reformed churches distort the Reformed understanding
 20 of sin. They use this doctrine as an excuse not to challenge the status quo. They correctly confess that humans are sinful but then use this fact to insist that Christians cannot change the sinful realities in which they live. Boesak tells us, in true Reformed theology "the recognition of the broken, sinful realities of our world becomes the impulse toward reformation and healing." Being a Reformed
 25 Christian should mean first, recognising the sinful nature of the world and then seeking to change that reality so that it may serve the purposes of God and the humanisation of the world.⁶⁴³

⁶⁴²Ibid., 88.

⁶⁴³Ibid., 89-90.

Fourth, the white Reformed churches in South Africa deny that the Reformed tradition has a strong concern for social justice. Boesak quotes Calvin, Kuyper and Barth, showing that the Reformed tradition has always understood that God is on the side of the weak and oppressed. Because the white Reformed churches deny this, it is in vain that they claim any Reformed legitimation.

Fifth, the true Reformed tradition understands that governments are instituted by God for the just and legitimate administration of the world. If the government does not serve the people it is neither just nor legitimate. The people should obey the government insofar as its laws are not in conflict with the Word of God. The white Reformed churches deny this principle because they argue for the blind acceptance of any kind of government.⁶⁴⁴

Therefore, Boesak argues that if the Reformed tradition is to have a future in South Africa, black Christians should formulate a Reformed confession for their time and situation and in their own words.⁶⁴⁵ Here we see Boesak going beyond what he said at the AACC meeting in Nairobi. At the earlier conference Boesak simply described what the Church's ministry should look like if it was going to be the authentic Church. At ABRECSA, he again described what it meant for the Church to be authentic, but he also took the important step in distinguishing the true Church from the false. He described what the Reformed tradition is and how it has been abused by the DRC. He concluded his speech by asking ABRECSA members to let the Reformed tradition once again become a champion of the cause of the poor and oppressed by clinging to the confession of the Lordship of Christ and to the supremacy of the Word of God. He asked them to "declare apartheid to be irreconcilable with the gospel of Jesus Christ, a sin that has to be combated on every level of our lives, a denial of the Reformed tradition, a heresy that is to be an everlasting shame of the church of Jesus Christ in the world."⁶⁴⁶

⁶⁴⁴Ibid., 92-94.

⁶⁴⁵Ibid., 95.

⁶⁴⁶Ibid.

In response to Boesak's address, the participants adopted a Charter which contained many of Boesak's formulations. First, the Charter defined the term "black" in its title as "a condition and an attitude and not merely the pigmentation of one's skin." In other words, the participants did not wish to

5 confine their confession to one racial group but open it to all who were committed to its theological basis. Secondly, the Charter affirmed the authority of Scripture; the Lordship of Christ; Christian responsibility for the world; obedience to the State (but only under God); and the visible unity of the Church transcending all human barriers. But most importantly, the Charter declared

10 "that apartheid is a sin, and that the moral and theological justification of it is a travesty of the Gospel, a betrayal of the Reformed tradition, and a heresy."⁶⁴⁷

For the first time apartheid was declared a Christian heresy. In his speech Boesak defined heresy in a new way. He held to the traditional expression of heresy as a false theological idea, but he also expanded it to include Christian

15 social practice. He writes:

Heresy is not merely the expression of a false idea, but the use of the Word of God in such a way that it becomes divisive and separates human beings from God and each other. It threatens the community of love. Heresy is an expression of the Word in service

20 of some other interest than the love of and communion with Jesus Christ. It is a proclamation that creates distrust rather than trust, confusion rather than understanding, isolation rather than community.⁶⁴⁸

In other words, apartheid is a heresy because it violates God's purpose for

25 humanity. For Boesak, declaring something a heresy no longer simply meant to judge it on the basis of its orthodoxy, but on its orthopraxis as well, including its relationship to socioeconomic issues. De Gruchy explains this new understanding of heresy perfectly:

These issues [race, culture and ethnicity], normally regarded as non-theological, must now be seen as equally confessional, because they have to do with the truth of the Gospel as much as those that, for example, traditionally separate Catholics from Calvinists. In seeking to express the unity of the Church in South Africa it is

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⁶⁴⁷de Gruchy and Villa-Vicencio, eds., *Apartheid is a Heresy*, 1983, 162.

⁶⁴⁸*Ibid.*, xii.

5 therefore clearly inadequate to try and resolve the inherited
 confessional differences without at the same time, and even more
 urgently, attending to the contextual confessional issues. If the
 Churches seriously begin to confess Jesus Christ as Lord in South
 Africa in terms that relate to the critical issues of our society, that
 is, the real issues which divide them, they will begin to discover
 their unity in a new way.⁶⁴⁹

At ABRECSA we see Boesak truly becoming involved in confessing
 theology. Certainly he is still concerned with the liberation of the black people
 10 from oppression, but that is not his primary concern. His principal focus was on
 the liberation of the churches (both black and white) and the liberation of the
 Reformed tradition from the false teachings of the DRC. It is this concern that he
 takes with him on his travels overseas as he speaks to various ecumenical groups
 such as the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC).

15 WARC

The year 1982 started on a positive note for South African Reformed
 churches when the NGK began to show ideological differences within its ranks.
 The first sign of a change emerged when a number of theologians and younger
 members of the church resigned and joined the African, Coloured and Indian
 20 mission churches. One prominent theologian was Nico Smith, who quit his post
 as head of the theological seminary at Stellenbosch. A second sign was that
 younger members of the church were beginning to challenge the conservative
 leadership by introducing resolutions that included a push for the abolition of
 racial barriers, the neutralisation of the Broederbond, and the desegregation of
 25 the church so that it would be open to all ethnic groups.⁶⁵⁰ These resolutions
 eventually lead to the signing of an open letter by 123 of the 1,500 ordained
 ministers of the NGK. This letter called apartheid biblically indefensible and
 called for the elimination of laws and practices which prohibited racially mixed
 marriages, determined residential areas on the basis of race, and caused blacks to
 30 live with lower wages, inadequate housing and poor education.⁶⁵¹

⁶⁴⁹de Gruchy, "Towards a Confessing Church," *Ibid.*, 80.

⁶⁵⁰*Ecumenical Press Service*, 82.02.59.

⁶⁵¹*Ibid.*, 82.07.33.

Boesak welcomed the initiatives of the signers and insisted that only the young clergy could influence changes in South Africa: “No other organisation in the country, not even parliament, can play a greater role for peaceful change within South Africa than the white NGK headed by verligtes.”⁶⁵² But he

5 doubted the ability of the young clergy to influence the proapartheid leadership which controlled the NGK: “I think they will find themselves at the crossroads, I would invite them to join our black churches as other white NGK theologians have done.”⁶⁵³ This concern proved to be correct, for by the end of February 1982, a meeting between the NGK and the SACC ended unsuccessfully with the

10 NGK Director claiming that apartheid was sanctioned by God. The leadership of the NGK also indicated that a discussion of unity between the black and white Reformed churches was not appropriate at that time.

The WARC was founded in 1875 in order that churches of the Reformed tradition might find fellowship, unite in mission and promote theological

15 reflection. Although the Alliance is characterised as having a deep concern for society and for its commitment to human rights, it was not until the mid-1970s that they gave such issues sustained reflection.⁶⁵⁴ Concerning racism and apartheid, the Alliance made its first major statement in Frankfurt in 1964 when the assembly stated emphatically that racism cannot be regarded as Christian.

20 Also in 1970, the WARC Assembly in Nairobi concluded that churches cannot make racism or racial segregation a norm and any church that did could not be regarded as an authentic member of the body of Jesus Christ. However, both assemblies went no further but simply urged its white South African members to examine racism in their country more thoroughly. They failed to follow-up

25 their resolutions with action, because neither assembly was willing to take a stand against the NGK or the NHK.⁶⁵⁵

⁶⁵²Ibid., 82.02.59.

⁶⁵³Ibid., 82.07.33.

⁶⁵⁴Sell, *A Reformed Evangelical, Catholic Theology*, 1991, Chapter 6.

⁶⁵⁵de Gruchy and Villa-Vicencio, eds., *Apartheid is a Heresy*, 1983, 169-170. Boesak, *Black and Reformed*, 1984, 128.

At the twenty-second assembly of the WARC, which was held in Ottawa, Canada, in August of 1982, the assembly changed its long standing policy of not interfering in the business of its members because of the influence of Boesak and his colleagues. In the summer of 1982, the Synod Commission for Ecumenical Relations of the NGSK nominated Boesak and Rev. D. P. Botha as delegates to the WARC. On the opening day of the conference, Boesak and eleven other black and white South Africans decided not to celebrate communion with members of the white DRC on the grounds that the Dutch Reformed family of churches in South Africa were racially segregated. Since it was impossible for them to celebrate communion with members of the NGK and NHK in South Africa, they reasoned that they should not celebrate the sacrament of unity in another country for the sake of appearances.

In his address to the assembly, Boesak again denounced apartheid as a pseudoreligious ideology which had been born in the white Reformed churches of South Africa and thus posed a threat to the credibility of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.⁶⁵⁶ It was a threat for two reasons: First, because it is built on the basis of racism which is a form of idolatry that uses political, military and economic power “to play God in the lives of others.”⁶⁵⁷ Second, apartheid was a threat to the Gospel because it denied “the liberating, humanising, reconciling work of Christ.” In the life, death and resurrection of Christ, human beings were reconciled to God and each other. Christ brought people together in one faith and one baptism. Racism, on the other hand, defiles “the very body of Christ” because it prevents unity and reconciliation.⁶⁵⁸ The white DRCs in South Africa, Boesak insisted, “*willingly and purposefully* reject this unity and togetherness for reasons of racial prejudice.”

In his conclusion, Boesak challenged the WARC and its members to reject racism as a sin, declare apartheid to be irreconcilable with the Gospel of Jesus

⁶⁵⁶Boesak, *Black and Reformed*, 1984, 102.

⁶⁵⁷*Ibid.*, 104.

⁶⁵⁸*Ibid.*, 104-105.

Christ, support the WCC's Program to Combat Racism, and declare the situation a *status confessionis* by recognising "that apartheid is heresy, contrary to the gospel and inconsistent with the Reformed tradition." Using the words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Boesak told the WARC that it can no longer afford "not to act
5 and not take to take a stand," for to do so would be a "contradiction of love."

At the end of the meeting, the Alliance elected Boesak as President and adopted a detailed declaration on racism in South Africa in which it dismissed racism as an idolatry because it fostered a false sense of supremacy, it denied people's humanity, it contradicted Christ's reconciling work and destroyed unity
10 in the body of Christ:

The division of Reformed Churches in South Africa on the basis of race and colour is being defended as a faithful interpretation of the will of God and of the Reformed understanding of the Church in the world. This leads to the division of Christians at the table of the
15 Lord as a matter of practice and policy, which as been continually affirmed save for exceptional circumstances under special permission by the white Afrikaans Reformed Churches.⁶⁵⁹

The resolution went on to state that the assembly "felt duty-bound by the Gospel to raise our voice and stand by the oppressed" and that it should "draw a
20 clear line between truth and error." It reasoned that if the Alliance was going to remain faithful "to Jesus Christ it may have to reject the claims of an unjust or oppressive government and denounce Christians who aid and abet the oppressor. We believe that this is the situation in South Africa today." It accused the NGK and the NHK of justifying apartheid through the misuse of the Gospel and the
25 Reformed confessions. They concluded that apartheid was a travesty to the Gospel, a "persistent disobedience to the Word of God," and a "theological heresy."⁶⁶⁰

Because the white DRC refused to change its position concerning apartheid after numerous appeals by the Alliance, the WARC chose to suspend
30 the memberships of the NGK and the NHK until: a) these churches stopped

⁶⁵⁹de Gruchy and Villa-Vicencio, eds., *Apartheid is a Heresy*, 1983, 169.

⁶⁶⁰*Ibid.*, 170.

excluding black Christians from church services, b) they demonstrated support in word and deed for the oppressed, and c) they rejected apartheid and work actively toward its dissolution.

The NHK responded immediately to the WARC's decision by declaring that the Alliance "departed from its Reformed basis" in favour of a theology which: "politicises and socialises the person and work of Jesus Christ in a biased manner," "superficially manipulates" Scripture in order to make claims which have nothing to do with God, denies the totality of sin, and "neglects the call to faith in Jesus Christ as the only Saviour in favour of a summons to solidarity with a so-called liberation struggle."⁶⁶¹

With this view of the WARC's decision, the NHK predictably withdrew its membership and affirmed that "a political policy of separate development and equal opportunities is not in conflict with Holy Scripture." The NGK, the largest of the Reformed churches, decided not to willingly accept the termination of its membership; however, under the circumstances it regarded itself no longer a full member of the WARC. Of course, the NGSK, to which Boesak belongs, responded very differently than the other two Reformed churches by supporting the WARC decision and drafting its own confession.

Belhar Confession

The NGSK General Synod met one month after the Ottawa meeting. Although we do not have a transcript of Boesak's address, we are told that he played a significant role in pushing the Synod to adopt a new confession.⁶⁶² Like the WARC, the NGSK declared apartheid a *status confessionis*, meaning that they regarded this matter as a concern about which it was impossible to differ without affecting the integrity of the Gospel. It was no longer possible to support apartheid and still claim to be Christian. The Synod believed it necessary to follow this declaration with a new confession of faith that would articulate

⁶⁶¹Ibid., 173.

⁶⁶²Scholtz, *The Story of Allan Boesak*, 1989, 59.

their faith and testify more emphatically concerning the relevant aspects of the Gospel for this new situation.⁶⁶³

The confession consists of five articles with biblical affirmations and corresponding negations all focused around the themes of unity, reconciliation and justice. Concerning unity, it confesses “that Christ’s work of reconciliation is made manifest in the Church as the community of believers,” and that this unity must be made visible in the world in that the Church will actively “experience, practice, and pursue community.” It therefore rejects anything that breaks this visible and active unity in the Church. Concerning reconciliation, the confession affirms the Church is a “peace-maker” and allows “people to live in a new obedience which can open new possibilities of life for society and the world.” The confession rejects any doctrine which forces the separation of people because that would deny the ministry of the reconciliation of Christ. And finally, with regard to justice, the confession confirms that the God who has revealed himself in Christ is “in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor, and the wronged” and “calls his Church to follow him in this.” This means that the Church must therefore

stand by people in any form of suffering and need, which implies, among other things, that the Church must witness against and strive against any form of injustice. . .

The confession rejects, then,

*any ideology which would legitimate forms of injustice and any doctrine which is unwilling to resist such an ideology in the name of the gospel.*⁶⁶⁴

In 1986 Boesak became moderator of the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Sendingkerk (Dutch Reformed Mission Church). Two days after his election, the Synod overwhelmingly approved the Belhar Confession of Faith which they had drafted at its previous synod back in 1982, three months after the WARC declared apartheid a heresy.

⁶⁶³Smit, “What does a *Status Confessionis* Mean?,” and Durand, “A Confession—Was it Really Necessary?,” in Cloete and Smit, eds., *A Moment of Truth*, 1984, 31, 37.

⁶⁶⁴Cloete and Smit, eds., *A Moment of Truth*, 1984, 1-4.

Reactions and Criticisms

Not everyone at the NGSK Synod was pleased with the decision to publish the confession or with the accusations lobbied against the NGK. This was reflected in the vote on the motion to accuse the NGK of “theological heresy and idolatry.”⁶⁶⁵ The motion was carried by just 193 votes to 185.⁶⁶⁶ The dissatisfaction of the minority was also reflected in a sermon that Boesak preached the following year entitled “At the Risk of Unity.”⁶⁶⁷

10 Many in the church are greatly disturbed. Our unity is threatened, they say: let’s not fight among ourselves, let us leave others in peace. People are entitled to their opinions, they say: in the church we must talk, we must find one another, give one another room to differ . . . after all, we are in the church.⁶⁶⁸

In response Boesak argued that his personal intention, and the intention of the WARC as well as the NGSK, was not to destroy unity but to encourage true unity amongst the churches in South Africa by defending the Gospel message of reconciliation:

20 By making this statement have we chased the white church away? No, rather, this is what we have said: “Continue to participate in the community of the WARC. We do not wish to release you. We wish to hold on to you. We must, nevertheless, tell you unambiguously that the church has reached a point where it is necessary to state in unison, ‘apartheid must come to an end!’⁶⁶⁹

J. J. F. Durand clearly argues along the same lines:

25 Eventually the lines had to be drawn, the truth had to be attested with as much authority as man could master—not only for the sake of those who confess but also particularly *for the sake of those against whom they are confessing*. . . . The reproach that the DR Mission Church is endangering its unity with the DRC could only be valid if there were, in the first place, a true unity in the biblical sense. But it is no secret that it was precisely such a visible unity, one which would transcend all ethnic and cultural differences, that was turned down by the DRC: it refused to hear the plea for a larger and more visible embodiment of the highly acclaimed spiritual unity between the Dutch Reformed churches. The Belhar Confession risks the apparent unity for the sake of the truth, for 35 the sake of clearing the way for true unity.⁶⁷⁰

⁶⁶⁵de Gruchy and Villa-Vicencio, eds., *Apartheid is a Heresy*, 1983, 179.

⁶⁶⁶Scholtz, *The Story of Allan Boesak*, 1989, 59.

⁶⁶⁷Boesak, *Walking on Thorns*, 1984, 11-18.

⁶⁶⁸Ibid., 17.

⁶⁶⁹Boesak, *Black and Reformed*, 1984, 132.

⁶⁷⁰Durand, “A Confession—Was it Really Necessary,” in Cloete and Smit, eds., *A Moment of*

Boesak insists that “it was not the time for a private conversation, for cautious negotiation in order to reach a shallow compromise and present a united front to the church and the world.”⁶⁷¹ Instead it was time for the Church to make a clear choice, because the Gospel was at stake. Boesak compared this

5 situation to the confrontation between the apostle Paul and the Jewish Christians who insisted on the circumcision of the Gentiles. Paul openly resisted the idea that the Church could be divided into classes with one more acceptable to God than others. Paul fought for the unity of the Church and “the acceptance of all by all.” He struggled, Boesak says, “for true solidarity among the members of the

10 body of Christ, for genuine reconciliation, for the preservation of justice within the church, for the church as an example of love and justice and reconciliation in the world and as a sign of the kingdom of God.”⁶⁷² Paul openly rejected and confronted publicly those who insisted on a kind of unity for the Church which undermined human solidarity. Boesak concludes then that the churches of South

15 Africa must make the same clear choice and confront false unity, even if that choice means “that we must openly oppose those who try to protect oppression and injustice through the use of gospel words like ‘peace’, ‘reconciliation’ and ‘unity’.”⁶⁷³

Boesak also recognised that many people who were involved in the South

20 African confessing church movement, and even members of his own church, the NGSK, objected to the charge that apartheid is a heresy on the grounds that the term “heresy” shouldn’t be applied to a secular, political issue. To become the confessing Church, some felt the churches must make their confessions on theological grounds and not on ethical or political issues. To some degree we can

25 see this position in the Belhar Confession. The focus of the confession was on the

Truth, 1984, 38.

⁶⁷¹Boesak, *Walking on Thorns*, 1984, 14.

⁶⁷²*Ibid.*, 13.

