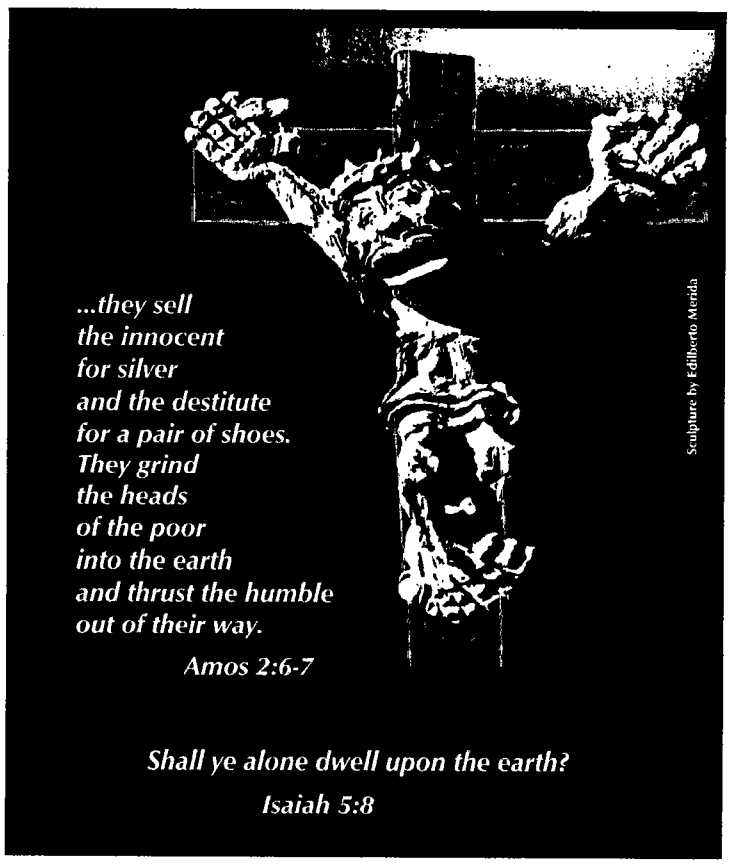
Liberation Theology and Land Reform

A ten-lesson course examining the struggle for economic justice in a theological context, with particular attention to the question of land ownership.



Texts:

Andelson & Dawsey,
From Wasteland to Promised Land: Liberation Theology for a Post-Marxist World;

selected readings from:

Hudson,
The Lost Tradition of Biblical Debt Cancellations;

Bigelow,
The Religion of Revolution.

Henry George School of Social Science, 121 East 30th Street, New York, NY 10016

Liberation Theology and Land Reform

Ten-week Syllabus

(Reading assignments in ***From Wasteland to Promised Land...*** except where noted)

1. Introductions
2. Chapters 1 and 2, pp. 1 - 16; questions 1 - 14
3. Chapter 3, pp. 17 - 27, and "Ownership"; questions 15 - 19
4. Chapter 4, pp. 28 - 33, and "Value"; questions 20 - 24
5. ***Lost Tradition...*** (readings as shown); questions 25 - 33
6. Chapters 5 & 6, pp. 34 - 47; questions 34 - 44
7. Chapter 7, pp. 48 - 68, and "Capitalism"; questions 45 - 56
8. Chapter 8, pp. 69 - 81, and "Land"; questions 57 - 62
9. Chapter 9, pp. 82 - 101, and "Religion"; questions 63 - 68
10. Chapter 10 & Appendix, pp. 102 - 122; questions 69 - 74

Welcome! This course is designed as an introduction to the theory and practice of liberation theology and its relationship to the land reform ideas of Henry George - inspired by Andelson and Dawsey's pioneering book. Liberation theology is a very broad topic; much important work has been published in the last twenty years, and the social mission of religion has been the subject of passionate debate for a long, long time.

It is not possible for this ten-week course to adequately deal with huge range of historical and sociological material necessary to understand the liberation theology movement. Our goal here is less gigantic, if not more modest: to encounter the ideas of liberation theology in a personal way. Thus, many of the so-called study questions are really invitations to personal reflection, having no "correct" answer. This is **not** a sectarian or dogmatic course. Liberation theology comes, of course, out of the Christian tradition - but we are not out to proselytize you, but to make you think deeply.

We'll take time out around lesson five to examine Dr. Hudson's research on the facts of Bronze-Age laws on land tenure and debt cancellation. His work shows that the tradition of the "Year of Jubilee" was a longstanding political reality long before it was adopted by the Jews.

Five essays are included in the study guide. These are meditations on subjects that are central to our inquiry: **Ownership, Value, Capitalism, Land,** and **Religion.** These are provided as discussion-starters, not doctrinaire pronouncements.

Because this course will include in-depth discussion of the principles of political economy, it is intended for students who have already completed *Fundamental Economics.*

Liberation Theology and Land Reform

Prologue: Hope for the Oppressed on Every Continent

1. What important dimensions of liberation are in danger of being glossed over by the current emphasis on political freedom?

2. How do the authors characterize the themes of ***wasteland*** and ***promised land?*** To what Biblical events do these symbols refer?

3. Describe your own conception of ***wasteland*** and ***promised land.***

4. On page four, the authors list six explanations that are commonly given for the poverty and backwardness of developing countries. What are they?

a)

b)

c)

d)

e)

f)

Which do you think are the most important contributing causes of poverty?

5. What to the authors contend is the true root cause of poverty?

6. Why does this discussion of liberation theology focus primarily on Latin America?

7. How does the land problem worsen the bad effects of

a) transnational corporations?

b) population growth?

II. Egyptian Bondage in the New World

8. What do the prevalent meek, mournful images of Jesus and Mary signify about the historical role of the Catholic church in Latin America?

9. Describe the fifteenth-century Church's official attitude toward colonization of the New World.

10. What do the Spanish terms ***encomienda, hacienda,*** and ***mercedes*** mean?

11. Why are large landowners disinclined to make as much profit as possible on their land, or to care for its maintenance?

12. How does the colonial system discourage the creation of capital?

13. Why did Colombian mine operators establish cattle and sugarcane industries? (Want to check out the sources in footnote #14 here? They may contain some interesting stories...)

14. Describe the connection between the rural monopolies in agricultural and mining land and urban poverty. (Can you think of a parallel development in U.S. history?)

III. Perceptions of the Promised Land

15. Why is it "more characteristic in Latin America than in England or the United States to legislate public ownership or control over subsurface mineral resources"?