⁶⁷³*Ibid.*, 17.

heresy in the *Church* and not on the political system. The letter that accompanied the confession expresses the spirit of the Draft Confession:

5 An act of confession may only be made by the Church for the sake of its purity and credibility and that of its message. As solemnly as we are able, we hereby declare before men that our only motive lies in our fear that the truth and power of the gospel itself is threatened in this situation. We do not wish to serve any group interests, advance the cause of any factions, promote any theologies, or achieve any ulterior purposes.⁶⁷⁴

10 Two of its signatories, professors Cloete and Smit, made it clear that they did not see the theology of apartheid and the political system itself as objects of the *status confessionis*.⁶⁷⁵ Smit rejected the idea that a political system could be a confessional question. He insisted that “in ethical matters, which include political and economic questions, the Church normally has other ways of making
15 resolutions, of speaking, and of acting,” and he pointed out that

20 it is a risky matter to reject a total socio-political ‘system’ on the strength of a Christian point of view, especially when such a rejection is interpreted as the rejection of almost any legislation, measure, or arrangement of the government in question and becomes nearly a license for all sorts of civil disobedience. To talk too easily of a government that has denied and therefore lost its God-given right to rule may be confusing and dangerously misleading.⁶⁷⁶

Smit made it very clear that “the Mission Church was not to be caught in the trap
25 of making a confession against a political system,” but against “a philosophy of life and a way of perceiving reality,” that had been “founded, motivated, and popularised out of the Word of God. The Church confesses against this. It is on account of this ‘doctrine,’ this ‘theology,’ this interpretation of the message of the Bible as it was put into daily practice that the DR Mission Church is
30 protesting and confessing.”⁶⁷⁷ Smit, then, was willing to challenge apartheid only as a church matter. It did not make sense to pronounce the secular apartheid system a heresy.

⁶⁷⁴Cloete and Smit, eds., *A Moment of Truth*, 1984, 5.

⁶⁷⁵Horn, “From Barmen to Belhar and Kairos,” in Villa-Vicencio, ed., *On Reading Karl Barth in South Africa*, 1988, 113-114.

⁶⁷⁶Smit, “What Does *Status Confessionis* Mean?,” in Cloete and Smit, eds., *A Moment of Truth*, 1984, 29.

⁶⁷⁷*Ibid.*, 30.

To some extent, we must agree with Smit, because both he and Boesak have insisted that apartheid was more than a political system. This enabled them to declare it a heresy. However, the difficulty with Smit's remarks is that they could be misinterpreted as a dismissal of any role of the Church or theology in the political arena. Boesak responded to such hesitation by stating that the intention of the charge against apartheid was not to enter politics but to remain true to the God's Word:

As representatives of black South African churches, we did not go to Ottawa in 1982 with political intentions. We went, rather, with our hearts in our hands and we said, "We wish to hear a word from the churches relative to what is being done in South Africa: not a word in the name of Marx or Lenin or Stalin or Mao; but, rather, a word in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the name of his church."⁶⁷⁸

Thomas Merton, in his theological study of nonviolent resistance, warns against the "ambiguity of an unclear and *confusing protest* that hardens the war-makers in their self-righteous blindness."⁶⁷⁹ He argues that protests should be neither "dramatic or superficial" nor "desperate and seemingly extreme," admitting that there may be need for dissent, but that dissent must be responsible. Protests must be "constructive, consistent and clear dissent that recalls people to their senses, makes them think deeply, plants in them a sea of change, and awakens in them the profound need for truth, reason and peace."⁶⁸⁰ However, the problem with dissent, Merton warns, is that protests often fall into what he analogically calls "political snake-handling." This is when politics becomes more of "an outlet for the indignation, the frustration, and the anxiety" of those who oppose a governmental policy than as a true process that is able to communicate and re-educate. The temptation is to use politics to get a reaction, rather than to use it for debate and discussion.

A lot of protests and demonstrations, even when they are perfectly valid and reasonable in themselves, take the form of political snake-handling. This, I submit, robs them of their real value,

⁶⁷⁸Boesak, *Black and Reformed*, 1984, 132.

⁶⁷⁹Merton, *Faith and Violence: Christian Teaching and Christian Practice*, 1968, 22.

⁶⁸⁰*Ibid.*, 43-44.

5 because it isolates our action and protest in a closed realm of images and idols which mean one thing to us and another to our adversaries. We no longer communicate. We abandon communication in order to celebrate our own favourite group-myths in a ritual pseudo-event.⁶⁸¹

We believe that Boesak also did not want the Church to become a “political snake-handler” when he insisted on charging apartheid with heresy. He has stated many times that it is not the Church’s responsibility to take over the political struggle or to meddle in party politics. Boesak told the students of 10 Victoria University in Toronto “that the gospel is free and not to be identified with any party ideology. For this reason the church should not become servant to any party or any ideological grouping. It must retain its critical distance simply because its loyalty is not to any party or grouping, but ultimately to the Lord and his kingdom.”⁶⁸² Elsewhere, he says that the Church cannot “be 15 absorbed by the world, or that the struggle dictate to the church . . . It is not a Christian struggle I am pleading for . . .”⁶⁸³ The focus of the struggle must be to inspire debate, communication, and the re-education of the public. For Boesak this is what the Church can do when it enters the struggle. It can help guide the struggle so that it re-educates the public. This is his intention when he writes:

20 In the heat of the struggle Christians today are called to be the light of the world. In the midst of the struggle we are called to be the embodiment of God’s ideal for this broken world. Christians must be there to represent God’s possibilities for authentic Christian love, meaningful reconciliation, and genuine peace. . . . the church [is] 25 to make a meaningful contribution in keeping God’s options open to those who in the thick of battle, because of their tears, their fear, or their anger, often fail to recognise these options.⁶⁸⁴

By being involved in the struggle, the Church may have to take risks or be involved in protests that confront the government, which Smit seems to be 30 afraid of. In situations where “the government makes a law that conflicts with the word of the Lord and requires of us conduct that conflicts with what we know

⁶⁸¹Ibid., 159. See also Mackie, *Civil Disobedience As Christian Obedience*, 1983, 14.

⁶⁸²Boesak, *If This is Treason, I am Guilty*, 1987, 17.

⁶⁸³Boesak, *Black and Reformed*, 1984, 24.

⁶⁸⁴Ibid.

to be Christian and human,” Boesak argues that the Church’s involvement “is an evangelical necessity.”⁶⁸⁵ The Church is called to make clear choices. He writes:

5 The God of the Bible is a God of such clear choices. He is called the God of the poor (Pss. 72, 82, 146) because he stands on the side of the poor, the oppressed, and the downtrodden. The church has no other option but to follow her Lord in this. This means that the church will have to make concrete political decisions and make clear political choices.⁶⁸⁶

It must make the same choices God makes. It cannot remain neutral.

10 Neutrality, Boesak says, “is the most abominable demonstration of partiality because it means choosing the side of power and injustice without assuming responsibility.”⁶⁸⁷ The confessing Church is to be socially critical so that it can explicitly relate the Word of God to the social and political context:

15 It is in this confrontation with the forces of evil who so vainly and falsely claim the name of Jesus Christ that the church in South Africa truly becomes a confessing church. But we understand that a confessing church is not simply a church with a confession. It is a church which stands by the demands of the gospel no matter what the demands of the “times,” the “situation,” or “the powers that be.”
20 It is a church which challenges the world, not on the basis of power or arrogance but on the basis of our understanding and sharing of the suffering of God’s children in the world. It is a church which learns to hear the voice of God in the cries of the suffering, the poor, and the oppressed. . . . We must challenge the forces of evil by
25 offering ourselves for the sake of that which is right and just.

Conclusion

In the early 1980s, Boesak wanted the churches of South Africa to recognise that apartheid was more than just a social, economic or political issue that affected South African society; it was also an ecclesial matter. He insisted,
30 along with many of his colleagues, that apartheid was not only a sinful policy but also a heresy that was dividing the Church and compromising its proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He thus sought the classification of apartheid as *status confessionis*. Apartheid violated the evangelical message of reconciliation between people, rendering that reconciliation impossible in
35 everyday life.

⁶⁸⁵Ibid., 133.

⁶⁸⁶Boesak, *If This is Treason, I am Guilty*, 1987, 17.

⁶⁸⁷Boesak, *Black and Reformed*, 1984, 134.

This is not a cheap reconciliation which will cover up the injustices that the South African government promotes, but true reconciliation can only take place when such injustices are confronted. Reconciliation “must be translated into terms of political, social, and economic justice.” Therefore he called the Church to “initiate and support meaningful pressure on the entrenched system, as a nonviolent way of bringing about change. The church must initiate and support programs of civil disobedience on a massive scale and challenge white Christians especially on this issue. It no longer suffices to make statements condemning unjust laws and then tomorrow to obey those laws as if nothing were amiss.” In other words, it is time for the Church “to obey God rather than man in South Africa.”⁶⁸⁸ This is where Boesak’s confessing theology turns into prophetic theology, which we now discuss.

Prophetic Theology and the Struggle in South Africa

It is not easy to distinguish confessing theology from prophetic theology, for it is commonly understood that when the Church formulates a confession it is at the same time being prophetic. However, de Gruchy has distinguished the two theologies in that prophetic theology goes beyond confessing theology. Like the latter, prophetic theology also wishes to separate the true Church from the false Church, but prophetic theology has a stronger passionate commitment to shape a just society. By prophetic theology de Gruchy means

a theology that is socially critical and “world transformative,” that is, one that explicitly relates the Word of God to the social and political context within which it is proclaimed.⁶⁸⁹

The problem with confessing theology, according to de Gruchy, is that although it unequivocally rejects a particular historical event, it often results “in a lack of concrete political commitment for fear of other forms of ideological captivity.”⁶⁹⁰ We can see this in Smit’s remarks. While rejecting apartheid, he

⁶⁸⁸Ibid., 30-31.

⁶⁸⁹de Gruchy, *Liberating Reformed Theology*, 1991, 19.

⁶⁹⁰de Gruchy, “Theology in Transition in South Africa,” in *Modern Theology*, 9:2 April 1993, 202.

also was unwilling to approve of civil disobedience. This shows us that he failed to make that important step that calls for historical action and offers a challenge to the political system directly. This was also the weakness of the Barmen Confession according to E. Bethge. The confession was more concerned with the inadmissible interference of the state in Church affairs than it was with specific political issues.⁶⁹¹ Although the Barmen Declaration addressed the heresy of Nazi ideology, it did not deal concretely and specifically with anti-Semitism and other problems in Nazi society. The confession was too vague, allowing for very different interpretations of its text. Hunsinger tells us Barth consistently interpreted the Confession “as a mandate for political resistance, while the Confessing Church sought refuge in the vagueness of the letter.”⁶⁹² This discrepancy in interpretation allowed some Christians to remain neutral with respect to the Nazi regime.

Prophetic theology goes beyond confessional theology because it is more concerned with specific political commitments. It challenges, confronts, and attempts to re-educate. We see this in the *Kairos Document* of 1985. This document does not present itself as a church confession but as “a Christian, biblical and theological comment on the political crisis in South Africa today.”⁶⁹³ The difference between the Barmen and Belhar Confessions on the one hand, and the Kairos document on the other, is that the Kairos Document is more contextual, meaning it deals specifically with particular issues. For example, the Belhar Confession addresses the issues of unity, reconciliation and justice within the Church and South African society, but contains no direct reference to the ideology of apartheid and indicates the historical circumstances by way of footnote only. The Kairos Document, on the other hand, while also addressing the themes of unity, reconciliation and justice, deals more specifically with

⁶⁹¹Smit, “What Does *Status Confessionis* Mean?,” in Cloete and Smit, eds., *A Moment of Truth*, 1984, 26.

⁶⁹²Hunsinger, “Barth, Barmen and the Confessing Church Today,” *Katallagete*, Fall 1987, 11.

⁶⁹³*The Kairos Document*, printed in Brown, *Kairos*, 1990, 24.

conflict, divisions and confrontations in both the Church and society by outlining what it calls State Theology, Church Theology, and Prophetic Theology. The Kairos Document describes how the Church is divided against itself in terms of the way in which it perceives and responds to the critical public and political questions of the day, while the Belhar Confession is more concerned with the heresies of the Church and is not specifically concerned with political choices which divide it.⁶⁹⁴ Nico Horn, in his comparison of the Barmen and Belhar Confessions and the Kairos Document, tells us that the Kairos Document is an open document which forms “a basis for further discussion by all Christians in the country,” while Barmen and Belhar attempt to speak a final word on heresies in the Church.⁶⁹⁵

The Kairos Document names seven characteristics of prophetic theology. It will: impel us “*to return to the Bible*”; “*read the signs of the times*”; always be a “*call to action*” that encourages repentance, conversion and change; always be “*confrontational*” and insist that “a church that takes its responsibilities seriously in the circumstances will sometimes have to confront and to disobey the State in order to obey God”; emphasise “*hope*”; deep “*spirituality*”; and lastly, it will be “*pastoral*” in that it will name the sins and evils that surround the people. It will identify the injustices and oppressions and demonstrate that it knows the experience of the people.⁶⁹⁶ While the Barmen and Belhar Confessions certainly contain most of these features, they do lack the “call to action” and the “confrontational” element that make them truly prophetic. Their descriptions of the political situation are not as specific as they could be, and thus they take a less than radical approach in offering a world transformative theology. They are reserved because of the risks that truly prophetic theology has.

⁶⁹⁴de Gruchy, *Liberating Reformed Theology*, 1991, 218-225.

⁶⁹⁵Horn, “From Barmen to Belhar and Kairos,” in Villa-Vicencio, ed., *On Reading Karl Barth in South Africa*, 1988, 119.

⁶⁹⁶*The Kairos Document*, in Brown, *Kairos*, 1990, 49-50.

In his book *Liberating Reformed Theology*, de Gruchy discusses the dangers of prophetic theology:

5 It is inevitably a risky business taking prophetic responsibility seriously because it entails consciously taking sides, eschewing neutrality, and making value judgements. . . . Prophetic responsibility is thus not avoiding conflict but participating in it in a way consonant with God's kingdom.⁶⁹⁷

The problem with prophetic theology is that it may easily degenerate into self-righteous triumphalism. It could very well become, de Gruchy explains, a closed,
10 sectarian ideology which masks reality in the interests of a particular social program. We have already seen how Merton had these same concerns.

In the 1970s it appears that Boesak leaned toward the Black Consciousness Movement and black theology. In the early to mid-1980s, the focus of his
15 theological energies was more on fundamentally changing the internal politics of the Dutch Reformed Churches and thus he asked what it meant for the Church to confess the Lordship of Jesus Christ. In this way he was driven to undermine the DRC's theological backing for the apartheid state. He therefore challenged and confronted the Church for its continued justification of and initial
20 suggestion to the government to establish apartheid in the 1940s. By the mid-1980s to the end of the decade, however, we see Boesak's theology changing again. He redirects his theology and broadens his framework from "black" to "oppressed," and from "Reformed" to "Christian"; thus, we discover him shifting toward a theology less concerned with BC and a confessing theology that is concerned with heresy and ecclesial matters, toward a prophetic theology that is
25 concerned with social justice. In 1987 he argued:

30 It is a question of not really shifting from Black and Reformed to Black and Christian, but from Black and Reformed to oppressed and Christian, because the oppression is suffered by Christians, and the oppression is sometimes perpetrated by Christians. And that is why Black and Reformed can no longer deal with what we have here today. So we talk about Theology for Justice.⁶⁹⁸

⁶⁹⁷de Gruchy, *Liberating Reformed Theology*, 1991, 20-21.

⁶⁹⁸Boesak, "Theology for Justice" speech presented at Stony Point, New York, 2 March 1987.

It has been said that through his many sermons, Boesak has offered not only South Africa a prophetic voice but the world as well. We can see this when he describes the responsibility of the Church:

5 It is therefore the task of the church and the Christian to take an active part in the shaping of structures so that justice will be done to our fellow human beings and the honour of God will be upheld. The church cannot accept sinful structures as if they come from God and nothing can be done about them. We are called, rather, to challenge human history, to shape, undermine, and change it until
10 it conforms to the norms of the kingdom of God.⁶⁹⁹

Boesak insists that the Church must challenge the South African government by making political choices and demonstrating support of acts of civil disobedience. Then the question before us is: Is Boesak being prophetic or does his theology simply serve the self-interests of a particular group, race, gender or class in
15 ways contrary to the Gospel? In the last chapter we tried to answer this question by showing how in relation to black theology, Boesak wanted to serve the interests of the Gospel rather than the interests of a particular group, race or class. But now we wish to discuss this question in relation to his call for confrontation through acts of civil disobedience, because it seems at this point
20 he comes closest to the dangers that de Gruchy mentions.

In the early and mid-1980s, Boesak himself participated in several demonstrations and political protests. In 1983 he gave one of the major presentations at the founding of the UDF, and in 1985 as the government increased the power of South African Defence Force (SADF) and revived the State
25 Security Council (SSC), Boesak marched with other church leaders on Parliament to protest the abuse of the security forces.

On 21 March 1985, the police opened fire on a crowd of mourners in the Langa township of Uitenhage, killing twenty. Five days later black church leaders held a service in Cape Town to commemorate the deaths. After the
30 service they decided to march to present to the State President the demands of the people of Uitenhage. In response to this protest and to the rising township

⁶⁹⁹Boesak, *If This is Treason, I am Guilty*, 1987, 15.

activism and the call by the ANC for a mass uprising, on 20 July, 1985 the South African government declared a partial state of emergency, which gave the police and related security forces virtually unlimited powers in thirty-six of South Africa's 266 magisterial districts. Within eight months, more than eight thousand people were detained without charge, including over half of the UDF's national and local officials.⁷⁰⁰

In August of 1985, Boesak called for a mass march on Pollsmoor Prison to demand the release of Nelson Mandela. Boesak was arrested. People were tear-gassed and beaten by the police, and hundreds were arrested.

10 It was to these events that Boesak called for civil disobedience and for the churches to pray for the downfall of the South African government.

Boesak's Theological Rationale for Civil Disobedience

When Boesak called for civil disobedience, he called for it with the belief that it was an alternative to the violence that he saw all around him. In an open letter to the Minister of Justice of South Africa, Boesak wrote that this call "is precisely an alternative to violence! And I turn to this alternative because I still find it difficult to accept violence as an unobjectionable solution."⁷⁰¹ For Boesak, civil disobedience is basically noncooperation. It is refusing to participate in a system or with a government that uses violence to impose its will on the people.

20 Boesak believes that to resist the government is to resist violence.

Saying "yes" to cooperation with the very government that maintains this violent system without first fundamentally changing it is taking responsibility for the continuation of the violence. The choice for violence, therefore, has not been made by those who resist the perpetuation of the system in hope of working for a better society, but precisely by those who have abandoned the struggle for a better society by strengthening the present one.⁷⁰²

Civil disobedience is noncooperation with the laws that disrupt society. Boesak asks: "If we condemn laws on the grounds of the word of God, how can we obey those laws?" He says, "it no longer suffices to make statements condemning

⁷⁰⁰Marx, *Lessons of Struggle*, 1991, 159.

⁷⁰¹Boesak, *Black and Reformed*, 1984, 35.

⁷⁰²Boesak, *If This is Treason, I am Guilty*, 1987, 26-27.

unjust laws and then tomorrow to obey those laws as if nothing were amiss. The time has come for the black church to tell the government and its supporters: we can not in all good conscience obey your unjust laws, because non-cooperation with evil is as much a moral obligation as is cooperation with good.”⁷⁰³ Thus, in answer to his own question: “Is there an obligation of obedience to a government that makes unjust laws . . . Do I have the right to resist?”⁷⁰⁴, Boesak states that Christians and the churches cannot be obedient to God and to an unjust government at the same time. Christians must choose, and if they choose to be obedient to God they must resist the government through nonviolent acts of noncooperation.

The Scriptures, Boesak tells us, are filled with instances where people resisted state authority because it would require disloyalty to God’s will. For example, Boesak tells us that Jesus refused to cooperate when Herod and also Pilate questioned him. Peter also refused to obey the commands of the Sanhedrin not to give witness to Jesus. Instead, Peter replied: “We must obey God rather than men.” Boesak insists that these are not “proof” that “violent, revolutionary overthrow of a government is justifiable,” but rather that “blind obedience to civil authorities is alien to the Bible; and that for the Christian loyalty and obedience to God are first and foremost.”⁷⁰⁵

Even Romans 13, according to Boesak, is not a justification for complete obedience to government laws regardless of the ethical consequences, as the white leadership in the government and churches have thought. Boesak teaches that Romans 13, verse 1, is in fact a “sharp criticism on government power.” The words “for there is no authority except that which God has established” does not mean that a particular form of government comes from God, but rather that the power and the authority which a government represents is established by God. It is the voters who are responsible for a particular government, not God. God is

⁷⁰³Boesak, *Black and Reformed*, 1984, 36, 31.

⁷⁰⁴Boesak, *The Finger of God*, 1987, 4.

⁷⁰⁵Boesak, *Black and Reformed*, 1984, 36-37.

responsible for giving “authority” to a government. All governments have power and authority because, and as long as, they reflect the authority of God. This was true of the kingship of Israel, and it is still true today. A king was king as long as he represented the presence of God’s liberating justice and

5 humanising power in the midst of the people—especially the poor and oppressed.

The *expectation* was that a ruler should reflect the rule of God, that the ruler be a shepherd of the people who would, in the words of Ezekiel, bind up the crippled, feed the hungry, seek the strayed, strengthen the weak.⁷⁰⁶

10 Paul, then, is describing what a government ought to be — “God’s servant for your good.” Therefore, it is no surprise that Paul asks Christians to submit to this authority. By the word submit, Boesak tells us, Paul does not mean “blind, unquestioning obedience” to any government but rather to “*order ourselves under*” a just government. Commenting on Paul’s use of the Greek word

15 *hypotassesthô*, Lehmann writes:

Hypotassesthô, translated as *order yourself under* instead of *submit*, rescues *submit*, and *submission* from their time-honoured association with passivity and gives them a meaning at once more active and purposed. Thus revolutionaries, *in ordering themselves under*, are *not* passively submitting to established power. On the

20 contrary, they are expressing the power intrinsic to their historical vocation and destiny: the power of the human reality of freedom in an unmasking action that exposes who the bearers of true freedom in the world are.⁷⁰⁷

25 In other words, Paul requires that Christians order themselves under authorities who are God’s ministers. In this sense Christians have an active part to play and a responsibility to fulfil. They have a service to the state. Christians must make sure that their government “is and should always be in the service of God” and engaged in what Barth called “political worship of God.”⁷⁰⁸ Barth maintains that

30 “the last thing this instruction [Romans 13:1-7] implies is that the Christian community and the Christian should offer the blindest possible obedience to the civil community and its officials.” He continues:

⁷⁰⁶Boesak and Villa-Vicencio, eds., *When Prayer Makes News*, 1986, 144.

⁷⁰⁷Lehmann, *The Transfiguration of Politics*, 1975, 302-303, n. 45.

⁷⁰⁸Boesak and Villa-Vicencio, eds., *When Prayer Makes News*, 1986, 149.

5 What is meant is (Romans. 13.6f.) that Christians should carry out what is required of them for the establishment, preservation and maintenance of the civil community and for the execution of its task, because, although they are Christians and, as such, have their home elsewhere, they also live in this outer circle. Jesus Christ is still its centre: they too are responsible for its stability.⁷⁰⁹

It is important to note Barth's final comment that Christians are responsible for the stability of society. Christians must resist the state if it proves to be unjust. As Barth pointed out this is not resistance *against* the state; it is the church's service *for* the state. Standing up against the evil power is to remind the people and the state of what government ought to be. As Barth says:

15 Christians would, in point of fact, become enemies of any state if, when the state threatens their freedom, they did not resist, or if they concealed their resistance, although this resistance would be very calm and dignified. . . . If the state has perverted its God-given authority, it cannot be honoured better than by this criticism which is due it in all circumstances.⁷¹⁰

Romans 13, then, does not just simply point out that civil authority exists, nor does it ask for blind obedience, but rather, according to Boesak, it suggests that there is proper authority only where there is clear distinction between good and evil. Boesak argues that Romans 13 offers a way to test the legitimacy of a government:

25 [Romans 13] suggests that there is proper authority only where there is a clear distinction between good and evil, so that it is not only important whether a government is "Christian" or not, but really whether it is still truly *government*—that is, understands the difference between good and evil. Where there is not justice and no understanding, the authority of the government is no longer derived from God, but is in conflict with God. Resistance to such a government is both demanded and justified.⁷¹¹

This idea is not new to the Reformed tradition. Calvin wrote in the prologue of his *Institutes*: "For where the glory of God is not made the end of the government, it is not a legitimate sovereignty, but a usurpation." This, of course, means the Church must decide when the actions of the government are in conflict with the Word of God. In this decision the Church, Boesak argues, must

⁷⁰⁹Barth, "The Christian Community and the Civil Community," *Against the Stream*, 1954, 24.

⁷¹⁰Barth, *Community, State, and Church*, 1960, 139.

⁷¹¹Boesak, *Black and Reformed*, 1984, 38.

consider the Word itself, with its demands for justice and peace, and it must also consider the experiences of the poor and oppressed. It must consider those “who are hurt at the deepest level of their being: those who suffer, those who have no voice—the oppressed, the ‘least of these my brethren.’”⁷¹² The Church must therefore challenge the world, not on the basis of power but on the basis of its understanding and sharing of the suffering of the poor and oppressed in the world.

During the state of emergency in 1985, Boesak therefore concluded the Church is called to civil disobedience:

10 As long as the South African government continues its oppressive policies, its murderous violence against innocent people, its blatant exploitation of the poor; as long as it persists in its disobedience to God, in its refusal to listen to his word, the church shall have no option. It is our duty to resist.⁷¹³

15 After two state of emergencies in the mid-1980s in which over 37,000 people were detained by the government, many church leaders were concluding with Boesak that the “South African government is neither just nor legitimate. In its ongoing oppression and exploitation of the people, in its wanton violence in order to maintain the system, in its persistent disobedience of the word of God, this government can no longer claim to be the ‘servant of God of your good.’ . . . It is our responsibility—indeed, our duty—to resist this government.”⁷¹⁴

A Call to Prayer for the End of Unjust Rule

As the violence and counterviolence increased, the SACC found it necessary to respond. In 1984, Boesak addressed the SACC National Conference arguing:

30 What the poor need is not more charity or emergency aid, not more sermons or resolutions, but a qualitatively different society. This is what the church must work for, knowing that this is the call of the gospel. What the poor need in this country is not meaningless reforms but a new government that will love justice, hate evil, and do what is right for all the people of South Africa. This present government does not seem able to do this, and therefore, as I did in

⁷¹²*Ibid.*, 39.

⁷¹³Boesak and Villa-Vicencio, eds., *When Prayer Makes News*, 1986, 154.

⁷¹⁴*Ibid.*, 151.

1978, I again call on all Christians and churches to set aside a day on which to pray for the downfall of this government. If the rulers will not hear the cries of the people, if they will not change, if they continue to prevent justice, let us pray them out of existence. God will hear our cry.⁷¹⁵

In response to Boesak's address, the conference adopted a resolution calling on the churches to pray "for the abolition of all apartheid structures." Later the SACC changed its language and spoke of prayers for "the end to unjust rule." This eventually resulted in the establishment of ecumenical working groups of leading theologians, church leaders, and grassroots Christians from all areas of the country to prepare a theological statement in defence of such prayer. The group drafted the *Theological Rationale and a Call to Prayer for the End of Unjust Rule*, which called all Christians to pray that God would "remove from power those who persist in defying his laws" on 16 June 1985—the anniversary of 16 June 1976 when approximately 700 people were killed in Soweto.⁷¹⁶

On that day memorial services were held throughout the country. In Cape Town a service held specifically to pray for the end of unjust rule was attended by approximately 3000 people. Boesak delivered the main address, entitled "In the Name of Jesus." Preaching from Acts 4:12—"Salvation is found in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved," Boesak told his audience that this verse outlines the basis of Christian faith and Christian obedience. "It is the foundation of the risk that Christians must take in the world, the foundation of all action by Christians in the world."⁷¹⁷ When Christians act, they always act in the name of Jesus. It is the same name in which the prophets stood up and spoke to the people and the rulers. It is in this name that the prophets spoke out against the oppression and violence of unjust rulers, because "This is the name which proclaims sight for the blind, liberty for the captives, and good news for the poor. This name is

⁷¹⁵Ibid., 16.

⁷¹⁶Ibid., 15-22.

⁷¹⁷Ibid., 32.

power and love, justice and mercy.”⁷¹⁸ It is also in this name that Christians today take action in the form of prayer against the South African government.

5 Yes, the name of Jesus Christ brings healing, the name of Jesus Christ brings power, the name of Jesus Christ brings transformation in the world; but it also brings confrontation with the powers of evil in this world.⁷¹⁹

10 Because in the name of Jesus the world is disturbed and challenged to be converted and transformed, confrontation with powers in the world that refuse this transformation is inevitable. Christ confronts the world so that “no longer hatred but love shall rule, no longer fear but boldness shall rule, no longer injustice but justice shall rule.” Powers or governments which resist this challenge because they “are built upon injustice must be ended,” argues Boesak. They must be confronted in the name of Jesus.

15 Boesak recognises that of course the name of Jesus Christ can be abused. It can be used to forsake the poor, the weak and the needy, as is the case of the history of the Christian Church. The Church too often is a place “where the poor no longer felt either comfort in their deepest need or challenge to their oppression. Neither did they find inspiration to rise up against it.” In the name of Jesus, too often the Church has justified injustice, division, economic
20 exploitation and racism. In South Africa the government has used the name of Jesus in an attempt to show that it is a Christian government. It believes it is upholding Christian principles, because the laws are believed to be based on the Word of God. In this case, the name of Jesus is used by a particular class, group or race to justify exploitation, suffering and killing. The name of Jesus is not a
25 name of liberation, love, compassion, justice or peace; instead, it is a name that is used for a bourgeois individualism which cloaks itself in individual selfishness at the expense of the poor and oppressed.

Boesak tells us that to know the name of Jesus is to know about peace, justice and how to “stand up and fight.” Boesak is clear that this does not mean

⁷¹⁸Ibid., 34.

⁷¹⁹Ibid., 37.

violence. This fight does not mean that the oppressed will take up guns against the government, or that people will go out on the streets to shoot people. Boesak says he does not believe “in the power of violence” but in the “power of prayer.”⁷²⁰ To know the name of Jesus is to know how to pray “for the crumbling of unjust structures.”⁷²¹ Of course, for Boesak this prayer does not mean being silent or complacent, but it means opening oneself to be used by God. It means communicating, re-educating, and building a land where people can live together in peace and where God’s kingdom is established.⁷²²

Conclusion

10 In his study on civil disobedience, Charles Villa-Vicencio discusses two Church traditions. In relation to history and politics, the Church on the one hand has provided legitimation of many corrupt political systems, but on the other hand groups within it have also rejected rulers by affirming the rule of God. For the first three centuries the Church exhibited revolutionary

15 characteristics. It consisted of socially deprived people who were thought by the rulers to be politically subversive. Certainly their conviction that God would imminently intervene in history led to a certain degree of political indifference, but it also accounts for their uncompromising obedience to God, with martyrdom regarded as an opportunity to become a disciple of Christ. But after the Edict of

20 Milan in 313 CE. when Christianity became state religion, the Church was transformed from an impoverished social entity into a community of wealth and power. With this transformation Christianity came to be an important part of the ideological framework that at times indiscriminately legitimated the existence of ruthless regimes which claimed to uphold Christian principles.⁷²³

25 It is the *alternative prophetic tradition*, that Villa-Vicencio speaks of, that captures our interest here. He has identified the essence of this tradition:

⁷²⁰Ibid., 35.

⁷²¹Ibid., 39.

⁷²²Ibid.

⁷²³Villa-Vicencio, *Civil Disobedience and Beyond*, 1990, 104-105.

5 Despite its captivity to dominant or ruling-class ideologies within successive ages, the church never quite managed to deny or suppress a residual revolutionary theology in favour of the poor and oppressed - traceable back to its earliest history. This is what
 10 has already (in accordance with the teaching of Metz) been called a “dangerous memory” which contradicts the church’s social location in society, accounting for marginalised groups within the church being susceptible to revolutionary impulses. It also provides a theological basis for Christians challenging the
 15 legitimacy of rules and the fidelity of laws that violate social justice, good order and the well-being of the people.⁷²⁴

Boesak is part of this tradition. He attempts to take into account marginalised people and challenge the South African government by affirming the rule of God and the Lordship of Christ. He weighs obedience to the government and its
 15 political system against obedience to God and the fundamental needs of the people. He affirms a preferential option for the poor and the oppressed. In this way he is being prophetic. If we follow the characteristics of prophetic theology that have been outlined in the Kairos Document, we will see that Boesak has addressed each category in his many speeches and sermons. First, “prophetic
 20 theology concentrates on those aspects of the Word of God that have an immediate bearing upon the critical situation in which we find ourselves.”⁷²⁵ Dwight Hopkins, in his survey of South African theologians, has said that “Boesak had dedicated his entire theology and ministry to the sovereignty of the Word of God.”⁷²⁶ Boesak has confessed that the most important thing “is the
 25 principle of the supremacy of the word of God. In the Reformed tradition it is the word of God that gives life to our words.”⁷²⁷ Boesak recognises that the Bible does not speak to every political or economic issue, but it does speak to the whole of human existence and can speak to particular circumstances of a particular time and place.

⁷²⁴Ibid., 105.

⁷²⁵*The Kairos Document*, in Brown, *Kairos*, 1990, 49.

⁷²⁶Hopkins, *Black Theology: USA and South Africa*, 1990, 105.

⁷²⁷Boesak, *Black and Reformed*, 1984, 87.

Second, prophetic theology reads the signs of the times. It attempts to analyse what is happening and then interprets those events in the light of the Gospel. Boesak believes it is important to have a proper social analysis:

5 We must make a proper social analysis. I believe that as real and as ugly as racism is in our country, it is not the only question nor is it the ultimate question. . . . But beyond the question of race lies the economic question. . . . If we do not take cognisance of the economic question, liberation theology will fizzle out.⁷²⁸

10 In our analysis we have also seen that Boesak's theology is a *call to action* and is also *confrontational*. Boesak often calls his listeners to repentance, conversion and change. He is severely critical of the status quo and is not afraid to take a stand, clearly and unambiguously. He deals with justice and injustice and is willing to be controversial.

15 Lastly, he offers a word of hope in circumstances that would be easier to condemn with warnings of doom. Right after he was released from spending three weeks in prison, Boesak preached a sermon saying:

20 I can tell you this now with more conviction than ever before. He who believes, she who believes and works for justice and for peace will never be alone. You will never be alone because Jesus promised that whatever happens, he will never leave us alone. Even the darkness of a cell in solitary confinement. So let us believe and not despair. Let us believe and work for justice. Let us believe and seek peace. Let us believe and challenge evil in this world. Let us believe and build together a community of love and joy and power and liberation.⁷²⁹

25

Conclusion

Boesak's theology went through three stages, black theology, confessing theology and prophetic theology, with each in relation to politics. In the first stage Boesak tried to show that black theology was a more adequate expression of the Gospel because it was concerned with the poor and oppressed, and thus it was an all-inclusive theology. He was not simply concerned that black and white people share racial fellowship in Christ's love, but that all people are liberated.

⁷²⁸Boesak, "Liberation Theology in South Africa," in Pan African Conference of Third World Theologians, *African Theology En Route*, 1979, 175.

⁷²⁹Boesak, *If This is Treason, I am Guilty*, 1987, 116-117.

“Black Theology is a theology of liberation,” in Boesak’s words. In the second stage he developed a confessing theology for South Africa. In this stage he attacked the theology of the white churches from within the ecclesial tradition and built upon the radical theological strands in church history. In the final

5 stage, prophetic theology, Boesak tried to formulate a world transformative theology, one that would address both the spiritual and political needs of South Africa. In this stage he invited people to action and to show their obedience to God instead of remaining neutral or silent in front of an illegitimate

10 government. Boesak represents the black political theological tradition in South Africa. He incorporated an argument against a theology of apartheid; sought liberation through a nonracial theology; promoted liberation theology, which extends beyond black theology to all the oppressed; and maintained that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white.

3.4 CRITICISMS OF BLACK LIBERATION THEOLOGY

Criticisms of Second Generation of Black Theologians

To put the criticisms of black theology into perspective, we must first understand that like Latin American liberation theology, South African black theology has many different strands. Boesak's theology represents just one of these strands. Most commentators on black theology divide its theologians into two groups—first and second generation. In the first group there are Boesak, Tutu, Buthelezi and Maimela, and in the second there are Mosala, Tlhagale and Mofokeng. What distinguishes these groups is how much they have allowed the Charterist or Black Consciousness Movement to influence their work and how much use they make of a Marxist social analysis. Bonganjalo Goba, a first generation theologian whose ideas are more aligned with second generation thinkers, draws our attention to this distinction.

Goba tells us that the difference of opinion between these two strands of black theology parallels divisions between the National Forum and the United Democratic Front (UDF). While both movements are committed to the liberation struggle, they differ both in terms of ideology and strategy.

The UDF is more inclined to a broad political vision of a democratic society reflecting certain basic tenets of the Freedom Charter. As far as its strategy is concerned it is an open one in which all progressive democrats participate irrespective of race, religion or class. On the other hand the National Forum is inclined to a Pan-Africanist ideology reflecting an exclusive kind of black nationalism and a strategy that excludes whites as participants in the revolutionary process.⁷³⁰

The National Forum (NF) was organised in 1983 as a national front against the government's new constitutional reforms, similar to the way UDF was created. But NF was established by the Azanian Peoples Organisation (AZAPO) and shares that organisation's Black Consciousness (BC) philosophy of conscientisation and commitment to the uniqueness of the black experience. Although NF is not as

⁷³⁰Goba, "The Black Consciousness Movement: Its Impact on Black Theology," in Mosala and Tlhagale, eds., *The Unquestionable Right to be Free*, 1986, 64.

exclusive as Goba makes it to be, the organisation did, however, restrict its membership to affiliates that were predominantly black. It excluded mainly white organisations because of the historical role whites played in black politics as neutralisers of black opinion and aspirations (see Section 3.1).