16. What is a sharecropping or peonage system? (On collective farms under the Soviet system, workers were allotted private plots of land to work in their spare time. These small private plots were usually far more productive than the large collective holdings that were worked in the name of "the people". Compare and contrast this arrangement with a share-cropping system.)

17. What are some of the structural obstacles to implementing land reforms in Latin America?

18. How have recent Pentecostal Christian movements revived the notion of a promised land that is entirely spiritual? (How does this relate to question #8?)

19. Who owns the Promised Land?

Ownership

How does one get the right to own anything? In this culture, almost everyone would agree that producing a thing with one's own labor confers a right of ownership. And, economically speaking, since exchange is part of the production process, exchanging the products of one's labor (i.e., wages) for something is essentially the same as producing it. Ownership in our society is a right which comes from **producing** something. Most people see this as perfectly fine as long as our things are legal to own and are purchased in a legitimate manner.

OK, all right - so why do Henry George and his followers have such a problem with land? If exchange is part of production, and land sites are something that is exchanged, why can't we say we've "produced" the value of a land site, when we buy it?

The obvious answer is that it is not possible to produce land. We can **improve** land, we can build things **on** land, and we can take entrepreneurial risks in putting it on the market or not - but we cannot produce the location itself. If we trade our wages for a car, we had already produced something that somebody valued - so a series of mutually agreeable trades were made. Having made the car, the seller had title to it, just as we were legitimate owners of our wages. But the title to a piece of land did not originally come from production. Value can ultimately come from only two sources: either production of goods and services, or the raw material that makes production possible.

Most of modern-day economics glosses over or ignores this fundamental distinction, and so has little to say about the moral basis of ownership. But for Henry George the moral basis of ownership is clear: we have the absolute right to own what we produce, and no right at all to claim title to natural opportunities.

However, we may want to go into the question more deeply. What is the moral basis of this seemingly inviolate right to keep what we produce? In fact, only people like Georgists and Libertarians hold this right to be inviolate; modern societies compromise it quite a lot. U.S. citizens work until mid-April, on the average, to pay their tax burdens. Most people accept, if grudgingly, the responsibility for paying public expenses out of the wealth that individuals have created. (They believe in taxation according to the principle of "ability to pay.")

Allowing everyone to keep what they produce may allow substantial inequality of income in society. There are huge differences in people's innate capacities, and in the advantages they start out with in the world. For example, most people would agree that an honest storekeeper provides the community with a useful service and deserves as much profit from the endeavor as he or she can ethically get. However, the storekeeper may have inherited the business, **and** the expensive business education which makes it even more profitable! And, like it or not, people's IQ scores tend to correlate strongly with their earning power. Is that "equal opportunity?"

But: the alternative is the famous dictum of Marx, "From each according to ability to each according to need." Here, the community has the right to all surplus and individuals have the right to have their needs met, even if their own production is insufficient to meet them.

Westerners should think for a moment before they recoil in horror at this notion. Compelled by a seemingly intractable boom-and-bust business cycle, as well as massive concentrations of wealth and deep poverty, modern liberal democracies have already gone quite a ways in the direction of socialism. But they have done so for pragmatic reasons. If the society provides the majority of people with an acceptable standard of living, they will probably not become too exercised about the moral basis of ownership.

The questions still persist, however. In the United States, the lowest-taxed of the world's advanced industrial nations, voters responded to Reagan's promise of tax cuts, and rejected Bush when his "read my lips" promise proved false! Much of this, of course, can be attributed to mere

selfishness and greed. But the fact remains that there is general agreement on our right to keep what we produce with our own labor. It just seems right.

Part of the reason it seems so right is that work itself can have a spiritual value. In economics, work is merely toil, exertion, something to be avoided - so much so that our theory of **economic value** is based on the **saving** of exertion. But our work is an extension of ourselves, in ways that are personal and complex and go beyond the realm of economics, which is forced to deal in averages and aggregates. Almost any job has some level of natural enjoyment - work for its own sake. In strictly economic terms work that provides us with joy, work that we would do even if we weren't paid for it, isn't work at all. But we all need to make a living.

The level of toil or natural enjoyment is a large factor in how various jobs are compensated. Many people choose jobs that they enjoy doing, even though they could earn higher wages doing something they found more toilsome. And, workers in unpleasant, boring or dangerous jobs are often able to demand top dollar for their labor. (This becomes less true, naturally, as unemployment rises!) Practically everyone who works for a living feels some sense, at some time, of satisfaction in being a competent and creative producer (and there can be elements of creativity in even the most mundane jobs.)

The "fundamental right" to own what we produce with our own labor is based on this identification with one's work, this value that we feel in accomplishing, contributing or providing. But: that satisfaction can quickly erode, if we feel that we're being taken advantage of, and our accomplishments or contributions are not being fairly compensated!

Of course, much of the satisfaction that workers **might** have in their work is obviated by the competition for scarce jobs which pushes wages down. Spiritual satisfaction in one's work is a motivator, but it is hard to sustain, to say the least, when we watch others get rich without working. So, to equalize things, it seems necessary to impose a progressive tax on those who produce more, thus infringing on **their** fundamental right of ownership...around and around it goes.

The right of owning what one produces has a concomitant responsibility - but this fact is only beginning to gain wide recognition. If we own what we produce, it follows that we also bear responsibility for what we destroy in the process. And, if we do **not** own what we have **not** produced - the earth - then it is incumbent on producers to pay the community for the privilege of using it. If these two responsibilities were enforced, the "inherently exploitative" nature of capitalism might not cause so much suffering.

"Rich" and "poor" are relative things. A person may be considered dirt-poor in the United States and yet own a car, a TV, and **two** pairs of shoes - signs of opulence in other nations. But compared to what others are getting - and compared to what he feels he is worth - that worker is poor. Justice does not require that every worker be paid a lot; justice requires that workers not be paid a pittance while their fellows, who work less, live in luxury. More to the point: justice requires people who are willing and able to work not be denied the opportunity when useful resources are being held idle by their "owners". Henry George shows us that those two situations differ only in degree, not in kind.

In the end, society has four possible choices regarding property rights:

1) complete private ownership of everything; 2) community owns the natural opportunities; individuals own the wealth they have created; 3) community owns all means of production and all surplus; wealth is doled out on the basis of need; 4) some mixture of the above

In pragmatic terms: #'s 1 and 3 are exceedingly radical, so #4 is what we go with, but #2 has not been tried. In moral terms, it is a matter of faith and conscience. Nevertheless: society, having opted for option #4, has been running from an all-important question. As the globe gets smaller, the day gets nearer when we will be forced to turn and face it.

20. Considering the above essay on ownership, how do you interpret the widespread resentment felt in this country over "welfare state" policies? In what sense is this resentment justifiable? In what sense is it misguided?

21. a) What are some examples of jobs that are well-remunerated because of their danger, dullness or unpleasantness?

b) What are some examples of jobs in which people sacrifice financial rewards in favor of greater personal satisfaction?

22. Some economists estimate that as much as 10% of the gross domestic product of the U. S. takes place in the "underground economy" - cash or barter transactions that are untraceable and therefore untaxed. Surprisingly, the trade in illegal drugs is **not** the largest sector of the underground economy; most of it is simply the black-market trade of otherwise legal goods & services. Comment on the ethics of this.

> We must be careful not to fall into intellectual self-satisfaction, into a kind of triumphalism of erudite and advanced "new" versions of Christianity. The only thing that is really new is to accept day by day the gift of the Spirit, who makes us love - in our concrete options to build a true human fellowship, in our historical initiatives to subvert an order of injustice - with the fullness with which Christ loved us. To paraphrase a well-known text of Pascal, we can say that all the political theologies, the theologies of hope, of revolution, and of liberation, are not worth one act of genuine solidarity with exploited social classes. They are not worth one act of faith, love, and hope, committed - in one way or another - in active participation to liberate humankind from everything that dehumanizes it and prevents it from living according to the will of the Father. - Fr. Gustavo Gutierrez, ***A Theology of Liberation***

Value

Our discussion of ownership calls to mind the question of **values**. It is one thing to say we have the right to own certain things; it is quite another to say that such things are good things to have, or that they are worth our effort.

Recently I spent an afternoon with a fellow HGS teacher, helping a friend of hers shop for some American consumer goods to take back to his family in India. We went to a shopping mall and a toy emporium, both teeming with (what I considered to be) useless, faddish products - and presently found ourselves in the cosmetics department at Macy's. I was addled by this consumer-overload, and I asked my teacher friend, "If we had Henry George's remedy in effect, we'd have **even more** of this - stuff, wouldn't we?"

"Oh, heavens yes," she replied, "lots more." It's true: people want "this stuff" - and a market purged of land monopoly would be even more adept at supplying it.

A Quaker friend of mine, reporting on his trip to the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, observed that, "More wealth and energy is spent on **taking photographs** of children in the U.S. than is spent on feeding children in many nations of the world."

There are different types, or conceptions, of value, depending on context. The easiest to deal with is **economic value**. This boils down simply to price. In strict economic terms we might say it is the amount of exertion saved by the buyer, expressed in terms of a medium of exchange; that just means: the price. The economic conception of value must restrict itself to that sense; if it tries to incorporate personal or spiritual values, it becomes unquantifiable - and useless to economists.

This does not mean that economists are all cold-hearted calculators who disdain the meaning of things. Rather, the meaning of things is not the primary concern of economists, whose insights come from the study of averages and aggregates. It is useful to know, for example, that the average U. S. family size is 2.6 children - even though no mother anywhere has ever given birth to six tenths of a child!

Economics is primarily a study of tendencies of aggregate behavior. Statements that economists make can always be made with greater confidence when they are talking about large numbers of people. This is because we are all individuals! One person may behave in wildly idiosyncratic ways. But people in general, on the average, can be expected to, say, seek the highest available return for their goods and services, or to increase the price of something in response to greater demand. Enough people will do these things, enough of the time, that confident predictions of aggregate behavior can be made.

But! Economic value is not the only kind of value. Paradoxically enough, the personal value of things has an important role in economics! As producers and sellers of things, we are concerned with their **economic** value, since we want to satisfy our desires with the least exertion by getting the best price for them. But as consumers, **personal** value becomes important. We trade away things we value less to get things we value more. Because people are individuals and tend to value things differently, this makes mutually advantageous trade possible.

There is also such a thing as **spiritual** value - but its meaning is even harder to define. We all perform tasks out of love or kindness or filial devotion - or even sheer serendipity - for which we don't expect payment. We devote labor and its products to certain causes, groups or activities simply because we believe it is the right thing to do - or because we feel "called" to do them.

Many are uncomfortable with this rigid dualism between economic value and personal or spiritual **values**. This is the problem that is at the root of Marx's concept of alienation. In capitalism, workers lose their identification with the things they produce, because they work on automated assembly lines. Instead of making recognizable things with their labor, they **sell** their labor to the employer, thus giving up a large measure of their autonomy. This leads to the **commodification** of all values - and an economic system that leads to worker alienation and commodification must be bad! Therefore, Marx attempted to merge economic value with personal and social **meaning** in his "labor theory of value." The true value of a product, according to Marx, is the labor time socially necessary to produce it. Any return higher than that value is **surplus value** and represents exploitation of workers by those who own the land and capital.

Unfortunately, it is exceedingly difficult - perhaps impossible - to come up with an objective figure for the labor time socially necessary to produce a given product in a given market. This effort to infuse economics with morals fails because, ultimately, economics is not about morals. Economics is about how human beings use scarce resources to satisfy unlimited desires. This is not a denial of moral and spiritual principles - no more than scientific method is a denial of Methodism. For us to be moral people, and to establish a just political economy, we do not have to redefine the concept of economic value.

What we do have to do is **resist** that process of commodification. We are commanded, if you will, not to commodify each other or our world - and to live in such a way that recognizes economic value as only one - and possibly the least important - of our **values**.

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23. a) What is the difference between economic value and personal value?

b) Is there were no science of economics, would "economic value" exist? Explain your answer.

24. On p. 24 the authors make this provocative statement: "Justice, it cannot be stressed too much, is the essential mark of the Promised Land." Keeping questions #8 and #18 in mind, how would you characterize the basic difference in outlook between liberation theology and older, more conservative conceptions of the Church's mission?

25. What do these verses from the Book of Leviticus mean to you?

a) *And when ye reap the harvest of your land, thou shalt not wholly reap the corners of thy field, neither shalt thou gather the gleanings of thy harvest./ And thou shalt not glean thy vineyard, neither shalt thou gather every grape of thy vineyard; thou shalt leave them for the poor and the stranger: I am the Lord your God.*

b) *The land shall not be sold for ever: for the land is mine; ye are strangers and sojourners with me.*

26. What phrase from the Lord's Prayer can be seen as an affirmation of liberation theology?

(For the following questions, please read *The Lost Tradition of Debt Cancellations.* Feel free to read the whole thing, but at least pp. 1 - 18, p. 39, pp. 54 - 62, and don't ignore the appendices!)