5 Goba tells us that the ideology of BC forms the essence of his political vision and understanding of the black struggle in South Africa.⁷³¹ Therefore, we perceive a basic presupposition to Goba's theology. He believes that black theology must continue to be informed by BC because that movement correctly understands the struggle which the black people face and the nature of the

10 South African social order. Goba, therefore, relies strongly on the particularity and uniqueness of the black experience for the development of a black liberation theology.⁷³² He exhorts those theologians who understand the black experience as simply part of the general experiences of the poor and oppressed class:

15 Those who view the black problem as part of the general problem of class oppression make a big mistake—they tragically underestimate the uniqueness of the black situation and experience as a whole. Black Consciousness poses a challenge to Black Theology because of its commitment to the uniqueness of black experience.⁷³³

20 Goba, therefore, is critical of Boesak because of the broadening of his framework from "black" to "oppressed" and the shift toward a theology of justice for all of South Africa. Boesak has written:

25 Is racism indeed the only *issue*? It seems to us that there is a far deeper malady in the American and South African societies that manifests itself in the form of racism. The deepest motivation of the Portuguese in Southern Africa was not racism. Nor is racism the deepest motivation of the economic colonialism of the United States in Latin America, or of the multinationals all over the "Third World." . . . [The issue is] the relation between racism and

30 capitalism.⁷³⁴

⁷³¹Ibid., 66.

⁷³²Hopkins, *Black Theology USA and South Africa*, 1989, 124.

⁷³³Goba, "The Black Consciousness Movement," in Mosala and Tlhagale, eds., *The Unquestionable Right to be Free*, 1986, 67.

⁷³⁴Boesak, *Farewell to Innocence*, 1986, 148-149.

As we said in previous sections Boesak became more and more concerned with the liberation of the poor and oppressed and less with the uniqueness of the black experience. He wanted to establish a link between black theology and Latin American liberation theology. Goba's criticisms are not specifically

5 against Boesak's class analysis, nor does he disagree with Boesak's concern for the oppressed. Goba is concerned that Boesak sacrifices the black experience and the importance of black culture in an attempt to create a theology of the oppressed that will fail to speak to the black community. He accuses Boesak of trying to remain nonideological and disagrees with Boesak's statement:

10 "Christian faith transcends all ideologies and all nationalistic ideals. It transcends specific groups and nations within specific ideals and interests."⁷³⁵ To this Goba replies: "This to my mind reflects a profound misunderstanding of the nature of a theological hermeneutic, a dangerous ahistorical perspective which contradicts Allan Boesak's view of the black experience."⁷³⁶

15 Itumeleng Mosala, another South African theologian, is also critical of Boesak for not being concerned with the history and culture of the *black* poor and oppressed. Agreeing with Goba, Mosala maintains that "Black Theology is actually the theological version of Black Consciousness," and the two cannot be separated.⁷³⁷ He asserts that those who

20 are committed to the struggles of the black oppressed and exploited people cannot ignore the history, culture, and ideologies of the dominated black people as their primary hermeneutical starting point. There can be no Black theology of Liberation and no corresponding biblical hermeneutics of liberation outside of the

25 black struggle for both survival and liberation. Such a struggle, however, requires being as clear about issues in the black community as possible.⁷³⁸

⁷³⁵Ibid., 121.

⁷³⁶Goba, "The Black Consciousness Movement," in Mosala and Tlhagale, eds., *The Unquestionable Right to be Free*, 1986, 65.

⁷³⁷Interview with Hopkins, December 1986, in Hopkins, *Black Theology USA and South Africa*, 1989, 129.

⁷³⁸Mosala, "The Use of the Bible in Black Theology," in Mosala and Tlhagale, eds., *The Unquestionable Right to be Free*, 1986, 197.

Mosala is concerned with religious fundamentalism of both the right (conservative) and the left (liberal). According to his thesis, Boesak's and Tutu's theologies suffer from a "liberal" fundamentalism because they fail to take the black community and its history, culture and ideologies seriously. He argues that they incorrectly assume a "high" doctrine of scriptural authority which they combine with an uncritical reading of certain biblical texts. These texts are regarded as hermeneutical keys to the entire message of the Bible. Mosala explains, "not that Boesak and other black theologians are mistaken in finding a liberating message in the Bible," but that "the category of the Word of God does not help to bring out the real nature of the biblical liberation because it presumes that liberation exists everywhere and unproblematically in the Bible."⁷³⁹ First generation black theologians cannot interpret the Bible in light of the black experience, because they are enslaved "to the wider neo-orthodox theological problematic that regards the notion of the Word of God as a hermeneutical starting point." First generation black theologians, therefore, make the Bible into "an ahistorical, interclassist document" that "transcends social, political, racial, sexual, and economic divisions."⁷⁴⁰ They fail to deal with the ideological conflicts within Scripture properly, and they fail to identify the oppressor in the text because their theologies are ideologically captive to the hermeneutics of Western theology. Quoting Karl Marx, Mosala has said that black theology "has not yet become a material force because it has not gripped the masses."⁷⁴¹ Mosala, therefore, wants to search for an appropriate biblical hermeneutic which deals with the black struggle for liberation more satisfactorily.

What Mosala says about Boesak's hermeneutical approach is correct. Boesak does not offer a materialist reading of the Bible. He does not examine the biblical text to discover its economic and sociological contexts so that he can find

⁷³⁹Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology in South Africa*, 1989, 20.

⁷⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 17-18.

⁷⁴¹*Ibid.*, 14.

the Bible's different ideological trajectories that are in conflict with each other. Instead, Boesak tries to confirm, incorrectly in Mosala's opinion, the importance of the black experience and also the significance of the Word of God at the same time. His approach is contextual, meaning he begins all his work by looking at a particular situation and then proceeds to come to terms with it theologically.⁷⁴² He argues that the Gospel needs to be interpreted in such a way that it makes sense to blacks in their poverty and oppression. It needs to become a part of the black struggle toward liberation. In this way, Boesak wishes to establish his theological viewpoint in contrast to a contextual elitist theology. Authentic theology must be done in the context of those who are struggling for a just society. However, in *Farewell to Innocence*, Boesak is also careful not to attach "too much theological import to the black experience and the black situation as if these realities within themselves have revelational value on a par with Scripture."⁷⁴³ Boesak argues that although it is true that the black situation is the situation where critical reflection and action can take place, God's Word illuminates the reflection and guides the action. God reveals God's self in the situation; therefore, the black situation is *only the framework* within which blacks understand God's revelation in Jesus Christ. This is to say that black theology, like all liberation theologies, should retain the primacy of God's Word as revelation in concrete situations and not elevate any particular situation as God's revelation.

Boesak is no right-wing fundamentalist; he differs in two ways. First, Boesak speaks against a "spiritual" interpretation of Scripture.

The spiritualization we have indicated not only compartmentalizes life, but also leads to a distortion of the Gospel message which then serves to sanction unjust and oppressive structures and relations. It forces Jesus and his message into a Western, white mould, degrades him to a servant of mere self-interest, identifies him with oppression. It makes of the gospel an instrument of injustice instead of the expectation of the poor.⁷⁴⁴

⁷⁴²Boesak, *Farewell to Innocence*, 1976, 13.

⁷⁴³*Ibid.*, 12.

⁷⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 23.

Secondly, we have seen how Boesak's hermeneutical method starts with the three Exodus events—God's hearing the cries of the oppressed, taking their side over against their oppressors, and performing liberating deeds—and how these form a paradigm which repeats itself throughout the entire Bible (Section 3.2). Boesak does not, as Mosala incorrectly assumes, presume that every verse of the Bible is about liberation.⁷⁴⁵ Instead, Boesak interprets the Bible in light of the Exodus-liberation event. "We have already pointed out that the whole Old Testament message *is given its meaning* by the liberation event."⁷⁴⁶ Furthermore, Jesus Christ "stood squarely within the tradition of the Exodus."⁷⁴⁷ In other words, Boesak interprets the Exodus event as it has been reread and reinterpreted throughout the Bible. It is not simply an event that took place around the thirteenth century B.C., but rather it is a paradigm that is given new meaning as it is reflected upon by other generations. In this sense our situation is enlightened by the Exodus event and the Exodus paradigm is given new meaning from our situation.

This is our situation and all the elements in it have a theological significance. . . . A theology that does not take into account this situation will never be able to interpret the demands of the Gospel or to say what the Spirit has to say to the people in this situation. That is why we have a black theology; that is why it is a situational theology.⁷⁴⁸

Therefore, Boesak's hermeneutical method runs in two directions, from the archetypal event to the existential present and vice-versa. In this way his method resembles Míguez-Bonino's and Severino Croatto's. We will recall that Míguez-Bonino shows that the biblical text must be examined with respect to its own particularity. Thus, hermeneutics cannot forgo a historical, literary, traditio-historical and linguistic, critical examination of the text. However, this examination of the text is not the same as understanding its meaning. For

⁷⁴⁵Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology in South Africa*, 1989, 20.

⁷⁴⁶Boesak, *Farewell to Innocence*, 1986, 23. Emphasis added.

⁷⁴⁷Boesak, "Liberation Theology in South Africa," in Pan African Conference of Third World Theologians, *African Theology En Route*, 1979, 173.

⁷⁴⁸Ibid.

Míguez-Bonino, to interpret the meaning of the text one has to understand how the present event *adds to the meaning* of the historical, biblical event. One must read the direction of the biblical text, particularly the witness of the basic, germinal events of faith, and also determine the historical conditions and possibilities of our present situation (Section 2.2). Like Míguez-Bonino, Boesak does not want to make the mistake of the religious fundamentalist and simply dislodge biblical passages from their context in order to apply them to a situation that has not been critically analysed from a sociopolitical and economic perspective. The attempt to derive direct political conclusions from the text is dangerous.

Boesak does not offer a historical materialist black theology like Mosala for two reasons. First, Moodley tells us that in the initial stages of BC, an economic analysis of the nature of exploitation was lacking because of the perception that Marxism was a white European ideology and because Marxist literature was censored at the “tribal” universities.⁷⁴⁹ Thus, as a student Boesak did not have access to the tools that would help him to be critical of capitalism.

Second, in *Farewell to Innocence* Boesak was attempting to come to terms with something which was not a concern of Mosala’s: racist nationalistic theology. Boesak was critical of James Cone because “he has taken black theology out of the framework of liberation theology, thereby making his own situation (being black in America) and his own movement (liberation from white racism) the ultimate criteria for all theology.”⁷⁵⁰ Boesak is critical of Afrikaner Nationalist theology for also interpreting the Gospel along racial lines. Boesak wanted to prove that on the one hand authentic black theology preaches the same Gospel of liberation as Jesus Christ did, but both Afrikaner and Black Nationalist theology were heretical.

⁷⁴⁹Moodley, “Impact of Black Consciousness,” in Pityanna, ed., *Bounds of Possibility*, 1991, 146.

⁷⁵⁰Boesak, *Farewell to Innocence*, 1986, 143.

Mosala does not examine Afrikaner Nationalist theology, which shares his concern for maintaining the history and culture of a particular group of people who were socially and economically oppressed. Boesak is more like Steve Biko than Mosala in his attempt to tread the narrow road between a concern for the struggle of the black people and the need to deny both black and white nationalism. We will recall that for Boesak black nationalism was just as difficult a problem to overcome as white Afrikaner Nationalism. “We for our part can no more accept Black Christian Nationalism than we can accept Afrikaner’s white, Christian Nationalism.”⁷⁵¹

This is why Boesak favoured the nonideological approach that Mosala and Goba reject. Boesak was just as aware as Mosala that theology arises as an expression of the history, culture and economic situation in which people find themselves; however, Boesak did not wish to link his concern for the poor and oppressed to black nationalism. This proves to us that Boesak was concerned with reconciliation between the races, while this does not seem to be a concern of Mosala’s. Nowhere does Mosala show a concern for the liberation of white people or discuss the future relationship between the races. Boesak, on the other hand, was very concerned with reconciliation and he wanted South Africa to be a place where blacks and whites could live together. In this way, Boesak was constructing a theology of liberation, justice and reconciliation that could speak across racial lines and bring South Africa into the future. This was never Mosala’s intention.

Missiology Conference - Moderate Criticism

Similar to the neo-liberal criticism of Liberation Theology in Latin America, South Africa is not without its moderate criticisms of the Black Liberation Theology movement which Boesak represents.

⁷⁵¹Ibid., 121.

The moderate position was first made clear in South Africa at the 1977 congress of the Missiological Society, in which David Bosch, General Secretary of the society, gave the opening address. In his speech, Bosch argues that the concept of “peoples” as an ethnic entity is entirely lacking in Scripture. He admits that the diversity of peoples is acknowledged in the Bible, but the concept “people of God” is very different than the idea of “peoples” in a cultural, ethnic or group sense. Nowhere in the Old Testament, Bosch insists, is *Israel as an ethnic entity* synthesised with *Israel as the people of God*.⁷⁵²

This is also true for the New Testament. The Sadducees, Pharisees, Essenes, Zealots and even Jesus’ disciples thought in terms of nationalistic liberation and understood the “liberation of *peoples*” in the context of ethnic group solidarity and privilege. They believed that God liberated individuals only in relation to the group to which they belonged. But Jesus corrected their mistake and taught that *Israel as people*—an ethnic identity—had no privileged position, thus exposing all ethnic and group solidarity. Jesus rejected the notion that to be in solidarity with one group of people one must separate oneself from other ethnic groups. Proof of this is that he told his disciples that they must love even their enemies.⁷⁵³

Therefore, Bosch concludes that the concept of “people” (“volk”), which has been developed in South Africa to uphold the idea that the Afrikaner people have a special, divine calling as an ethnic group is to be rejected. But that is not all he rejects. Bosch believes his interpretation can also be applied against black theology because it simply provides us with a mirror image of Afrikaner Nationalist theology:

This kind of theologising is, in South Africa, not restricted to the Afrikaner. On the contrary! Black South Africans have—consciously or sub-consciously—taken over much of White Afrikaner rhetoric; they have also interpreted *their* liberation in Biblical and theological categories. Albert Luthuli has, like a latter-day Moses, written a book with the title *Let my people go!* Douglas

⁷⁵²Bosch, “The Church and the Liberation of Peoples,” *Missionalia*, August 1977, 30.

⁷⁵³*Ibid.*, 31-32.

5 Makhathini, Sol Lediga, Simon Gqubule and Allan Boesak—to mention but a few—have from time to time spoken in the same vein. Here we have the opposite pole of White awareness of being chosen, with the same theological pregnancy. That these two theologies mutually exclude one another requires no proof. Theology must be contextual, that is true, but may it ever be exclusive?⁷⁵⁴

Bosch wonders if the idea of people, nation or ethnic group may be the object of the Church's concern for liberation. He insists that "people' as a cultural and ethnic entity is *not* a theological category and wherever it is made into such a category . . . it cannot but lead to mutual exclusiveness which endangers the life of the church as the new community."⁷⁵⁵ According to Bosch, an alternative to Afrikaner Nationalist theology and black theology would be that the church concerns itself with the liberation of all people, irrespective of the group to which they belong. By this he means that the Church needs to focus on the liberation of individual people. Therefore Bosch concludes:

20 How can the church, in the light of all this, continue putting the "liberation of *peoples*" on her agenda, now that, according to all indications, the real issue at stake is *not* the liberation of peoples but clearly rather the liberation *from* national ties ("voksverbondenheid"). Of course, the peoples remain, but their ethnicity ("volksheid") has lost its decisive and absolute power. Where this does *not* happen, ethnicity blocks the way of the gospel. Then "*the people*" is not something that has to be liberated but something *from which* people have to be liberated.⁷⁵⁶

25 The entire premise of Bosch's paper is to show that it is wrong to define a group of people solely as an ethnic entity—either Afrikaner or black. "If [the church] should engage herself in the struggle for the liberation of Blacks as a group defined on ethnical lines, she would simply be adapting herself to present political solutions."⁷⁵⁷ In other words, if black theology simply speaks of the liberation of black people, and not the liberation of all people, then it is simply accepting the ideology of the separation of people along ethnic lines. Bosch wants to overcome all ethnic and nationalist separation and speak of the

⁷⁵⁴Ibid., 33.

⁷⁵⁵Ibid., 34.

⁷⁵⁶Ibid., 35.

⁷⁵⁷Ibid.

liberation of all people, not just one group. This is why he rejects Boesak's theology.

Bosch's remarks are fair to the extent that they point to a danger which black theology must be aware of. However, Bosch is too quick to assume that black theology, and particularly Boesak's theology, is another form of nationalistic theology. First, we will recall that the BCM defied the government's insistence on the separation of racial groups by inviting other ethnic groups to unite under the concept of blackness. Biko opposed ethnic divisions; for him the only division in South Africa was between those who supported black liberation and those who did not. Second, in his response to the Missiology Conference, Tutu tells us that he counts black theology as a theology which is truly concerned about liberation in South Africa because it teaches what he fervently believes — “that no reconciliation is possible in South Africa, except reconciliation between real persons. Black consciousness merely seeks to awaken the Black person to a realisation of his worth as a child of God, with the privileges and responsibilities that are the concomitants of that exalted status.”⁷⁵⁸ In other words, Tutu is not against reconciliation or against the liberation of all people in South Africa, but rather he recognises that true reconciliation and liberation of all people, black or white, can only become a reality if black people are given the opportunity to realise their humanity. Thirdly, we have already demonstrated in our discussion of Mosala's criticisms of Boesak, as well as in previous chapters, how Boesak wanted to transcend ethnic divisions because he desired the liberation of all people. In this way, Boesak, Tutu and Biko had the same concern as Bosch—the division of racial groups—but they do not believe in Bosch's “third way” solution, which neither supports apartheid or counts itself as being part of the black struggle.

I have labelled Bosch's reaction to black theology as “moderate” or neo-liberal because while he wants to show solidarity with the poor and oppressed of

⁷⁵⁸Tutu, “God Intervening in Human Affairs,” *Missionalia*, August 1977, 115.

South Africa, he also tries to maintain what he believes is a critical distance from the black struggle. In his recent book on missiology he speaks favourably of liberation theologies: “The theology of liberation is often misunderstood, attacked, and vilified. . . . I have not intended to whitewash liberation theology in these paragraphs, nor to ‘put the record straight’. I have simply attempted to point out that this movement, in spite of its flaws (and there are several) represents ‘a new stage, closely connected with earlier ones, in the theological reflection that began with the apostolic tradition’.⁷⁵⁹ But Bosch still has reservations about black theology in that he does not see much difference between it and a racist ideology. Like Boesak, Bosch wants to rescue the Church from racist nationalism, but Bosch cannot bring himself to speak of the liberation of the black majority from oppression or to speak of the necessary confrontation of the sociopolitical, economic system as Boesak can. Alternatively, Bosch speaks of reconciliation, not liberation. Bosch does not comment on the liberation of the black community at all and he differs with Boesak and other black theologians concerning reconciliation. For Boesak, reconciliation means supporting the struggle for liberation. Black theology’s premise is that reconciliation is not possible unless black people can be lifted out of their inhumanity so that they can be reconciled with whites as equals. When Bosch speaks of reconciliation and asks the white community to make sacrifices, he fails to challenge them to take the initiative, to *insist* on social and economic change, and to support the black community in their struggle.⁷⁶⁰

Another difficulty with Bosch’s moderate position is that it can too easily lead other moderate or more conservative theologians to the conclusion that Afrikaner theology is the same as black theology. This is well documented in J. A. Loubser’s *The Apartheid Bible: A Critical Review of Racial Theology in South Africa*. Villa-Vicencio describes Loubser’s position:

⁷⁵⁹Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, 1991, 447.