27. How has our understanding of Biblical economic laws shifted away from their original message?

28. What political purpose was served by debt cancellations in Bronze Age Babylonia?

29. How did the character of debt cancellation change as it moved from Mesopotamia to ancient Israeli society?

30. Jesus's angry expulsion of the "moneychangers" from Jerusalem's Temple has been used to teach markedly different lessons. Traditionally, it has usually been regarded as an affirmation of the sanctity of the temple - a place where business activities, even honest ones, should not be undertaken: "It is written, My house shall be called a house of prayer..."

Liberation theologians, however, have rallied around the rest of Jesus's quotation of the prophet Jeremiah, "...but ye have made it a den of thieves," and seen this story as a symbol of Christian activism.

Dr. Hudson takes us a step further. He suggests that the story of the expulsion of the moneychangers, describes real - not symbolic - activism, that had a deliberate political objective. What was that objective?

31. What is the meaning of ***deror***? How, according to Hudson, has the inscription on the Liberty Bell been misconstrued?

32. How did medieval Canon Law distinguish between productive commercial lending and usury? (see p. 58)

33. From Psalm 15:

> *Lord, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? Who shall dwell in thy holy hill?*
> *He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart....*
> *He that putteth not out his money to usury, nor taketh reward against the innocent. He that doeth these things shall never be moved.*

Discuss interpretation of this passage a) politically, as a command to be followed to ensure social harmony; b) psychologically, as a key to inner peace in a temptation-filled world; c) as a text of liberation theology, expressing a synthesis of a and b.

IV. Viewing Life from the Wasteland

34. Liberation Theologian Leonardo Boff elaborates three historical models of the Church and its role in society. Briefly describe each.

a) City of God

b) *Mater et Magistra* (Mother and Teacher)

c) Sacrament of Salvation

35. Boff calls for a new fourth paradigm, which he calls "the Church of People-hood and Justice for All." Why does this model emphasize the community more than the individual?

36. How did the Canaanite worship of Baal consolidate the power of landowners?

V. Poverty in the Wasteland

37. "How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!" (Matt. 19:23) Many passages in the Bible seem to indicate God's predilection for the poor and helpless. Why do you think that would be so?

38. a) The authors identify three "paths to poverty". What are they?

b) What strategies might be effective in dealing with each?

c) Are they mutually exclusive, or interdependent? Explain your answer.

39. What are some of the spiritual pitfalls to be found in the condition of poverty?

40. "Clearly God does not wish to act in such a way that keeps the poor poor." (p. 40) Liberation Theology seeks to de-institutionalize poverty, asserting that the problem is far too deep to be reached with mere charity toward the less fortunate. Compare this point of view with Henry George's views (in ***Progress & Poverty)*** on charity, and the root cause of poverty.

VI. Suffering in the Wasteland

41. To what stage in Latin America's history do the authors compare the Israelites' forty-year exile in the desert?

42. a) Evaluate the following two statements:

"Underdevelopment is a necessary step on the way to progress."

"Underdevelopment in some nations is a by-product of development in others."

b) Has the United States ever been underdeveloped? Explain.

43. Many have said that free trade policies help to create dependency and exploitation of developing nations. The authors don't agree; they contend that "the supposed ill effects often attributed to free trade result not from the unhindered flow of commerce ***per se,*** but rather from various forms of legalized piracy." What are some of these forms of piracy?

44. How does the contrast between Canada and Albania (p. 46) show some of the weaknesses of dependency theory?

VII. Detours in the Wilderness

45. According to Andelson & Dawsey, are the liberation theologians as committed to Marxism as their reputations would lead us to think? What general impressions are created when a person or a movement is labeled "Marxist"?

46. a) According to Marx, why does alienation of workers reach its worst point when production becomes increased by industrial development?

b) What role does the division of labor play in alienation?

47. How does the spiritual alienation recognized by Christian doctrine differ from Marx's concept of alienation?

48. What is Marx's term for the difference between the exchange value of a product and the "labor time socially necessary" to produce that product?

49. What is the role of the landowner in the collection of surplus value? (See footnote #30)

50. In strict Marxist terms, the "proletariat" is the class of industrial wage workers. What is the status of the proletariat, thus defined, in Latin America? (See p. 57)

51. What was Marx's opinion of the peasantry and the "lumpenproletariat", the classes which include the vast majority of the poor in Latin America?

52. What are some important unanswered questions about how the "dictatorship of the proletariat" would actually work?

Capitalism

Is capitalism the last best hope for wordwide peace and prosperity?

Or is capitalism inherently exploitative, dehumanizing, and inimical to the preservation of our world for future generations? We are talking, here, about an argument that has raged unchecked in the hearts and minds of society for at least a century. Indeed, it is said that a twenty-one year old who is not a liberal has no heart, and a forty year old who is not a conservative has no mind. But is it possible to unite heart with mind, justice with freedom, equity with efficiency in a single argument - or a single economic system?

These questions will remain impenetrable until we are able to properly define our terms. The word "capitalism" is used in two distinct senses. Whether the two senses of this very loaded word are incompatible is a matter for searching discussion, but they are certainly different. Is capitalism

- an economy which preserves the power ralationships of the status quo, reducing workers to mere automatons denied both the value and the dignity of their work, and which seeks growth, of markets and profits, above all else?

Or is it

- an economy which respects the right of workers to the fruits of their labor, and uses the natural benefits of the free market to allocate goods and services in the most efficient way?

True Believers of either the right or the left may not think so, but the difference between those two statements is more than simply rhetorical. They reveal two entirely different conceptions about the moral basis of ownership. If capital is the rightful property of the person who produces it, then the increase of capital is the producer's rightful property also. How then can it be an instrument of exploitation?

It is more important to our present discussion, though, to note that the two opposing views contain different underlying assumptions about economic behavior itself. Can we trust ourselves to cooperate? Or are human beings doomed to foul up their communities and their environment, if left to their own greedy devices?

Markets, after all, spring up spontaneously wherever people gather. None of the essential features of a market economy - trade, specialization, entrepreneurship, monetary systems, etc. - require any special or conscious direction; they just happen. This central fact is what Adam Smith called the "invisible hand," and Henry George dubbed the "body economic" - which exists prior to the "body politic," and out of which political systems come into being. These inexorable tendencies toward greater specialization and more intricate forms of trade - fueled by our universal impulse to satisfy our desires with the least exertion - will eventually lead to a market in which workers do not directly produce what they consume. Because of specialization, trade, and efficiencies of scale, workers will find exchanging their labor for pay to be a better deal. This will entail, of course, such things as entrepreneurship, and private ownership of capital, driven by the promise of **profits.** These developments are quite predictable and natural - an insight which led Marx to see an unavoidable "historical materialism" at work in human economic relations.