⁷⁶⁰Bosch, “Processes of Reconciliation and Demands of Obedience: Twelve Theses,” in Nürnberger, ed., *The Cost of Reconciliation in South Africa*, 1988, 98-112.

5 Apartheid theology, Loubser tells us, began as a people's theology
 and came into its own in promoting the cause of the Afrikaner,
 lured to the cities by the industrialisation process during the early
 part of the century. As such, he says, it showed 'amazing similarity'
 with the concern for the poor and oppressed found in the NG
 Sendingkerk's *Confession of Faith* and the *Kairos Document*. The
 10 problem, according to Loubser, is that theologies like Afrikaner
 apartheid theology are written explicitly and self-consciously in
 response to particular experiences of human suffering. According
 to Loubser, this is where both liberation and apartheid theologies
 go wrong. It is therefore logical, he thinks, that in rejecting
 apartheid theology we also reject all contextual and liberation
 15 theologies. And the answer? It is, he suggests, beyond both
 apartheid theology and *kairos* theology - a 'third option'
 theology.⁷⁶¹

Bosch's and Loubser's comments express a concern over black theology
 which is still widely prevalent, and thus they are representative of the white,
 neo-liberal response. With their concern in mind, we now turn to the criticisms
 of black theology made by the representatives of the DRC at the Rustenburg
 20 Conference.

Rustenburg Conference

Background

The 1986 General Synod of the DRC has been commended by its leaders as
 the synod that completely redirected the DRC's position on social issues in South
 25 Africa. In its declaration, *Church and Society*, the synod adamantly rejected
 racism as "a serious sin which may not be defended or practised by any person
 or church." Concerning apartheid it concluded that "the conviction has
 gradually grown that forced separation and division of peoples cannot be
 considered a biblical imperative. The attempt to justify such an injunction as
 30 being derived from the Bible must be recognised as an error and should be
 rejected."⁷⁶² Thus Prof. Willie Jonker of the University of Stellenbosch stated at
 Rustenburg that because the DRC now rejects apartheid, there is now nothing to
 obstruct a united witness by the churches of South Africa.⁷⁶³

⁷⁶¹Villa-Vicencio, *Civil Disobedience and Beyond*, 1990, 134-135.

⁷⁶²Villa-Vicencio, *Trapped in Apartheid*, 1988, 147-148.

⁷⁶³Jonker, "Understanding the Church Situation and Obstacles to Christian Witness in South Africa," in Alberts and Chikane, eds., *The Road to Rustenburg*, 1991, 92.

Has the DRC really changed? Have they really rejected all aspects of the apartheid ideology? The *Church and Society* document was careful to clarify its rejection of racism and the apartheid system with several qualifying statements.

5 . . . that a sincere attachment to one's own people, aimed at creating and preserving one's own culture, must be clearly distinguished from racism.⁷⁶⁴

Allan Brews summarises for us the document's qualifications:

10 The Bible does, however, handle the concepts of people (volk) and nation as aspects of existing reality. "The existence and the variety of peoples (volk) as such is neither positively affirmed nor negatively judged but is accepted as part of given reality" (p. 20).
 15 The biblical texts formerly used to legitimate separation of peoples are to be seen as reflections of this reality. This neutral biblical stand point towards the concepts of race, nation and peoples (volk) means that the practising of the own affairs of a people (volkseie) is "determined by that people's (volk) seriousness about maintaining its own cultural values."⁷⁶⁵

The document's authors believed it necessary to establish a declaration for the protection of human rights with its emphasis upon the right to affirm one's own
 20 cultural heritage. It affirms, regarding culture, that people are entitled to freedom of association and participation in their own cultural movements. This gives people the right to insist that education occurs within one's own cultural milieu and in the language of the different cultural groups. What the document therefore promotes is that all racial groups have the right to pursue their own
 25 culture without the interference of other racial groups. To modern Western ears of a liberal democratic tradition, what this document promotes sounds satisfactory because it protects an individual's right for the pursuit of liberty. However, if the DRC's statements are placed in the context of South Africa in the late 1980s, these statements can be easily interpreted as justification of the
 30 government's policy of separate development or the further impoverishment of black people.

⁷⁶⁴Excerpts of the *Church and Society* statement have been published in Nürnberger, ed., *The Cost of Reconciliation in South Africa*, 1988, 36.

⁷⁶⁵Brews, "Church and Society: A Summary of the Recent Dutch Reformed Church Statement on Church and Society," in WCC, *PCR Information*, 1986, No. 23, 36.

In the late 1980s the DRC was able to maintain its support for the government's policies. It refused to challenge the South African political and social structure. This was nowhere made more clear than in a comment of Johan Heyns: "I cannot dictate to the State any particular form of political structure, I am a theologian and . . . cannot prescribe any [political] structure as such."
 5 Asked his opinion on the Group Areas Act, he replied: "This is a political issue. It is an open political question. I cannot see any explicit theological principle to maintain or abolish the law."⁷⁶⁶ The concern of the DRC of protecting group identity and culture and its practice of not getting involved in politics after its
 10 1986 declaration is important, because this is the position that the DRC leaders took with them to Rustenburg. Ten days before the conference the 1990 synod of the DRC completely rejected apartheid.

The church made the error of allowing forced separation and division . . . to be understood as a biblical imperative. . . . Apartheid
 15 began to function in such a way that the largest part of the population of the country experienced it as an oppressive system. . .

Any system which in practice functions in this way is unacceptable in the light of the Scriptures and the Christian
 20 conscience and must be rejected as sinful.⁷⁶⁷

Here the DRC rejects the practice of apartheid but not necessarily the ideology of separate group development. The synod qualified its rejection of apartheid by affirming the right "to remain true to one's own cultural heritage" and agreed that the protection of individual human rights was of utmost importance to the
 25 church's witness as long as the church did not interfere with the political process.

The Conference

At the Rustenburg Conference the DRC leaders took a moderate position and borrowed from Bosch's thesis that black theology is the same as Afrikaner
 30 theology. For the first time the leaders carefully scrutinised Afrikaner

⁷⁶⁶Villa-Vicencio, *Trapped in Apartheid*, 1988, 147.

⁷⁶⁷Villa-Vicencio, "Rewriting a Theology of Oppression," *Christianity and Crisis*, 7 Jan. 1991, 421-422.

Nationalist theology as well as black liberation theology. The collective position of these participants is easily summarised by Prof. Elaine Botha from the University of Potchefstroom. In South Africa, she argues, there are “two very strongly opposing theologies which have become quite ideological and, in my opinion, to some extent demonic.” There is the Afrikaner Nationalist ideology and black liberation theology which, she insists, have both tried to make sense out of dreadful experiences. “That is how Afrikaners try to make sense of their colonial experience, of the way they felt that they had been oppressed. This is how the black people today are experiencing reality and are trying to make sense of it.” She argues, therefore, that the two theologies are “much the same.”

[Black Theology] has made it quite clear that when you want to be a Church and when you want to have a new vision, you will have to side with the oppressed and with the poor. I think these concepts deserve serious consideration. But I do think that what we need far more urgently is some instrument to liberate us from our ideologies and to unmask the presuppositions underlying these ideologies which make it impossible for us to see the world as it really is.⁷⁶⁸

Like Botha, Prof. Johan Heyns also discredits black theology by associating it with Afrikaner theology.

In the past, it so happened that the Church—or rather a group of Churches, and specifically the Afrikaans-speaking Churches—were too closely involved in party-political processes, and went so far as to base political models such as apartheid on the Bible and defend them biblically, presenting them as demands on the State. Because the Church is not equipped for that kind of action, and because it is not the Church’s task, in so doing the Church not only overstepped its own bounds, but also encroached upon the sovereignty of the State. At present, in formal terms, precisely the same thing is taking place in Liberation Theology, or at least in certain of its forms, where there is so strong, but one-sided, a concentration on current political, social and economic problems that the difference between theology and politics, or between Church and a political party, is scarcely discernible. The Church cannot expect the State to listen to it and do what it asks, if it is no longer the Church but simply expects of the State what a political party expects. In such a case, by its actions and its demands, the Church has already deteriorated into a party-political pressure-group, no longer able to relay clearly and distinctly the Bible’s message to the State.⁷⁶⁹

⁷⁶⁸Botha, “Understanding the South African Reality,” in Alberts and Chikane, eds., *The Road to Rustenburg*, 1991, 74.

⁷⁶⁹Heyns, “Church/State Relations in South Africa,” *Ibid.*, 172.

Like Bosch, the DRC leaders try to maintain a critical distance from both Afrikaner and black theologies because they are both political party pressure groups. Alternatively, the DRC has an obligation to the state, but it is not to prescribe any political change or model for the future, because then it would be making the very same mistake of the two political theologies that the leaders reject. This follows the position of the 1986 *Church and Society* statement:

The Dutch Reformed Church must also proclaim the Word of God to the government, directing its attention to the scriptural norms in respect of mutual relationships between people and groups, social justice, order and peace, and the government's obligations in these matters.⁷⁷⁰

However, this statement is qualified by the following:

The Dutch Reformed Church unequivocally dissociates itself from the view that the church is called to prescribe any political model or policy to the government.⁷⁷¹

Therefore, the DRC is to be concerned with issues of social justice, but, the church can do nothing because it cannot interfere in politics. In this way the DRC follows Bosch's moderate "third way" position which favours the status quo.

This discussion on church and politics, of course, raised the much-debated topic of human rights at the conference. Prof. Johan Heyns, a DRC representative, insisted the Church demand that the state work toward "the preservation of the right to free association for the creation of a community life centred on either religion, culture, language, education, or any combination of these."⁷⁷² The protection of human rights and free association should be written into a new Constitution for South Africa:

— The preservation of the right to free association for the creation of a community life centred on either religion, culture, language, education, or any combination of these.

— The creation of the opportunity for these plural forms of society to provide such educational facilities as they desire, in accordance with their own convictions regarding their life and worldview.⁷⁷³

⁷⁷⁰*Church and Society*, in Nürnberger, ed., *The Cost of Reconciliation in South Africa*, 1988, 39.

⁷⁷¹*Ibid.*

⁷⁷²*Ibid.*, 175.

⁷⁷³Heyns, "Church/State Relations in South Africa," in Alberts and Chikane, eds., *The Road to Rustenburg*, 1991, 175.

It is interesting that Heyns' statement on free association supports the position of the National Party (NP). Gerrit Viljoen, South Africa's minister of constitutional planning, said in an interview with the *New York Times* that any new system would have to be one in which "each person chose his or her racial group, or chose to be in none. . . . Freedom of association would be a dominant factor."⁷⁷⁴ Ironically, the ANC also maintains a similar concept in its Freedom Charter: "All people shall have equal rights to use their own languages and to develop their own fold culture and customs," and that "All people shall have the right to live where they choose, to be decently housed, and to bring up their families in comfort and security."⁷⁷⁵ However, the ANC has different intentions in their proposal for a bill of rights than either Heyns or the NP, because the ANC clarifies its position in its 1989 *Constitutional Guidelines* with the recognition that under the present conditions in South Africa, the "constitutional protection for group rights would perpetuate the status quo and would mean that the mass of the people would continue to be constitutionally trapped in poverty and remain as outsiders."⁷⁷⁶ Price tells us that embedded in the terms "free association", is also the right to exclude:

But if free association was to be the dominant factor, how could race-group cohesiveness be maintained and the interests of racial minorities be protected? The answer apparently lies in the NP elite's conception that "freedom of association" includes the freedom to exclude. Thus, while race group membership would be prescribed by the legal system, groups could still form based upon race and they could maintain their racial "identity" by themselves excluding those deemed racial outsiders. Such groups could then become the basis for race-group political representation and for the drawing up of separate racial voting rolls.⁷⁷⁷

We therefore ask, is Heyns truly concerned with the protection of all people's rights in South Africa irrespective of race; is he concerned with the well-being of all South Africans and the fair distribution of that country's

⁷⁷⁴Lewis, "The New South Africa," *New York Times*, 27 March, 1990, A15. Also Price, *The Apartheid State in Crisis*, 1991, 288-289.

⁷⁷⁵Lewin, ed., *The Struggle for Racial Equality*, 1967, 54, 57.

⁷⁷⁶ANC, *Constitutional Guidelines for a Democratic South Africa, 1989* in Nürnberger, ed., *A Democratic Vision for South Africa*, 1991, 407.

⁷⁷⁷Price, *The Apartheid State in Crisis*, 1991, 289.

resources; or is he simply concerned with the protection of the white minority's social status? We may conclude that Heyns had good intentions and was truly concerned about the social well-being of all South Africa's inhabitants.

However, he supports the government's early consociation proposals that protect
5 the economic and social status of the white minority, and he wants a bill of rights only for the purpose of guaranteeing the social status of the white minority. Heyns' position is a moderate position because he is willing to seriously consider the demands of the black majority, but he remains cautious and he fears the loss of white support.

10 Charles Villa-Vicencio, who was asked to write on the same subject as Heyns at Rustenburg, seems to focus on exactly what the DRC ignores. Villa-Vicencio asks: "*Does the Church have a decisive word and programme of action to offer as South Africa undergoes the agony and exhilaration of rebirth?*"⁷⁷⁸ Heyns' paper also inquired into what decisive word the Church had to offer the
15 state, but he failed to ask what decisive *programme of action* the Church has or what should be the course of action open to the Church if the state fails to meet the demands of the Church for social justice?

Villa-Vicencio argues that we must draw upon the resources of black theology, contextual theologies, feminist and womenist theologies in order to
20 arrive at an authentic understanding of church/state relations in South Africa. He agrees with DRC theologians that there is no political blueprint in the Scriptures and that the precise political details of such programmes cannot (and *must* not) be prescribed by the Church; however, he argues that the Gospel offers values against which we are obliged to test all political options. "The
25 Gospel," he says, "is not neutral on such matters." Because the Gospel demands that we bear one another's burdens and find fulfilment in solidarity rather than individualism or ethnic grouping, "we are obliged to say 'Yes' to economic

⁷⁷⁸Villa-Vicencio, "Church/State Relations in South Africa," in Alberts and Chikane, eds., *The Road to Rustenburg*, 1991, 177.

structures which show a preference for the provision of the basic necessities of life (food, housing, health care and education) which enable all people to share in the fullness of life, before providing for the absolute protection of all property rights and the accumulation of wealth. It means saying 'No' to economic ideologies which leave the poor destitute."⁷⁷⁹

Heyns is not able to make such an affirmation. He supports the concept "that all people ought to enjoy equal treatment and equal opportunities" under the law, but he fails to assert that this protection should be secondary to the concept of helping all South Africans to share in the fullness of life first and foremost. Basically what Heyns is saying is that apartheid is wrong and should be rejected, but the dismantling of apartheid should not infringe on the rights of the privileged. Thus, he cannot bring himself to ask the white community, as Villa-Vicencio can, to call people to solidarity and sacrifice. Instead, Heyns is more worried about maintaining law and order and the protection of people's rights to develop their own culture separately from others. Nowhere in Heyns' paper do we see a call for the wealthy, privileged white community of South Africa to show restraint and commit themselves to specific acts in which they could rediscover unity with all peoples of South Africa "in a common praxis oriented to transforming the social, economic, political and cultural fabric to reflect the liberating and transforming message of the poor man of Nazareth," as we see in Villa-Vicencio's paper.⁷⁸⁰ In his recent book *A Theology of Reconstruction*, Villa-Vicencio points out the flaws in the concern for individual human rights which Heyns' theology demonstrates:

In a situation where the larger part of the economic, social and material power is disproportionately located in the hands of a minority, the affirmation of First Generation rights can have the most negative implications. To ensure oppressed people basic political rights, without some kind of affirmative action designed to restore the basic resources denied or taken from them during the period within which they were without political rights or due process to protect themselves, is likely to unleash an extended and

⁷⁷⁹Ibid., 187.

⁷⁸⁰Ibid., 185.

5 embittered period of enduring political and social conflict. A simple
 10 vote without food, shelter and health care is to use First Generation
 15 rights as a smoke screen to obscure the deep underlying forces
 which dehumanise people. It is to create an appearance of equality
 and justice, while by implication socio-economic inequality is
 entrenched. To protect individual rights which include the abuse
 of the private ownership of property located almost exclusively in
 the hands of the few, to allow major business concerns to continue
 disproportionately to serve the interest of the shareholders, and not
 to affirm the right to education and work as means of redressing
 social imbalances, can only broaden rather than narrow the gap
 between the rich and the poor. To entrench First Generation rights
 to the neglect of other rights is to ignore the fundamental problem
 of poverty which characterises western societies. To the extent that
 the fulfilment of the basic human rights to the material necessities
 of life is inherent to what it means to be human, the denial of such
 rights can only perpetuate conflict and revolution.⁷⁸¹

While drawing upon the resources of black theology and other contextual
 theologies, at Rustenburg Villa-Vicencio calls on the Church to proclaim the
 20 Jubilee Year and “wrestle with questions concerning the restoration of land,
 economic reconstruction and the freeing of the poor from the structural bonds
 of oppression.”⁷⁸² He admits that the Church has to leave the details of the
 complex process of economic redistribution up to the economists and politicians,
 but the Church is “required to provide moral and spiritual support for the
 25 process of ensuring that the poor are enabled to share in the wealth of the
 country. This,” Villa-Vicencio insists, “is an inherent part of the Gospel which
 Jesus proclaimed in announcing the dawning of the Jubilee year as a part of his
 ministry.”⁷⁸³ The Church, he therefore concludes, is always “permitted to have
 only one political ally, namely the poor and oppressed — recognising that those
 30 who make up this constituency may change from one age to another.”⁷⁸⁴

Therefore, the difference between those papers by DRC leaders and the
 essays that show an influence of contextual theology, is that their focus on a
 theology from below gives them a deeper vision of the role of the Church in
 changing South Africa. Beyers Naudé’s address also demonstrates this perfectly.

⁷⁸¹Villa-Vicencio, *A Theology of Reconstruction*, 1992, 192-193.

⁷⁸²Villa-Vicencio, “Church/State Relations in South Africa,” in Alberts and Chikane, eds.,
The Road to Rustenburg, 1991, 188.

⁷⁸³*Ibid.*, 188-189.

⁷⁸⁴*Ibid.*

At the time of the conference Naudé not only argued that the Church should call for removal of all apartheid laws, but that the Church should also work to repair the damage that apartheid laws have caused South African society. The Church, he insists, should make a meaningful contribution in the following areas: the

5 fight against unemployment of all people, but especially young blacks in urban and rural areas; they should encourage a new united system of education; find proper housing for the millions of people that live in squatter camps; and finally the churches should give urgent attention to build a community where health and welfare is given top priority.