If the power relationships of the status quo have arisen out of the private ownership of capital, which came from the collection of surplus value by capitalists, then capitalism can't be just. Furthermore, if these evils of capitalism arise out of natural and unavoidable historical processes, then eventually the capitalist system will become intolerable - and the means of production will be seized by the proletariat!

Obviously, these two views lead us toward very different strategies for fixing our economic and social problems.

Before we can sort out what capitalism is as an "ism," we have to recognize that there is quite a lot of confusion over what **capital** is. There are two competing definitions, both perfectly appropriate for the uses to which they are put - but, as we will see, they don't mix.

Mainstream economic thought (as well as the daily business page) conceives of capital, generally, as **assets** - that is, of things subject to ownership, and capable of increase. This can include a whole smorgasbord of stuff, such as plant & equipment, bonds, stocks, real estate, and exclusive licences. The term "human capital" is often mentioned, in the context of "maximizing the labor input," making things even more confusing. In mainstream parlance, **capital** can be seen as a catch-all term that has different shadings in different contexts, but generally means **assets**. As in: a business is said to be "undercapitalized" if it lacks enough savings to weather a period of slow sales. Or: the country's stock of "human capital" is weakened by poor public schools.

For the classical economists and Henry George, the definition of capital is quite precise. Capital is "wealth used to produce more wealth. Capital is **wealth**, first: that is, material things, produced by human labor, that satisfy human desires and have exchange value. This unambiguous definition allows political economists to understand which payments go to this factor of production.

From these different definitions come our different conceptions of what capitalism really is.

So: was Henry George a capitalist? Of course! If we define capital as Henry George did, then capitalism is eminently desirable. It is nothing more than a system which recognizes the legitimate right of the producer to the wealth produced - and the concomitant right of society to the rental value of natural resources.

Unfortunately, most of the world doesn't define capital in the same ethically impeccable way. If capital is a vague term for anything people own that makes them a profit, then a capitalist system that allows people to own anything they want is not such a good thing. It means there is an inherent structural tendency for the powerful to consolidate their power - and for the poor to get poorer.

So was Henry George a capitalist? Great Heavens, no! Not by **that** definition. He certainly did not want the poor to get poorer. In fact, Henry George was a socialist - when it came to land. He believed the unearned income that comes from monopolizing the natural resources should be **socialized**. Gasp!

Pigeonholing does us little good, here. Things are not always as they seem. For example, two things that are constantly identified with capitalism are **the free market** and **competition**. Wonderful processes; they make the world go 'round - capitalists can't get enough of 'em, right? Wrong. Capitalists are after profit - and they should be, of course, nothing wrong with that. But economic theory shows us that in a **perfectly competitive** market, there is no surplus, and hence no profit. Hindrances to competition - temporary or permanent - are what make for economic success. Perfect competition is a theoretical ideal that no real-world market will ever reach.

People seek to satisfy their desires with the least exertion. Entrepreneurs are people too; they will seek to gain the most profit from the least labor and risk. Income from other people's labor (such as land rent, or monopoly income generally) is the easiest of all. This, entrepreneurs will seek to capture **rent** whenever they can. In current economic parlance this is known as "rent-seeking behavior" and it is pervasive in "free-market" economies. Taxing away the rent of land is the first, best way to remove most of the rent that rent-seekers seek. But that might not get us all the way to the Promised Land. Capitalists are a resourceful lot. If there are monopoly returns to be had, they will find them.

53. a) Before you studied *Progress and Poverty,* how would you have defined the term "capitalism"?

b) Has your understanding of capitalism changed? How?

54. Despite the assertion that "capitalism, in the eyes of liberation theology, is the enemy," does the political economy that obtains in Latin America today conform to the basic tenets of capitalism? (see pp. 62-3) Name some of the most prominent contradictions.

55. According to the authors, what about capitalism is fully worthy of defense?

56. How does the relative lack of checks and balances weaken the effectiveness of socialist economies? (Is it possible to break the law of supply and demand?)

VIII. Traveling Down the King's Highway

57. How can we show that a lack of capital is not the cause of poverty in developing countries? (Hint: Consider this in this light of questions 11-14)

58. How do the economies of Japan and Holland show that overpopulation cannot be the root cause of poverty?

59. Population growth in the United States has slowed considerably in the 20th century, and in western Europe, only an increase in life expectancy keeps population from actually declining. Why do you think it is easier to control population growth in wealthier nations?

Land

"The entire material universe, excluding human beings and their products." That is the definition of land from ***Fundamental Economics.*** Like our other definitions, whose goal is a framework within which to understand the distribution of wealth, it is admirably precise. But this definition has a bit more of a metaphysical implication than the others. We might say that land is not simply our ground, but our Ground of Being.

Land is air, water, soil fertility, minerals, biological diversity - every kind of natural opportunity. It is our **environment**, in the grandest possible sense of the term: our universe. It is parceled off in plots, zones, sections, townships, states, and nations - for pragmatic, economic and political reasons. Although geographical and cultural factors influence the drawing of national boundaries, those lines on the map are not part of the land. God didn't create boundary lines; we create them for our own reasons.

The whole idea of "owning" land is absurd. Is it not? It is one thing to say a person is granted secure tenure in a specific location; it is quite another thing to say that person owns the land. For starters, how deep is our land claim? How high? It is a common practice for the surface rights and mineral rights of a location to be traded separately. But how deep do those mineral rights go? In a conical section converging at the center of the earth? And what is the upper boundary of land "ownership"? Infinite space?

Human society may someday evolve to the point where land tenure becomes a benign means of securing the fruits of our labor on the land, and not a way of usurping the labor of others. Human society may someday evolve to the point where nations are cultural, not political units, where trade is free and borders are places to fly flags, not mass tanks. We are not there yet; in fact such dreams would seem hopelessly utopian were it not for the existence of trends that seem to be moving us haltingly toward them.

One such sign is the emergence of **global** environmental problems and dangers. They could well prove to be a blessing in disguise. The atmosphere and the oceans belong to no one and everyone. No nation can unilaterally solve global pollution problems, and yet all nations are menaced by them. If (as seems very likely) global pollution problems worsen to the point where they threaten large-scale loss of land and livelihood, global cooperation on the environment will be inevitable. Once we cross that threshold, other forms of transnational cooperation will see less outlandish, and arbitrary boundaries will become less menacing. The emerging fact of environmental and economic problems that transcend national interests is forcing society to see "the land" in a new way. For example: it is impossible for any nation to claim sovereignty over the ozone layer - but nations are coming together and taking steps to preserve it. In the face of global dangers, voluntary cooperation between nations becomes not only desirable but necessary. (We might point out, by the way, that **involuntary** cooperation between nations has been going on quite nicely all the while, hindered only by short-sighted protectionist barriers!)

The "capitalist" economies of the world are facing intractable debt, inflation and business-cycle problems. The "socialist" economies of the world are facing either stagnation or outright collapse. People are casting about for a new paradigm, and the land problem remains unsolved. Those who believe in Henry George's remedy are patient: sooner or later, the world will have tried everything else.

In economics, land is shown to be the physical source of all wealth. Since the food, clothing and shelter we need for survival are, in the economic sense, **wealth**, we may say quite literally that the land sustains us. But the land sustains us in more ways than just physically. Human beings have an **existential relationship** with the land, a vibrant connec-

tion with the wonder and majesty of the world, that even our TV-drenched, consumerism-besotted, poverty-blighted, fad-addled modern society has not been able to obliterate.

Why do New Yorkers need Central Park? Why do motorists total their cars to avoid killing a raccoon? Why does work stop while everyone gazes in awe at a lunar eclipse? How does human memory work? We need not look far for sources of awe: **How in the world** do cockroaches manage to thwart the most persistent efforts of human science to kill them off? We have not lost our connection with the earth. It may be dormant, much of the time, for many of us. But to lose it is to lose our humanity.

This fact - and it is a fact - leads us to the realization that the private land ownership is not only economically bad, and not only ethically bad: it is also spiritually bad. (Try making that same statement, substituting "private ownership of laborers" - and remember that chattel slavery was both legal and widely practiced, in this country, quite recently.)

It may not be stretching the imagination too far to say that Henry George's insight is not all that new, in fact, not new at all. Perhaps Henry George simply recast into the terms and methods of political economy the spiritual truth that people have known since the beginning - known in their hearts even while the lure of expediency and unearned profits prompted them to enact some very bad laws.

It takes an educated imagination to make a Good Samaritan to-day. To a man without an imagination what does it mean to say that there are six hundred thousand preventable deaths a year in the United States? Perhaps it would mean something if he were to stand forty days and forty nights watching the procession pass four abreast. Perhaps he would get, from that, some apprehension of this waste. Suppose that our army of one hundred thousand men were massed before Mexico City, and suppose this entire army were blown up and wiped out in an instant by an explosion of mines. Such a catastrophe would stun the whole world. The loss would be unparalleled in the history of human slaughter. It would go down in our schoolbooks as a never-to-be-forgotten day, the bloodiest in the annals of man. But suppose we are told that in times of peace there is an industrial army three times greater than this that is destroyed every year. This destruction of life is not due altogether to industrial accidents. The most of it is due to diseases and accidents which are the by-products of poverty, and fall mostly on the poor. - Herbert S. Bigelow, ***The Religion of Revolution*** (1916)

60. a) When the word "land" comes up in normal conversation, what images come to mind?

b) What is the precise definition of land used by Andelson & Dawsey, and by Henry George?

c) Make as long a list as you can of things in the world that fit the above definition.

61. To be held for speculation, land need not be kept completely idle. It is more common for land to be underused. Under-use of land also pushes back the margin of production and makes everything more costly. Make as long a list as you can of ways in which land sites are under-used. (Some important third-world examples of this emerged back around questions 11 & 12!)

62. a) How does land speculation contribute to wasteful patterns of consumption and environmental destruction?

b) Please read p. 76 many times, memorize it, and then relate the concept of the **margin of production** to the destruction of the Amazon rain forests.

Religion

In the Beatitudes, we find a fulcrum point for the social mission of liberation theology vs. the traditional emphasis on a personal salvation that transcends secular concerns. The two attitudes seem to be antithetical, and they have engendered great theological controversy. But it seems to me that, unlike the real difference between Marxism and capitalism, this difference is apparent only. It can be resolved, at a deeper level.

Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted.
Blessed are the meek; for they shall inherit the earth.
Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness; for they shall be filled.
Blessed are the merciful; for they shall obtain mercy.
Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.
Blessed are the peacemakers; for they shall be called children of God.
Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake; for they shall be called children of God.

Now these are difficult words. Many people see them - quite understandably - as powerful tools for the mass-marketing of oppression. Think of it: if only we can get people to believe that eternal life depends on their being poor, meek, mournful, hungry, persecuted peacemakers! Why, we can march right in and get **all** the diamonds and gold! Sadly, millions of TV viewers, hungry and thirsty for righteousness, have sent their money to finance the theme parks, cable networks, and presidential aspirations of televangelists. Religion has proved to be such a powerful force for evil that many despair of it ever mustering equal potency for good.

Nevertheless: if we are poor in spirit, our hearts are not addled by envy. If we allow ourselves to mourn, we are not lonely, sealed off from human connection. If we are meek we stand less chance of sudden death from a heart attack; if we are merciful we simply feel better about walking down the street. If we are pure in heart we have fewer headaches, better digestion, and our jokes, when we can remember the punchlines, get merrier laughs. Are these things not blessings?

Social action is by no means irreconcilable with personal salvation; they are the same thing. In the end, what liberation theology liberates us from is the delusion that we might, somehow, be able to escape the fundamental paradox of human existence: that while we die alone, we live in a community.

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63. Comment on the following verses from the Epistles of Paul:

For it is written in the law of Moses, thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn. Doth God take care for oxen?/ Or saith he it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written: that he that ploweth should plow in hope; and that he that thresheth in hope should be partaker of his hope.

64. Comment on the following verses from Lao Tzu:

If I have even just a little sense,
I will walk on the main road and my only fear will be of straying from it.
Keeping to the main road is easy,
But people love to be sidetracked.

When the court is arrayed in splendor,
the fields are full of weeds,
and the granaries are bare.
Some wear gorgeous clothes,
Carry sharp swords,
and indulge themselves with food and drink;
they have more possessions than they can use.
They are robber barons.
This is certainly not the way of Tao.