10 A confession of guilt is simply not enough, argues Naudé. The churches “need to rectify the injustice of apartheid, of the suffering and the pain caused by this policy to millions of people. No healing is possible without reconciliation, and no reconciliation is possible without justice, and no justice is possible without some form of genuine restitution.”⁷⁸⁵ Above all, Naudé tells us

15 that he is concerned about bridging “the gap between the affluent and the poor, the incredible privileges of the ‘haves’ and the poverty and destitution of the ‘have-nots’. . . . We are faced with the danger of a Church which represents largely the middle class or the rich and the Church risks becoming the church of the elite. A Church which does not stand in authentic solidarity with the

20 powerless and the poor, does not truly reflect the image of the Church of Jesus Christ.”⁷⁸⁶

Villa-Vicencio’s and Naudé’s concerns have already been voiced in the black community and amongst black theologians. We have already seen how this concern is present in the ANC’s constitutional proposals.⁷⁸⁷ But the most detailed

25 elaboration is in the work of Ananias Mpunzi who was a contributor to the book *Essays in Black Theology (Black Theology: The South African Voice*, edited by

⁷⁸⁵Naudé, “The Role of the Church in a Changing South Africa,” in Alberts and Chikane, eds., *The Road to Rustenburg*, 1991, 227.

⁷⁸⁶*Ibid.*, 230.

⁷⁸⁷See also Villa-Vicencio, *A Theology of Reconstruction*, 1992, 71-75.

Basil Moore) back in 1972. He discusses two aspects of freedom: the ability of the individual to establish uniqueness and self-determination and the ability to be in community with others; thus, there is a polarity between self and community; “the desire for solitude and the desire for company; the desire to be in our uniqueness and the desire to be in our community.”⁷⁸⁸ Unfortunately, the apartheid system in South Africa distorted both these desires by making the drive for uniqueness an end in itself and the impulse for community into a sectional, communal fascism.

Under apartheid what became important was not “How can I both be myself and be accepted by others?” but “How can I be myself without the interference, threat, or obstruction of others?”. Individuals tried to gain power (educational, economic, military or police power) in order to prevent others from getting in their way. Here is where racism has an important role. “You legislate and take other steps to rule out as competitors a whole group of people, i.e. black people are discriminated against as a total group.”⁷⁸⁹ This individualism, Mpunzi tells us, makes everything competitive and is based on the rule that a person can succeed at the expense of others.

In South Africa one also finds a communal fascism, where the needs and interests of the individual are swallowed up into the community or the group. The needs of the community are said to be more important than any individual in the community. “Conformity is the arch-virtue and non-conformity the cardinal and unforgivable sin. The individual exists to serve the community and its interests, and in this lies his value. His value is not in himself. If he fails to serve the interest of the community he is dispensable.”⁷⁹⁰ In South Africa communalism is not conceived in relation to the world community or even to the

⁷⁸⁸Mpunzi, “Black Theology as Liberation Theology,” in Moore, ed., *Black Theology*, 1973, 131.

⁷⁸⁹*Ibid.*, 132.

⁷⁹⁰*Ibid.*, 132.

community of all the people who live in that country; instead, it is a sectional communalism. It is a closed community that has been divided upon racial lines.

Mpunzi argues that if freedom is to be obtained in a society, then uniqueness and community must both be given a place; but it must never slip into the extremes:

Neither authoritarian individualism nor communal fascism can ever be a structure for freedom. They are static structures for control. But freedom can never be a state; it is a process, for it involves the continual movement within ourselves to be in our uniqueness and to be in our community. If ever there is to be freedom it has to allow for this movement. It demands a tremendously high evaluation of human beings to allow them to be — both in their desire to be themselves and in their desire for acceptance into a living community.⁷⁹¹

From Mpunzi's analysis we can set up a similar dialectic that we saw earlier in both Clovodis Boff and Míguez-Bonino's work.⁷⁹²

Communal fascism	COMMUNITY	UNIQUENESS	Authoritarian individualism
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It is our thesis that Afrikaner Nationalist theology and the DRC's theological understanding of human rights cannot maintain this dialectic because they either slip into one extreme or the other. Afrikaner Nationalism is susceptible to communal fascism because it stresses the importance of the *volk* and denies individual uniqueness. The DRC, on the other hand, falls into the trap of individualism because they stress a person's individual rights and disregard a community's total well-being; therefore, they deny the importance of solidarity in the South African community.

Black theology, Mpunzi explains, wishes to keep this dialectic intact by affirming both uniqueness and community. It does this by claiming that God affirms the uniqueness of every individual. God affirms everything that makes us distinct, including the colour of our skin. "Black Theology claims that God affirms my uniqueness, and so my blackness. It goes further and says: 'Black person, you are unique persona, and you must express your uniqueness or die,

⁷⁹¹Ibid., 133.

⁷⁹²Míguez-Bonino, *Toward a Christian Political Ethics*, 1983, 39.

and you must affirm your humanity or become the thing, the object, that others have deluded you into believing yourself to be.”⁷⁹³ But black theology also stresses the importance of community. Mpunzi says, “It is not enough to say that we are persons in our uniqueness, however vital it is to say that. We are persons
5 in the unity that holds people in the powerful give-and-take of love and acceptances.” In other words, we can only be truly human when we can express both our uniqueness *as well as* our solidarity with all of humanity. This concept enables Mpunzi to go on and insist that black theology is truly about the liberation of South Africa because “although it directs its voice to black people, it
10 nonetheless hopes that white people also will hear and be saved.”⁷⁹⁴

Toward the end of the 1980s and early 1990s we have seen many DRC theologians and English-speaking conservatives adopt a more liberal position. They have dismissed apartheid as a sin and have confessed their guilt in supporting it. However, can their new position uphold the dialectic that we have
15 constructed from Mpunzi’s paper? The differences between Heyns and Villa-Vicencio over the importance of black theology and their different understandings of human rights in South Africa at Rustenburg explain why the DRC hesitated in the closing phase of the conference. While the DRC stood by its confession of guilt, Pieter Potgieter stated in a press conference that he did not
20 know what the “unequivocal” rejection of apartheid meant. He also stated that the call by the conference for a “democratic elective process based on one person, one vote” was a matter for politicians, not the Church.⁷⁹⁵ The implication of Potgieter’s statement is that the DRC still remains unresolved about its rejection of apartheid and the concept of separate development. This
25 inability to make a commitment may be due to the fact that one-third of its members belong to the Conservative Party.

⁷⁹³Mpunzi, “Black Theology as Liberation Theology,” in Moore, ed., *Black Theology*, 1973, 137.

⁷⁹⁴*Ibid.*, 139.

⁷⁹⁵Villa-Vicencio, “Rewriting a Theology of Oppression,” *Christianity and Crisis*, 7 Jan. 1991.

Although the DRC Synods of 1988 and 1989 renounced apartheid as a “sin,” its spokespersons have not tried to prepare its white adherents for the inevitable sociopolitical economic change in South Africa. In recent discussions with the black, Indian, and coloured factions, the DRC has proposed to open its churches to all racial groups but it has left this responsibility to the local church councils. The church leaders refuse to join the other churches of the SACC in their support for the victims of apartheid. But most importantly, the DRC still seems to be seeking the preservation of “cultural and ethnic” groups.⁷⁹⁶

Conclusions

The fact that black theology is undeniably bound up with black interests is neither surprising nor a matter for criticism. The interests of black theology are those of the poor, the powerless and the oppressed, and these interests are consonant in large measure with the Gospel of the kingdom of God. Black theology is not only a legitimate expression of the Christian Gospel, but it is also a theology which challenges and judges traditional Western theology, and it is a catalyst which is forcing the West to rework its theologies in ways which are more biblically faithful and more contextually relevant to the struggle for justice and peace. Afrikaner Nationalist theology, as well as the moderate positions of Bosch and the DRC, lack this character and are very different than black theology of liberation.

Boesak is not just interested in black affairs, because for him black affairs are not theological issues. This is his disagreement with Mosala. Instead, Boesak is concerned about justice. This is one element in which all those at the Rustenburg conference could agree upon—the desire for social justice. However, the DRC leaders defined it on the basis of protection of individual human rights or along ethnic lines, and failed to see that black theology is about justice for all South African people, irrespective of race. We can agree therefore with Tutu

⁷⁹⁶ECUNEWS, May 1993, 6.

that black theology is truly about liberation. We can also agree with Alastair Kee's assessment of Boesak's theology:

5 Whether consciously or intuitively, I believe that Boesak knows
that to take the view that the only issue in South Africa is race
would be to agree with the architects of apartheid at a fundamental
level. Race is neither a moral nor a religious issue, but justice is.
When Boesak writes - and acts - on race he does so because of his
concern for justice. It is not trite to say that when he speaks of
10 injustice, he does so out of the black experience, but when he
speaks about justice, he does so as a Christian. . . . It may well be that
what has been said here about Boesak was true about Dr Martin
Luther King Jr., who was motivated by love and not by demands for
equality of opportunity. . .⁷⁹⁷

⁷⁹⁷Kee, *Domination or Liberation*, 1986,56.

4.0 COMPARATIVE ASSESSMENT

In this final chapter we will compare José Míguez-Bonino's theology with that of Allen Boesak's. We believe that they offer similar, yet distinct theologies; and it is both this similarity and distinction that allows these two theologians to address the current socio-economic, political, and theological issues of our world better than their conservative and neoliberal critics from Europe and North America.

General Overview of Their Theologies

We will remember that the task Míguez-Bonino assigns his theology is to show God's preferential option for the poor, and to turn theology into a critical reflection on praxis. The God of the Bible is a God of justice who loves all people, but sides with the oppressed. This places the Church and its theologians in an interesting position. The Church can either side with the victims or with the perpetrators of injustice; it can work to maintain the *status quo* or it can work to help the poor. This requires that theologians occupy a 'double location' says Míguez-Bonino. "On the one hand there is the theologian's location within the theological discipline with its particular epistemological conditions and demands; on the other hand the theologian is also a social agent within a particular social formation."⁷⁹⁸ His argument is that theologians, despite their social location, are required to see things from the perspective of the poor, and do theology from that perspective. For Míguez-Bonino the poor provide a perspective from the 'underside' of society which the Church cannot afford to ignore. Therefore, Míguez-Bonino's theology is primarily concerned with dehumanised persons and their concerns and struggles with poverty. He calls the Church to be in dialogue and solidarity with the poor by allowing the poor to interpret the gospel from their perspective for the wider Church.

⁷⁹⁸Míguez-Bonino, *Towards a Christian Political Ethics*, 1983, 42.

In Boesak's theology we saw how he moved through three distinctive stages: black theology, confessing theology and prophetic theology. In the first stage he insisted that the Church was to reflect on and interpret the Word of God in light of the black condition. For Boesak, the black experience provided an important and indispensable framework within which blacks could understand the revelation of God in Jesus Christ and their liberation from oppression. Although the condition of the black people in South African history has been one of social and economic injustice, it is through racism (the belief that inherited physical characteristics, such as skin colour, facial features, hair texture, and the like, accounts for differences in human character or ability and that a particular race is superior to others) that oppression was introduced, justified, and perpetuated. The task of the Church then, according to Boesak, was to restore the humanity of black persons and to give them confidence as part of God's creation. The Church, in the eyes of Boesak during this first stage, should have worked to give the black people a sense of worth and dignity, and to help them rediscover their human beingness.

In the second stage Boesak developed a confessing theology for South Africa in which he attacked the theology of the white churches from within the ecclesial tradition and built upon the radical theological strands found in Church history. According to Boesak, in this period of his life the oppression of the people by the minority elite forced the Church to "proclaim the gospel in its original intention: as the gospel of the poor."⁷⁹⁹ In his work, during this period, Boesak defended his orthodoxy and was cautious against any formulation that defined Black theology simply as a reflection "in light of the black situation." He called the Church to a more adequate expression of the Gospel based upon a love for both the poor and oppressed.

In the final stage of prophetic theology, we will recall that Boesak tried to formulate a world transformative theology in which he invited all people, both

⁷⁹⁹Boesak, *Farewell to Innocence*, 1977, 10.

black and white, to action and to show their obedience to God instead of remaining neutral or silent while facing an oppressive situation.

Similarities in Their Theologies

“God is on the side of the poor and oppressed.” This is the common thread that ties Míguez-Bonino’s and Boesak’s theologies together, and unites them with other liberation theologians around the world. The two of them hold in common the quest for liberation from oppression—freedom from conditions that enslave—because they are convinced that God has a special concern for the poor and oppressed of the earth. Throughout the Old Testament, in the books of the prophets, the Psalms, the Law, and the wisdom literature, one reads of God’s commands to assist the needy. One also reads of how God hears the cries of the distressed, and of God’s anger when justice is not done. For example, Isaiah records God’s passion and God’s special bond with the poor in these words:

When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue is parched with thirst, I the Lord will answer them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them (Isa. 41:17).

The New Testament continually teaches us to see the poor not as a burden but as those to whom compassion must be shown. Míguez-Bonino’s and Boesak’s theologies can be described as an attempt to take seriously the claim of Jesus, that he came “to preach good news to the poor . . . to set at liberty those who are oppressed” (Luke 4:18; 7:18-23).

Míguez-Bonino and Boesak both developed their respective theologies based on what they had read in scripture concerning God’s love for the poor and oppressed. But these interpretations and reflections did not provide the only basis for the formation of their thought. They developed their theologies also out of a deep desire to view and understand theologically the social condition in which they lived and they wanted to interpret the praxis that they had found in the community of faith. For as these two theologians were developing their theologies they noticed, each in his own way, that there was a growing consciousness of socio-economic and political realities amongst many people

from the peasant and indigenous people to academics and professionals in the Third World, which was causing an irruption in the exploited classes, marginalised cultures and humiliated races. This irruption has been described in the following way:

- 5 They are bursting from the underside of history into the world long dominated by the West. It is an irruption expressed in revolutionary struggles, political uprisings, and liberation movements. It is an irruption of religious and ethnic groups looking for affirmation of their authentic identity, of women
10 demanding recognition and equality, of youth protesting the dominant systems and values. It is an irruption of all those who struggle for full humanity and for their rightful place in history.⁸⁰⁰

As Míguez-Bonino and Boesak began to develop their theology they noticed that
15 people were exchanging insights about the nature of the oppression found in their countries. People were beginning to go beyond simple protest and resistance to assume responsibility for proposing and pursuing an alternative to the present system. More specifically, Míguez-Bonino and Boesak were noticing that a different understanding of the Church was beginning to emerge.
20 Christians were joining the struggle of the poor and oppressed by immersing themselves in communities of the disenfranchised. They were beginning to understand their faith as a commitment to solidarity and they were starting to seek to release the power and resources of their faith and Church to serve the poor.

25 It is out of this struggle against oppression that Míguez-Bonino and Boesak believe their theologies were born. In similar ways, they responded to the oppressed first by standing with them in solidarity and in practical commitment. Míguez-Bonino and Boesak worked to identify the causes of the poverty and racial discrimination that surrounded them. They questioned religious and social
30 orders from the perspective of the poor and from the perspective of those discriminated against because of the colour of their skin. They joined and helped

⁸⁰⁰“The Irruption of the Third World: Challenge to Theology,” statement of the Fifth EATWOT Conference, 1981, in *Voices From the Third World*, June 1988, vol. xi. no. 1, 78.

create organisations where they could discuss their questions, discern the concrete face of the poor, recall lessons from history, learn from their mistakes and achievements, and experience solidarity.

Míguez-Bonino and Boesak also sought to interpret their situation with the help of social analysis. Míguez-Bonino and Boesak have both defined the oppression that has existed throughout their country's histories as the result of social conflict; which they believe to be a structural (institutional and legal) phenomenon. They believe that the traditional or common conception that laziness, ignorance, or wickedness, as the cause of the impoverished conditions, is no longer an acceptable approach for explaining the way in which a vast percentage of the world's population currently live. What has made their situations oppressive are the many forms of social, economic, political, and cultural domination in their regions. The conditions of international trade, the financial system, the exploitation of resources and labour by national and transnational corporations, the "foreign debt", as well as, technological, cultural, psychological, and religious domination, are all symbols of the oppressive condition that exists in their countries. This "conflictive" phenomenon, Míguez-Bonino and Boesak believe, cannot be reconciled unless the structure of society and its institutions are fundamentally changed. An alternative social system is required because the conditions of the destitute only seem to be getting worse under the present systems.

Distinctions

Both Míguez-Bonino and Boesak are similar in their theological method: both hold that God is on the side of the poor and oppressed and both follow Gutiérrez's definition that theology is the critical reflection on Christian praxis in light of the Word of God.⁸⁰¹ But what makes these theologians and their theology distinct? They are distinct with respect to audience, style, and content.

⁸⁰¹ See discussion on Míguez-Bonino's and Boesak's theological method, pages 55, 151 and 186.

They are distinct, first, because they speak to different audiences. We will recall Míguez-Bonino's assessment of the churches in Latin America. He distinguishes them by ideology rather than by confessional tradition. In Latin America there are those churches who hear the Gospel as a call for justice and a
5 call for a radical transformation of the social, economic, and political structures of Latin America. But, according to Míguez-Bonino, these churches are in the minority. The majority are either Charismatic churches that refuse to take any responsibility for social process because religion belongs to the individual, private sphere; or they are characteristically Conservative churches that
10 believe they are the defenders of institutional democracy, classical forms of freedom, socio-economic developmentalism, the capitalistic enterprise and the transmission of a religious tradition.⁸⁰²

Boesak, on the other hand, faces a different situation and a different audience in South Africa. He is confronted by the fact that a majority of his
15 audience claims a single confessional heritage—the Dutch Reformed tradition. The churches in South Africa can be divided in a similar way that Míguez-Bonino does in Latin America—those churches that resist the status quo, those who ignore the political situation, and those who openly defend the status quo. But in South Africa, because a majority of the churches are of a single theological
20 heritage, all three types of churches defend their position using the Reformed tradition. In his work Boesak takes this important factor into account.

This difference with respect to audience accounts for the difference in their style and content. Míguez-Bonino argues his position from the standpoint that both the socio-economic and the theological traditions that Latin American
25 churches have inherited from the West are corrupt and inadequate. These traditions, therefore, need to be stood on their heads. There has to be a complete transformation of both the socio-economic predicament and the theological sphere. Everything must be changed, from the way common business

⁸⁰² See above, 36.

transactions are performed to the way the churches think about their faith in God. Boesak, on the other hand, becomes the true defender of the Christian heritage in South Africa. His perspective is that the white churches have allowed the gospel to become corrupted through their racism. In Boesak's mind, South Africa must return to its Reformed theological roots and the basic gospel message of liberation. The message of God in its "original intention" must be proclaimed.⁸⁰³ Boesak is of the opinion that if the churches allow their Reformed heritage to truly speak to them and transform them, then racism will be defeated and the black people will be able to properly participate in the socio-economic structures of their country.

Because Míguez-Bonino wishes to see a total transformation of all systems in Latin America, this explains why he finds it necessary to offer his audience a detailed account of the economic conditions in Latin America and why he finds himself at odds with the theological traditions that Latin America has inherited. As a professor, Míguez-Bonino is basically concerned with analysis of the social, economic, political and theological situation of the world around him. He painstakingly outlines the different factors that have contributed to the conditions of poverty that exist in the Third World. He is not a preacher, or any other type of "resistance" leader, who attempts to appeal to the emotions of the people in order to help them find their liberation. Instead, he is a professor and a theologian who's predilection is the analysis of the liberation movement, the "causes" of poverty in the world, and the theological response of the Church.