The inheritance tax could legitimately be used, if necessary, to equalize the right of access to land and capital. It is doubtful if government should ever try to equalize the earning power of individuals. That the government should take some of the earnings of one man and give to another would seem contrary to natural justice. But it is incontestable that one man should have access to the earth on equal terms with every other, and it seems equally incontestable that one man has as good a right as any other man to inherited capital. It would be right for the government not only to guarantee free land, but also to provide capital to private citizens out of the proceeds of land value or inheritance taxes. Even so, not all the men would leave the factories and become farmers or otherwise employ themselves on the land. But with free land, not at the other side of the continent, but immediately at hand, and with available capital, many men would go, and the wages of the employees that remained would rise to the level of those who went. Indeed, employees would become so free that it is difficult to think that the present chain-gang methods would long endure. Probably a quiet revolution would take place and co-operative shops, democratically managed, would rapidly displace the present autocratic organization of industry. - Herbert S. Bigelow, ***The Religion of Revolution*** (1916)

IX. Claiming the Promised Land

65. Describe the Mosaic concept of the "Jubilee Year".

66. How does the arrangement made for the support of the clerical tribe, the Levites, foreshadow the land reform proposal of Henry George?

67. Leaving aside, for the moment, all the good practical reasons for doing so, what is the moral reason why society should collect the rent of land?

68. "Land rent is not the only type of unearned increment." (p. 87) How do the following types of unearned income differ from land rent?

a) Collection of the increased value of stocks when they are sold

b) The appreciated value of antiques and rare works of art

c) Inherited talent, energy and health

69. "...God does not consider politics and economics subjects too crass for his notice." (p. 104) Henry George asserted that political economy, if properly understood, is not a "dismal science" but a divine gift to allow the creation of a just and prosperous society. How does the evaluation of his remedy by the "canons of taxation" support that assertion?

70. Henry George stressed that beyond the problems of the community lie the deeper problems of the individual life. Keep that thought in mind as you comment on the following verse from Lao Tzu:

When the Tao is present in the universe,
the horses haul manure.
When the Tao is absent from the universe,
war horses are bred outside the city.

There is no greater sin than desire,
no greater sin than discontent,
no greater misfortune than wanting something for oneself.
Therefore he who knows that enough is enough will always have enough.

71. "The market, if purged of monopoly, affords more scope for human liberation than anything socialism, in any of its forms, has yet devised." (p. 93) This statement of the authors has drawn fire from some reviewers, who contend that the capitalist system is inherently exploitative. What is your opinion?

72. How have the experiences of the following four countries shown the efficacy and practicality of George's remedy?

a) Japan

b) Taiwan

c) Australia

d) The U. S. (Pennsylvania)

73. What miniature example of the principle of land value taxation is in everyday use in every modern city?

74. If it is true that "the earth is the Lord's," what does that tell us about the place of human beings in the world?

EPITAPHS

- Herbert S. Bigelow, *The Religion of Revolution* (1916)

With what judgement ye judge, ye shall be judged. - *Jesus*

Once upon a time there was a country, with a strange custom. It was the unbroken law of that country that a man might compose his own epitaph and have it duly recorded, and the state was bound to have it carved upon his tombstone when he died. He was not allowed more than ten words, but in one brief sentence he was permitted to state the achievements by which he commended himself to the mercy of the last judgement. The curious thing was that if a man neglected to do this, and died without writing his epitaph, his worst enemy was required, under the law, to write it for him.

There was in this country a great war - a war for the liberation of a race. Whole armies of brave men perished. But some stayed at home and speculated in army supplies. A certain man who did this made a fortune. This man invested his fortune in city real estate. Thereafter, every child that was born in the city, every home that was built, every factory that was located, all the growth of business and population, increased the value of this estate.

Finally this fortune was married to the man's son-in-law. Whereupon, of course, the son-in-law became a very wise and important man. He became an authority on art, because he could buy a million dollars worth of pictures. He became an authority on music, because he could subsidize an orchestra. He became an authority on religion, politics, business, and a lot of other things, because, in this country, the value of a man's views depended, for most folks, on the amount of money he possessed.

It is charitable to say that the luster of this son-in-law borrowed less from the brilliancy of his genius than from the glitter of his gold.

But he is said to have made some shrewd investments on his own account. He bought a three-hundred-thousand-acre farm, the most of which he held idle, and on the rest of which he employed foreigners at eighty cents a day. By that he showed that he had some qualifications for business, for he did not permit patriotism to interfere with business. He made a lucky investment once in a baseball team. But he made a notable failure when he invested a huge sum of money in a presidential nomination for a relative.

This man owned a newspaper, the principal editorial policy of which was to abuse radicals, and in particular, a certain radical preacher.

Now the rich man died without writing his own epitaph. Thereupon this preacher was called upon to write it for him. The preacher summed up his life in the sentence:

"He married millions, nominated an amiable president, and skinned agitators."

After writing that, the preacher remembered the words: "With what judgement ye judge, ye will be judged." He got to thinking what he might expect if he neglected to write his own epitaph, and some of his enemies about town were called upon to write it for him. To avoid such a fate, he wrote and recorded the best things he could think of to say about himself. If we all judged others as generously as we always judge ourselves, what an amiable world this would be! This preacher was no exception. When it came to composing an epitaph on which he was to hang his hopes of heaven, he just couldn't tell the bad about himself. Besides, the epitaph had to be limited to ten words. When it came to telling the bad in the preacher's life, ten words were not enough to make a beginning, though they might suffice to tell the good he had done. Therefore in his own indulgent judgement of himself, he requested that these ten words should be inscribed upon his tombstone:

"The *Evening Star* was my enemy, the poor, my friends."

Almost immediately after that the preacher died. So they both went to sleep, the rich man and the preacher. The same earth claimed them. The distinctions of wealth were effaced. Their little quarrels were forgotten. The years grew to centuries, the centuries to cycles, the cycles lengthened into eternity, until, in the twinkling of an eye, the graves were opened by the trumpet's blast, and each man stood forth in his shroud, while the angel read the story of his life.

Some were sent straight to heaven. Others were dispatched summarily to the other place. But when the angel read the epitaphs of the rich man and the preacher, he said curtly, with a commanding gesture: "You two for Purgatory."

At Purgatory they were sentenced. Their sin had been that each man saw only the good in himself and only the evil in the other, and they were both commanded to stay in that place until they were willing to say something good of one another.

But the preacher won release immediately by sending to the warden of Purgatory the following note:

Dear Warden:

I never did say anything as bad about that rich man as Jesus said about men like him, but I do think of one good thing I might have said. It is this: the writers on the *Evening Star* were mostly Socialists. Although the rich man hired them to write his opinions, he did not fire them for thinking their opinions. On the contrary, he always seemed to have the good will of his employees, without regard to their socialistic views, and for that I sincerely praise him. Moreover, it was creditably reported of him that he was not only an angel to a president, but that he was an angel compared to this president, and quite the better fellow of the two.

And that was the note that got the preacher out of Purgatory.