Boesak also concerns himself with analysis and theological method. However, these are not the strengths of his work. Boesak does not perform a detailed analysis of the economic conditions in South Africa and instead of turning theology on its head as Míguez-Bonino wishes to, Boesak finds himself defending the Reformed tradition. Instead of insisting on a complete transformation of all systems—social, economic, political and theological—Boesak

⁸⁰³ See above, 197 and 230.

confines himself to an argument against the structures that prevent the black people of South Africa from participating in the system completely and to the fullest potential of their capability. Why is this so? When looking at his theology we must remember that Boesak was first and foremost a preacher and a leader in the resistance movement. Although he did receive his Ph.D., he was not an academic scholar first and foremost. As a preacher and church leader he invested his efforts into reaching the hearts, minds, and emotions of the people of South Africa. His desire was to be in the very midst of the liberation movement fighting against apartheid. In his many sermons and speeches we get the impression that he worked, not at the universities or seminaries, but rather with the people where they lived, worked and breathed. In his sermons Boesak gives almost a case by case study of the oppression in South Africa under the apartheid government. He tells many personal stories of how various communities have suffered oppression. Míguez-Bonino, on the other hand, never specifically discusses particular cases. Although he does detail the historical situation of Latin America in *Doing Theology in a Revolutionary Situation*; even then, he is primarily concerned with analysis and addressing the academic community.

Their different audiences and their difference in style accounts for their different theological contents. Míguez-Bonino challenges all that he sees—secular and religious. Boesak tries to persuade South Africans to put aside their racism and nationalisms in order to truly live as Reformed Christians. Because Boesak deals more with the feelings and emotions of living under the apartheid system, he talks more about racism and the social effects it has on the community and on the Church. Racism goes beyond all socio-economic and political analysis. Certainly, and Boesak recognised this, many people are discriminated against because of their economic position in society. But people are also discriminated against for no other reason than the colour of their skin or their race. Therefore, when dealing with racism one must remember that there is an

inexplicable emotional side. Míguez-Bonino, on the other hand, deals more with analysis of the economic system of oppression that the Latin American people are experiencing. He does not articulate the emotions of poverty, or how people who are poor, feel. He does discuss what poor people must endure, but he ignores racism and nationalism therefore the level of emotion is very different between the two theologians and this leads them to distinct theologies.

Both theologians believe that God identifies himself as a covenantal being, one who manifests himself as a liberating God and as one who brings justice to the people that he has created. Míguez-Bonino tells us that God stands by human life by taking responsibility as “*go’el*, the defender, the avenger, the redeemer of all Adam.”⁸⁰⁴ In doing justice God proves himself faithful to the covenant relation that God has established. Boesak, drawing heavily on the Exodus event, explains how God hears the cries of the oppressed, takes sides with them over against their oppressors, and performs liberating deeds. He explains how Jesus Christ participated in God’s liberating activity. Jesus struggled on behalf of the poor and oppressed in order to liberate them from the enemies and the evils of this world. Both theologians, then, see liberation of humanity as a gift from God. Both understand that liberation, spiritual and historical, is God’s initiative and grace.

But, Míguez-Bonino and Boesak differ in their approach to salvation and the way they relate their understanding of “God as liberator” to social action. Míguez-Bonino insists that a covenantal relationship between God and humanity is a two way street and all people, as God’s “partners” in this covenant, are required to demonstrate the same faithfulness in the communal relation of everyday life. This covenant makes the defence of the poor, the protection of life and the vigilance of human rights not an option for Christians.⁸⁰⁵ Míguez-Bonino insists that Christians must be involved in politics because of the

⁸⁰⁴ See above, 118.

⁸⁰⁵ See above, 121.

covenant relationship we share with God. We are partners with God in our salvation. Here we see him questioning the “Protestant tradition”, and turning it on its head; arguing that under the Western theological tradition all human action has been dismissed from the process of salvation. Míguez-Bonino insists
5 that our actions are intrinsic to the relationship we have with God and that we are not saved through works, but we are not saved without them. In other words, he sees salvation as a process that synthesises “action” and “being.” Becoming a Christian means to take action in history.

Boesak, on the other hand; coming from the Reformed tradition focuses
10 more on God’s justice and judgement; on God’s action in human history. God’s gift of liberation to us sets us free to live our lives in peace and gratitude, which is expressed in obedient action and justice toward our neighbour. It is God who liberates people so that they may live in just relationships with each other. God’s gift of peace to us is a call to battle with the sinful structures and injustices of
15 this world. If we ignore or refuse this call God will judge and, indeed, destroy those who resist God’s righteousness and justice. If Christians, according to Boesak, are to be God’s covenantal people, then they must act in justice vis-à-vis other people.

Míguez-Bonino and Boesak approach God’s action and human response in
20 salvation differently because of their background and audience. Míguez-Bonino is trying to awaken what he sees as an apathetic church that has accepted without challenge a corrupt theological tradition from the Western churches. He questions the doctrines that have lulled the church into its complacency in the face of devastating poverty. Boesak is trying to awaken the churches as well,
25 but he is not attempting to transform the Reformed theological tradition into something completely new. Instead, he is trying to defend it. He argues that the white churches have wrongly interpreted the theology of the Church and his desire is for the churches to awaken to their Reformed tradition by responding to God’s call for liberation and justice. It is his hope that Reformed Christians

will properly respond to God's grace and start to live in relationships built on justice, peace, and reconciliation.

Therefore, there is a fundamental difference here in the way Míguez-Bonino and Boesak understand salvation—Míguez-Bonino understands it as a partnership that must be worked out, while Boesak views it as a gift to be appreciated and responded to—and thus there is a fundamental difference in their understanding of liberation. As it was said earlier they hold in common the quest for liberation—freedom from all conditions that enslave—but they interpret that liberation, or freedom, in different ways because of their audience and their understanding of the conditions that enslave. Míguez-Bonino believes that people will be liberated into a completely new and different social, economic, political, and theological situation if the people of God “link” themselves with God as a partner to bring about this liberation. Boesak, on the other hand, coming from a Reformed tradition (of which he wishes to defend) would feel uncomfortable with Míguez-Bonino’s “partnership” terminology. For Boesak, it is God alone who ultimately “orders” all things—all cultural, economic, and political relationships. For example, in his discussion on Romans 13 Boesak insists that a particular form of government is not established by God, but rather the power and the authority (or the order) which a government represents is established by God. It is human beings that establish a particular form of government, and it is these “forms” that can abuse and manipulate God’s ordering. Boesak thus understands liberation as a “freeing up” of the oppressed from their oppressive situations so that all may participate in God’s ultimate ordering of reality. This difference in definition concerning liberation accounts for the different ways Míguez-Bonino and Boesak approach the Church’s mission and witness.

These theologians stand close together concerning the limits on the Church’s mission concerning utopianism, power and violence. Boesak is critical of the white Reformed churches in South Africa for using the Reformed Doctrine

of Sin as an excuse not to challenge the status quo. He tells us that true Reformed theology recognises the sinful, broken realities; but these realities become the impulse for reformation and reconciliation.⁸⁰⁶ Míguez-Bonino understands sin in the same way when he tells us that sin is not an established blockage which cannot be challenged. Instead it must be permanently struggled against. The quest for peace, justice, and freedom is a permanent struggle. The liberation movement is all about this struggle.⁸⁰⁷

Míguez-Bonino and Boesak also seem to agree on the Church's use of power and violence. Míguez-Bonino believes that the human use of power is caught in a tension between a command to mediate God's justice and a temptation to use God's power for self-justification.⁸⁰⁸ Liberation theologians do not attempt to use power to produce political parties, for self-glorification or to destroy one's opponents; but rather to mediate God's justice in historical situations. Power, according to Míguez-Bonino, is about love. In fact, he calls it the "inner meaning of politics." Power is about struggling for liberation and solidarity. Like Míguez-Bonino, Boesak also rejects the definition of power as the ability to force one's will on others. Instead, he defines it as the ability to achieve a purpose, create, help, affirm, or encourage. It is the ability to affirm one's own beingness and to create one's own resources.⁸⁰⁹ Power is service to others and obedience to God. It is the ability to love. Boesak and Míguez-Bonino therefore both reject solutions that promote violence.

But these two theologians still approach liberation, and thus the Church's mission, from different perspectives. This is nowhere made more clear than in each of their discussions on the danger of making a particular social class or group the object of faith and the constituting principle of the Church.⁸¹⁰ Míguez-Bonino takes a little different approach to this subject than Boesak.

⁸⁰⁶ See above, 227.

⁸⁰⁷ See above, 148.

⁸⁰⁸ See above, 140.

⁸⁰⁹ See above, 199.

⁸¹⁰ See above, 132 and 207.

Boesak argues that the Christian faith transcends all ideologies and human perspectives. Míguez-Bonino admits to his readers that every faith perspective is bias and ideological; and his bias is towards the poor.

Similar to Boesak, Míguez-Bonino refuses to allow the Church to neglect its theological focus—seeking a faith that is rooted in God’s self-revelation centred and fulfilled in Jesus Christ. The theological task of the Church must not be a mere reflection of social location.⁸¹¹ However, Míguez-Bonino does not see the “poor” as simply another social class; but rather, the poor are a “theological locus” that is at the very heart of the biblical witness. Míguez-Bonino calls the poor “God’s messengers” and “the bearers of the gospel.” To discover what Míguez-Bonino means when he says this, John de Gruchy’s commentary on Míguez-Bonino’s words are helpful. He says, “we not only need the spectacles of Scripture in order to know God the creator and redeemer in Christ, but we also need the spectacles of the victims of society in order to discern the liberating Word in Scripture itself.”⁸¹² For Míguez-Bonino, then, the Bible is inevitably read from many ideological points of view. In order to fully understand God’s liberating Word, we must read Scripture from the ideological perspective of the poor. For it is from that perspective that our ideological defences fade away and we are able to see God’s liberating purposes and grace.

Similar to Míguez-Bonino, Boesak does not deny that black theology faces the danger of promoting an ideology that serves the interests of one group of people. Boesak insists that God cannot be reduced to a mere symbol of nationalistic aspirations. He argues that the Christian faith transcends all ideologies and all nationalistic ideals.⁸¹³ It transcends the interests of specific groups and he rejects any theology that is exclusivistic. But, instead of admitting that all theology is ideological, as Míguez-Bonino does, Boesak takes a different approach. He excuses Afrikaner theology because it is an ideology, which Boesak

⁸¹¹ See above, 135.

⁸¹² de Gruchy, *Liberating Reformed Theology*, 1991, 78.

⁸¹³ See above, 208.

defines as an exclusivistic system of ideas used to justify and perpetuate existing structures of injustice. Boesak proceeds then to show that Black Theology does not yield to the evils of ideology. It is a system that stands firm on the Word of God and in the Christian tradition. This is why he insists that Black Theology is not a new theology but “the proclamation of the age old Gospel.”⁸¹⁴ According to Boesak, Black Theology goes beyond ideology because it reflects upon the human condition in light of God’s Word, its goal is to be an instrument of God’s love and justice, it lends to the needs of the oppressed, and it seeks the liberation of all people.

Thus, we can see that Míguez-Bonino and Boesak differ considerably concerning the constituting principle of the Church. How do we account for this difference? As a theologian from the Reformed tradition John de Gruchy admits: “We, [Reformed theologians], need to develop a Reformed hermeneutic that recognises what José Míguez-Bonino has called ‘the epistemological privilege of the poor.’”⁸¹⁵ De Gruchy’s statement recognises the fact that the Reformed tradition is at a loss with regards to the theological case that Míguez-Bonino presents. This explains Boesak’s inability to reach the same conclusion as Míguez-Bonino. Boesak wishes to argue that he has developed a new way of doing theology that stands within the boundaries of the “age-old Gospel”. This beckons us back to our earlier discussion on audience and the intent of Boesak’s work. Boesak wishes to rescue Reformed theology from the clutches of Afrikaner Nationalist theology, thus he must show how Afrikaner theology is ideological and Black Theology transcends all ideology. Míguez-Bonino, on the other hand, is trying to turn theology on its head and show that all theology is done from a certain ideological perspective; but, it is only the perspective of the poor that can show us the liberating Word of God.

⁸¹⁴ See above, 196.

⁸¹⁵ de Gruchy, *Liberating Reformed Theology*, 1991, 78.

The advantage of Míguez-Bonino's position over Boesak's is that it inspires analysis of one's own bias when entering into theological discussion. It helps the churches to understand that as Christians get involved in politics an analysis of one's ideological bias must be performed. However, the importance of

5 Boesak's position must not be lost. Boesak's position seems to "add to" or to qualify Míguez-Bonino's theology. As we saw in our analysis, Boesak's thinking sought the liberation of all people. Míguez-Bonino's work is susceptible to the criticism that it only offers liberation to the oppressed and not the oppressors. Míguez-Bonino is concerned about the liberation of all people; however, his theology is

10 not as strong as Boesak's on this point.

How then should Christians get involved in politics according to these two theologians? Before the Church can enter the public realm, Míguez-Bonino argues that it must recognise that it speaks on behalf of the entire Christian community (the church of the people), that it speaks for the entire human

15 community (and particularly the poor), and that it needs to perform an analysis of the historical conditions as well as Christian praxis in that condition.⁸¹⁶ By recognising these elements the Church is able to reverse its Constantinian tradition and return to the priorities of the biblical witness. Instead of asking "What degree of justice is compatible with the existing order?" the Church will

20 ask "What kind of order is compatible with the exercise of God's justice?" For Míguez-Bonino, then, the goal of the Church in the public realm is to look for a social system which complies with God's justice. The churches must enter the public realm to denounce bad systems and to promote a just social system that seriously takes into consideration the condition of the poor. The churches must

25 introduce into the realm of public debate and discussion a specific perspective on society, history and human life that has been born out of faith and strengthened

⁸¹⁶ See above, 153.

by social analysis. The churches must stimulate Christians to participate actively in human affairs from that perspective.⁸¹⁷

What is the social system that complies with God's justice? What perspective on society, history and human life that the Church must bring forth into the public realm? According to Míguez-Bonino it has four elements: societal appropriation of the means of production; (2) societal appropriation of political power; (3) societal appropriation of freedom; and (4) the creation of a new social consciousness." This formula, Míguez-Bonino tells us, points to a society which is "socialist in the organisation of its economy, democratic in terms of the political participation of the people, and open in the sense of ensuring the conditions for personal realisation, cultural freedom and opportunity, and the mechanisms for self-correction."⁸¹⁸ Míguez-Bonino insists that politics, economics, and cultural decisions must be put into the hands of all the people; not just the elite. The people must have control of production, distribution, and consumption of all goods; not just major multi-national corporations. The people must have the power to create their culture, values, and destiny; not just the privileged few. The government must be formed by the people and for the people.

From our analysis of Míguez-Bonino's theology we conclude that he not only condemned the conditions of poverty in Latin America; he questions the socio-economic, political, and theological traditions, and he takes an additional step by outlining a new social system that he hopes complies with God's justice.

Although Boesak alludes several times to a major transformation of the socio-economic and political structures in South Africa, he does not go as far as Míguez-Bonino. Boesak insists that the liberation the churches must proclaim is total—it is liberation from sin as well as from economic exploitation, dehumanisation, and oppression. He insists that the oppressed people of his country need a "qualitatively different society."⁸¹⁹ However, the emphasis of

⁸¹⁷ See above, 167.

⁸¹⁸ See above, 158.

⁸¹⁹ See above, 223 and 251.

his theology lies more in the area of resistance to the established social and political systems than it does on transforming economic factors. As we have pointed out, Boesak does not perform an in-depth analysis of the economic conditions. He does draw together a modest social analysis (his country has been built on racism) with a political analysis (South Africa has not been a truly democratic society); but he does not associate these with an economic analysis (why people are poor). He does not describe other contributing factors for the causes of poverty in his country except that of racism .

Similar to Míguez-Bonino, Boesak takes the first step in condemning the conditions that he sees. But in the process of developing his theology, Boesak goes a different direction than Míguez-Bonino. Boesak does not take the additional step that Míguez-Bonino takes of outlining a new socio-economic and political system that complies with God's order of justice. Instead, Boesak emphasises resistance and plans a "strategy" for that resistance. Boesak insists that the Church cannot remain neutral in the face of injustice. The Church must make political choices, in that it must initiate and support meaningful, non-violent pressure on systems of injustice. It must initiate and support programs of non-violent civil disobedience in order to raise socio-economic and political issues. The Church must never struggle against an unjust system in order to gain power or control, but rather to bring justice and reconciliation for and amongst all people.

Boesak emphasises resistance to a corrupt political system because that is how he defines liberation. Liberation is the overcoming of oppression that prevents one from participating in God's creation. But Míguez-Bonino, as we have just seen, takes us in a different direction. He understands liberation as being liberated into a completely new and different social system. He therefore, takes the additional step of outlining what that new system looks like. Boesak does not take this additional step when developing his theology. Of course, Míguez-Bonino does not outline a "plan of resistance" based on civil-

disobedience or organise public prayers to end unjust rule. So their understandings of the Church's mission diverges because of the way they understand God's project of liberation.

Boesak emphasises more than Míguez-Bonino the idea that the political struggle for a new social system should never become a "Christian struggle". Míguez-Bonino is aware of this danger, but he does not allow it to distract him. Boesak, on the other hand, insists that the Church must never meddle in party politics or be associated with any party ideology. In fact, the churches must retain a critical distance (a non-ideological position) from any party so that it may bring a Christian presence to the struggle for liberation. If the Church should involve itself in party politics it loses this perspective.

Boesak resists party politics because it concerns agendas, platforms, positions, and creating new social structures. In his discussion on Romans 13, Boesak argues that God gives authority and power to governments but does not dictate the particular form of government. The voters decide what form of government a country should have. Likewise, the Church must protest against and resist any form of government that abuses its God-given power and authority through civil-disobedience, but the Church cannot establish a particular form of government. That must be left to the people.

The mission of the Church in the public realm, according to Boesak then, must be to inspire debate, communication, the re-education of the people, and give direction for resistance. The churches must not "Christianise" the political struggle for liberation. He argues from this position because he believes that in relation to the Church the fight for liberation in South Africa is not so much a struggle for a new political order as it is a struggle to maintain the integrity of the gospel. Under Boesak's direction the General Synod of the NGSK in 1982 declared apartheid a *status confessionis*, meaning that they regarded apartheid a concern about which it was impossible to differ without affecting the integrity of the Gospel. The confession affirmed that the Church must "stand by people in

any form of suffering and need,” and “must witness against and strive against any form of injustice.”

In order to maintain the integrity of the gospel, Boesak deduced that the Church must be socially critical. It must maintain its distance from any political party or group, but this did not mean it should remain neutral. The Church cannot remain neutral in the face of such injustice. The Church must make political choices, in that it must initiate and support meaningful, non-violent pressure on systems of injustice.

Unlike Míguez-Bonino, Boesak never outlines a new socio-economic, political program. He believed that the Church should not maintain that role. In fact, we have had to rely on other South African theologians instead of Boesak to discuss specific issues such as land restoration and economic reconstruction in South Africa. For Boesak, the Church was to play a custodial role concerning the needs of the people. Constantly and consistently the Church must remind whoever has political power, of the needs of the poor, oppressed, and the voiceless. The Church has a duty to resist any government that does not listen to God’s Word and protect justice by defending the poor and oppressed. But Church must never support a particular ideological political position.

At this point the theologies of these two theologians have diverged. They both have their advantages and disadvantages. The advantage here of Míguez-Bonino’s work is that it offers churches direction in the midst of a transition from an old socio-economic and political system to a new one. The disadvantage is that his work is more susceptible to the danger of absolutising a particular order by insisting that it complies with God’s justice. The advantage of Boesak’s work is that it is less susceptible to absolutising a political system because he is less specific in his recommendations. However, the disadvantage of his work, because he does not specifically outline a new social structure for South Africa as Míguez-Bonino does for Latin America, is that it runs the risk of allowing the status quo to continue.

Míguez-Bonino's theology works to liberate people to a new situation. The strength of his theology is that it is a theology of development or reconstruction. Boesak's theology works to liberate people *from* an old situation. The strength of his theology is that it is a theology of resistance. Boesak envisions a new society in which justice is served but he refuses to give us details about what shape that new society has. The shape is to be determined by the people once all people have been liberated and can participate equally in the system. The theologies of these two men are different because they are trying to speak to different audiences that have different needs.

10 *The Significance of Their Theologies for the Church Today*

Like Luther's "justification by faith alone," the claim that "God is on the side of the poor and oppressed" is reverberating throughout the Church and shaking the foundations. It is seen by Míguez-Bonino and Boesak to exact changes in the Church due to its assertion that the God of the Exodus, of the Old Covenant and the New, has a special concern for the little people of the world, the marginalised, the excluded, in biblical language: the widows and orphans. José Míguez-Bonino has suggested that if liberation theology is on the right track, "it demands a total overhaul of Christian piety, ecclesiastical institutions, discipline, and theological reflection."⁸²⁰ Míguez-Bonino and Boesak ask the Church some uncomfortable questions about the world's socio-political and economic systems that cannot be ignored in any real attempt to end poverty and oppression. They question and analyse the ideological influences relating to the Church, including its theology and its interpretation of Scripture. Its often alleged neutrality in politics often masks a support for the status quo and its pastoral ministry ignores social conflicts that divide society.

We, who live in Europe and North America, are naturally fearful in the face of change, especially sweeping and fundamental change. There is the

⁸²⁰ Míguez-Bonino, *Doing Theology in a Revolutionary Situation*, 1975, xxiv.

danger that we shall lose something of real value, and there is the even more threatening danger that we shall be called to repentance and conversion. So the temptation is strong to escape this challenge by completely dismissing liberation theology by insisting that Church and politics do not mix or by linking it to an international communist conspiracy while calling for a strategy of continual security.⁸²¹

In the West, when we find that we can no longer ignore it, we seek to find sufficient fault with the liberation theologies to render them discredited. We fault liberation theologies for incorrectly mixing religion and politics. We accuse liberation theologians for focusing too much on “this world salvation”, to the extent that they neglect any future, heavenly salvation. We believe in so doing this, liberation theologians stand in danger of providing uncritical theological legitimisation of political action. Liberation theology in this respect is no different than nationalistic, racist theology or the theology of the elite.

We who live in Europe and North America may also disagree with the fundamental premise that God is revealed throughout the Bible to be on the side of the poor and oppressed. This is the deepest reason critics find liberation theology offensive and therefore reject or dismiss it. Critics admit that the Old Testament makes reference to God’s support of the widow, the orphan, and the oppressed. But God favours such people in as much as they obey God’s commandments. God is in no way partial towards certain individuals because of their social status.

In the West, many critics of liberation theology who consider themselves to be socially and political liberal, are disturbed by what they consider to be the signs of utopianism, totalitarianism and anti-intellectualism evident in the work of progressive, liberation theologians. Liberals agree with liberation theologians when they call attention to the reality of social injustice, to the mechanisms of domination which tend to perpetuate situations of dependence,

⁸²¹ Nelson-Pallmeyer, *Brave New World Order*, 1992, 52.

and to the inadequacy of the means taken to eliminate social injustices; but liberals argue that the formulations of progressive theologians are too general, their goals are abstract, and they have no clear program for social change. A lack of political realism, liberals insist, leaves progressives without any means
5 for dealing with the subtleties and tragedies of politics or for solving the question of power to bring about significant change.⁸²²

But in this paper we have challenged and called into question the theology of those conservative theologians who argue that the Church should stay out of politics completely, and we have called into question the theology of those neo-
10 liberal or moderate theologians who insist that the Church should be more realistic and work within the established order. We have argued against the way conservative and neo-liberal theology is being done in our churches. Asserting that although these theologians strongly believe that they are the ones who are protecting the Gospel and promoting a theology that truly cares for the well-
15 being of the poor and oppressed, we have said that in reality all they are doing is maintaining the status quo and the present systems of oppression.

Our conservative and neo-liberal theologians in our Western churches cannot offer solutions to the problems of poverty, racism, sexism, and nationalism that seems to plague our world and our own countries because they
20 do not understand the predicament of these situations. They believe they can somehow do theology in a vacuum—where they can interpret the Word of God and then only secondarily try to understand how this Word enlightens our socio-economic and political situations. In the West, we have not learned to wrestle with the problems of the world. We have not attempted to understand all of our
25 context—the problem of homelessness, the problem of famine, the problem of racism—before our governments shut down the programs that assist the poor and oppressed. We have not tried to understand what makes people poor. We refuse

⁸²² Shaull, "Liberal and Radical in an Age of Discontinuity," *Student World*, Vol. LXII, Nos 3 and 4, 1969.

to ask the difficult questions: Does everyone have access to political, economic, and cultural power? And to what extent does racism or nationalism defeat this access?

For the most part, our churches and theologians in the Western world
5 ignore such questions because we are the product of a consumerist culture. We look at all that surrounds us as items that can serve us. In relation to our faith, we turn to a God that we can use rather than a God we must obey. We turn to a God who will fulfil our needs rather than to a God before whom we must
10 surrender. We believe that God is *for* us—for our satisfaction and for our pleasure. We transform the God of mercy into a God who is at our mercy. Instead of interpreting our life according to the Word of God, we interpret the Word of God according to our life.

On their own, our churches in the West are therefore unable to produce a theology that questions ourselves, our behaviour, and the way we understand
15 and affect our world and the people around us. Without help we are unable to understand social forces and social conflicts, and the social balance of power. We are unable to comprehend our own ideology and how far it is used as a cloak to disguise what is really happening; how far it is an instrument of social control and contributes to oppressive conditions. On our own, we are unable to speak in
20 a meaningful, purposeful, relevant way to our own society let alone to the world.⁸²³

If our teaching, our preaching, our mission, or our future witness is going to be at all relevant in our society, our churches in the West must be educated and assisted in seeing the world, not just from our own perspective but from all
25 perspectives. This is why we believe that both the theologies of Míguez-Bonino and Boesak are helpful to our situation in the West. If we are going to address the needs of the poor who walk our own city streets, then we need to adopt parts of Míguez-Bonino's theology because he offers an analysis of the world market,

⁸²³ Forrester, *Theology of Politics*, 1988, 81-82.

how monopolies dominate the world economic reality, social class, systems of production, and international relations. He gives us a perspective on how people suffer from working under poor conditions without proper compensation. He shows how people are manipulated by their own companies. He shows us how to
5 look at the world from the perspective of the poor.

We need to examine Boesak's theology as well because he can offer us an analysis of how our society is affected by racism. Certainly in the West we have our own economic and social analysis, however we need to broaden that perspective if we are going to understand all the contributing factors in our
10 society. Racism and nationalism is a serious problem in our world that must be addressed by our theology.

Another strength of Míguez-Bonino's theology (and perhaps a weakness of Boesak's), is his understanding that all theological perspectives are ideological and all are bias. This is a strength of Míguez-Bonino's theology because it forces
15 every Christian to consider the fact that whenever they think about God's relationship with them, they are approaching that relationship from a bias perspective. It also forces each Christian to consider their role in the socio-economic and political conditions of the world and as they think about their relationship with their neighbour; whether that neighbour be wealthy or poor,
20 black or white. Each of us must consider our own bias as we think about all our relationships.

Related to this issue, another strength of Míguez-Bonino's theology is this understanding: if we are going to truly appreciate the liberating Word of God, and discover what we must do to change the socio-economic and political
25 conditions in order to meet the requirements of the gospel, then we must interpret Scripture and our social situation from the perspective of the poor and oppressed. Míguez-Bonino gives special attention to the ideological bias of the poor because through them the rest of the world is able to see and believe in a

liberating God—in a God who cares and brings salvation to the world. It is in and through the poor that the rest of the world learns about love and compassion.

The weakness of Míguez-Bonino's theology at this point, is that he does nothing with racism. If Míguez-Bonino's theology is truly going to be beneficial for the Western churches than it must be qualified here by Boesak's theology. For poverty and racism are both devastating problems in Western countries.

Boesak's theology is somewhat weak in the area of ideology. We can understand why he felt it necessary to show that his theology (Black Theology) was non-ideological at the time—he wanted to dismiss Afrikaner theology as being ideological. However, at the end of the day it would have suited his purposes better if he would have argued the way Míguez-Bonino did—that God has a preferential option for the victims of society. That this preferential option is God's ideological bias.

A third strength, and perhaps a danger as well, of Míguez-Bonino's theology is that he outlines a specific socio-economic and political plan that the churches should be working toward. He does not leave his readers wondering what the next step should be when the old oppressive regime comes to an end. But perhaps this is also a weakness because, (and Míguez-Bonino was aware of this), when the Church lifts up something that is temporary and presents it as something that is absolute it runs the risk of idolatry. The Church runs the risk of setting up a system to be worshipped other than God. Boesak understood this risk so he decided not to promote a political program for restructuring South Africa. However, in many cases if no socio-economic or political details are given for the development of a society, then the chances are greater that the status quo will not be challenged. We agree with Boesak that the Church cannot prescribe any precise political details, however, the Gospel offers values by which Christians are obliged to test all political options and discern which options comply with God's justice. For example, we must agree to economic

structures which provides for the care of all people and gives them the basic necessities of life.

Míguez-Bonino's theology is weak on several issues where Boesak's theology is at its strongest. Míguez-Bonino does cover the issues of violence and power, however, his work does not offer details concerning resistance to an unjust government. Boesak deals very well with the subjects of violence and power, civil disobedience, and non-violent confrontation; which Míguez-Bonino for the most part ignores. Míguez-Bonino leaves these issues up to the secular revolutionaries in Latin America of which many Christians eventually joined.

10 We believe Boesak's theology to be beneficial in this area because he offers Christians constructive guidance in resisting an unjust government. First, he worked to have its policies declared a church heresy, not only in South Africa but also across the world within the ecumenical movement. Second, he promoted acts of civil-disobedience through non-violent actions of non-cooperation. And

15 third, he organised public prayers for the downfall of an unjust government. In each step of this process, Boesak made more and more people aware of the oppression in South Africa so that eventually the government had to peacefully resign. Míguez-Bonino's work in Latin America and those who suffer from poverty and racism in the West can benefit from such a process for it raises

20 support within the ecumenical movement for the causes of the poor and oppressed.

In the West, we need the influence of both Míguez-Bonino's and Boesak's theologies because we need to be challenged from both directions. We need to have our complacency challenged and we need to be aware of those instances

25 where we have allowed the Church's theology to be subdued by ideologies that keep us from understanding God's liberating Word. Míguez-Bonino was a scholar and Boesak was a preacher; they had very different styles. In the West, we need a liberation theology that will be taught in the classrooms as well as preached from our pulpits. Today the various forms of liberation theology are discussed in

the classrooms of our universities and seminaries, however our ministers struggle with the courage to preach it in the pulpits.

We also need more than a black theology or a poor theology in the West. We need a theology of *both* poverty and oppression. For we have both problems of poverty and racism in our countries. Our middle-class churches refuse to recognise these problems because in almost every instance we fail to perform the necessary analysis of our social bias before we draw conclusions or reach solutions to the socio-economic problems of our communities. This leads us to offer misleading explanations that have little understanding of why people are poor, how they became poor, why they continue to live in their poverty, and how they can overcome their situation. We do not seem capable of appreciating the devastating affects of racism and nationalism in our countries. Under the influence of our conservative and neo-liberal theologians, our churches are unable to offer informed theories on the socio-economic structure of society or a theology that will guide us to liberation.

A Struggle for Solidarity

According to Calvin the political responsibility of the Church is to ensure that the poor and needy, the old and infirm, widows and orphans, exiles and refugees were cared for and the young educated. The Church should ensure a just distribution of wealth. Calvin adopted a position we would today refer to as a “mixed economy” in which there is a scope of individual initiative as well as state intervention and control. Calvin would have supported the redistribution of wealth through a system of taxation that favoured social victims and the poor. Calvin did not believe in allowing the state off the hook; on the contrary, the Church’s task was to “remind those in authority about the responsibility under God to those in their political care.”⁸²⁴

⁸²⁴De Gruchy, *Liberating Reformed Theology*, 1991, 250-251.

However, the world's governments do not seem to be meeting their responsibilities. A 1992 study document from the World Council of Churches tells us that a quarter of the world's population lives in absolute poverty, 900 million people cannot read or write, that one out of every three children born alive is
5 undernourished at some time within its first five years, and that at least 14 million of those children die of hunger every year. "This at a time in world history when the conditions necessary to ensure a minimal living standard for all are entirely within the powers of the world community."⁸²⁵ What Beverly Harrison describes concerning the domestic economy of the United States seems
10 to be happening in many other wealthy countries.

Our domestic economy is also undergoing profound mis-
development. The much discussed problem of deindustrialization—the loss of basic industries and industrial jobs—is but the tip of the
15 iceberg. Increasingly, this economy has become militarized—shaped and sustained by massive federal expenditures on military technology and hardware. These expenditures create far fewer jobs and no wealth-producing goods or socially beneficial services.⁸²⁶

The care of the poor is being ignored. Calvin argued that if the "magistrates" fail in their duty towards the poor and the oppressed, then it was the Church's
20 responsibility to struggle for justice on behalf of the poor. Today, the responsibility of the Church cannot be ignored. It is the Church's responsibility to minister to the needs of the poor and to take their side in the struggle for justice. As Míguez-Bonino argues whenever structural changes are needed we must weigh the human cost of their realisation and the human cost of their
25 postponement. Some people insist that fundamental social, economic and political changes in the world will only cause human lives to be needlessly sacrificed. However, he asks how many lives are sacrificed by prolonging a distribution of goods that has already ceased to serve the needs of the people in this world? Míguez-Bonino concludes "The churches need to expose the ideology

⁸²⁵ World Council of Churches, *Christian Faith and the World Economy*, 1992, 18.

⁸²⁶ Harrison, "The Fate of the Middle 'Class' in Late Capitalism", in Thomas and Visick, eds., *God and Capitalism*, 1991, 63-64.

of oppression and unblock the conscience of Christians so they can participate in a project of liberation.”⁸²⁷

Míguez-Bonino and Boesak are not asking we who live in the West to be simply sympathetic to their cause. Nor are they asking for our charity—asking
5 us to help them along. Instead they are asking us to become liberated ourselves. When we become liberated our response to the Third world will change. We will not look at it from a conservative nor a liberal position. They are asking us to liberate our society, by changing the structures that we participate in so that all people—poor, rich, white, black, female or male—can participate in our society.
10 They are asking for the development of a new solidarity and a new community.

In the early 1970’s in South Africa the liberal and predominately white National Union of South African Students finally recognised that the black South African Students Organisation was the body best able to represent the interests of black students. It was resolved that of the NUSAS was to be “supportive of black
15 initiative.” Some white students were offended that their leadership was rejected and dropped out of political engagement. But others tried to relate white student activities to black-led campaigns. White students participated in campaigns against the celebration of Republic Day and for the release of political prisoners. The earlier campaigns had been lead and dominated by white students, but the
20 later campaigns in the 1980s were lead by black students. The relinquishing of political control of the white liberal students assisted in the emergence of viable black political leadership in trade unions, civic associations, women’s organisations, and student and youth organisations. Perhaps this development is not axiomatic, but it is surely an important legacy of the tradition of the political
25 struggle in South Africa.⁸²⁸

What happened in South Africa needs to happen at a world level today. We are still stuck in our old conservative and liberal responses, trying to

⁸²⁷ Míguez-Bonino, *Toward a Christian Political Ethics*, 1983, 108.

⁸²⁸ Budlender, “Black Consciousness and the Liberal Tradition: Then and Now,” in Pityana, ed., *Bounds of Possibility*, 1991, 228-237.

incorporate the poor and oppressed into existing structures. We try to work for them instead of with them; offering them our charity and our sympathy, but we are not willing to allow them to take the lead in negotiations for “a new world order”. Richard Shaull’s comments concerning liberalism are more relevant
 5 than ever:

Concerning liberalism, the situation today is quite different. If it once represented a dynamic struggle for freedom, equality, and justice . . . today these ideals have become slogans with little power to transform the world. And as it has lost its power to change
 10 society, it has placed increasing emphasis upon the defence of the only means it can accept for bringing about social change: gradual progress and reform within the framework and according to the rules of the given social, economic, and political structures. To the degree that we are confronted by a situation demanding the
 15 creation of qualitatively new institutions and structures, this liberal dogma becomes the major obstacle to understanding and action.⁸²⁹

Are those who call themselves liberal or neo-liberal really concerned with the poor? When they insist that their theology is really what is best for the poor are
 20 they not, as Rowland and Corner ask, reflecting a perspective ‘from the top down’ rather than ‘from the bottom up’. Is not their theology simply expressing the concerns of the poor, instead of really becoming a product of the concern for the poor?⁸³⁰

As Christians, we are called to allow the poor and oppressed people of our
 25 world to forge their own identity in history. To do this we must find a new sociological structure in our society as well as a new theological foundation in our churches. We must change our social structures. We must not work *for* the poor and oppressed but instead we must work *with* them, allowing them to take control of their lives. To do this we must change our social, economic and
 30 political structures. The conservative and reformist (liberal) reactions to liberation theology that I have outlined in this paper will not suffice. We cannot

⁸²⁹Richard Shaull, “The End of the Road and a New Beginning,” in John C. Raines and Thomas Dean, eds., *Marxism and Radical Religion*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1970), 33.

⁸³⁰Rowland and Corner, *Liberating Exegesis*, 1990, 180.

offer the third world charitable gestures and promises for change; we must allow them to participate in the decision making process of this world.

We must also have a new theological foundation in our churches. We in the West must seriously consider the heart of liberation theology—the conviction
5 that God is revealed throughout the Bible to be on the side of the poor and oppressed. As John de Gruchy, drawing upon Paul’s letter to the Corinthians, reminds us that God’s purposes are revealed in the weakness of the cross and are discerned in his gracious favour to the poor and oppressed. “Like the slaves in
10 Israel, the victims of society have a special place in the redemptive purposes as well as in the providence of God. They can become God’s special witness to God’s liberating grace and the promise of life in Jesus Christ crucified.”⁸³¹ In other words, we are not speaking in exclusive terms, but rather through God’s preferential option for the poor God is working in history from the particular to the universal.

15 We must seriously consider what it means for those of us who are not among the poor and oppressed, to come to terms with the conviction that through the victims of our society the rest of humanity is enabled to know the saving grace and power of God in Christ crucified, and to respond in faith, obedience, and love. This raises the question of conversion. Conversion means
20 reconciliation in our churches and in our society. Reconciliation in our society should not only bring people together so that they can forget their differences; it should help people to become converted to each other. The cause of the poor has to become the cause of the rich. Christ was converted to us, and we are converted to him and our neighbours.

⁸³¹ de Gruchy, *Liberating Reformed Theology*, 1991, 133.

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