While the two were in Purgatory together the rich man had to spend half his time being preached at by the preacher, but it was tolerable, because he had the satisfaction of writing editorials about the preacher which the preacher had to spend the other half of his time reading.

When the preacher was gone and there was no longer the fun of the fight, the rich man got very tired of it. One day he sent a note up to the warden's office, asking for an interview. In the note he said:

Dear Warden:

I don't think I have had a square deal down here. Why should I be punished for never saying anything good about the preacher, when, honestly, I never could see any good in him? You don't want me to tell a lie, do you, just to get out of here? If you can show me any good there ever was in him, I'll give him credit for it.

The warden called the rich man into his private office.

"You say," he began, "that you will give the preacher credit if I point out any good in him?"

"Certainly," answered the rich man.

The warden pressed a button on his desk, and his secretary came in.

"Please bring me that letter we received yesterday from the preacher," said the warden.

The secretary went out, and returned at once with the following letter, which the warden handed to the rich man to read:

Headquarters
Heaven Improvement Association

Warden, Purgatory.
Dear Warden:

Had an uneventful trip. Have been up here three days. I am surely enjoying the change of climate. Hope you and your delightful family are in good spirits.

It is the rich man I left in Purgatory that prompts me to write. I really don't think he deserves to be there any more than I.

Down on earth we knew that if a man lived long enough in one of our smoky cities, his lungs, which were naturally of a grey color, became as black as his shoes, and frequently the tissue got so grimy that it was impossible for the man to breathe right.

We also noticed that when a man lived in the atmosphere of tens of millions of dollars the tissue of his brain suffered a chemical change, so that it was absolutely impossible for him to think right.

It was not the money that hurt the man. It was the possession of so much money in the presence of poverty. A man who had millions to spend on politics or pictures, when others lacked pennies for bread, could not have a normal outlook on life. Poverty starved the bodies of the poor. Great wealth in the presence of poverty starved the souls of the rich.

I am sure that if the rich man had lived in a sane social order, if he had not been permitted to marry or inherit the privilege of living upon the rightful earnings of others, if his wealth had been in proportion to his services, if he had lived a life of useful work in a democratic society, where no man could be rich enough to excite envy, or poor enough to know fear, he would have been as good a fellow as the next one.

At any rate, Warden, I am sorry I wrote the kind of epitaph I did for him. If I had it to do over again I would change it to read:

"Passable millionaire. Would have made a first-rate poor man."

So, Warden, I wish you would let him out of Purgatory. He really could not help thinking I was bad. Besides, I gave him plenty of provocation. If you keep him there, I feel I ought to go back and stay there, too.

The rich man handed the letter back to the warden and remarked:

"Well, I must say, that letter isn't half bad, is it? Really, I wish I had my newspaper; I'd give him a stick or two of thanks for that."

"If you feel that way," said the warden, "you are at liberty to go. But let me give you a little advice. You'll have plenty of time, you two, up in Heaven. Before you go to writing editorials or preaching sermons about each other, you had better get acquainted with one another. And tell that to the preacher, too, when you see him. He needs it."

The warden shook hands warmly as the rich man departed for Heaven.

LAWLESS ROADS STILL

THE 'RED' BISHOP OF CHIAPAS

ALBERTO HUERTA

Less than a year ago, the name of a Catholic bishop—Don Samuel Ruiz García of San Cristóbal de las Casas, in the southern Mexican state of Chiapas—appeared on a hit list. The assassination plot, traced to a handful of landowners, was foiled by the bishop's supporters, committed like him to defending the human rights of the indigenous peoples who make up 80 percent of the diocese. They are proud descendants of the once powerful Maya civilization. Though the police were given the names of the conspirators, Don Samuel did not file charges. It was characteristic of him, as I later learned, that he forgave the perpetrators and did not wish to "embarrass" those involved. A co-worker, Sister Lucy Jimenez, who is responsible for more than 40,000 Guatemalan refugees housed in the many refugee camps in the diocese, smiled when she said, "Someone would be gunning down Don Samuel, and he would most likely apologize to the assassin for something or other. He is like that, always careful not to offend a person's dignity." At the same time, however, mindful of pastoral implications, the diocese let it be known that the attempt constituted grave sin.

Some members of Don Samuel's flock say he has received thirty or so death threats since he was consecrated bishop by Pope John XXIII at age thirty-five in 1960. When I pressed him on the matter he shrugged his shoulders: "They are exaggerations." But the assassination plot was genuine, and many believe that serious threats against the bishop are routine.

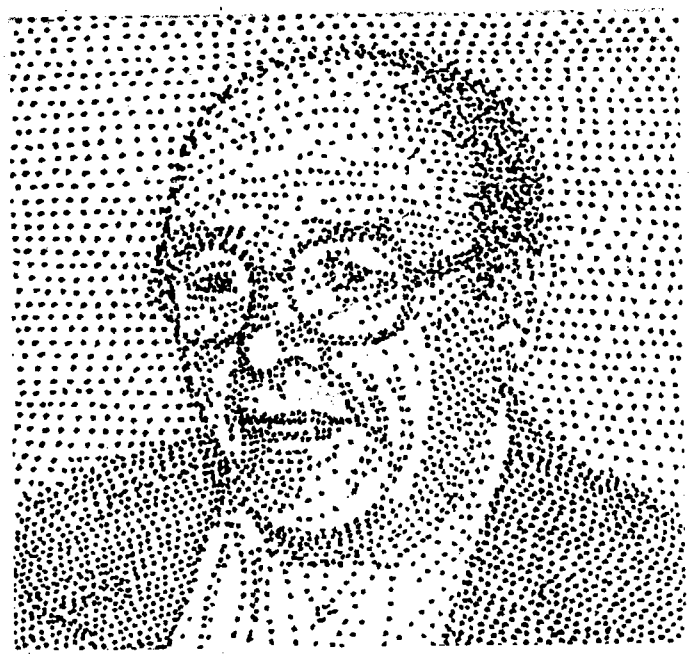
The bishop is less casual about labels pinned on him by elements of the local press and government calling him a "Communist" and a "Red." They are calumnies, he says, attempts to defame his character and undermine his option for the poor. But such name-calling, said the diocesan vicar general, the Reverend Gonzalo Ituarte, O.P., is expected. "Anyone who is concerned for the poor, and especially the indigenous peoples, is labeled a 'Red.' You have to get used to that idea, if you are going to work here."

Close associates of Don Samuel point out that, desplte his easy dismissal of the threats, for years he has had a CB radio in his car (which he drives himself); they say the purpose is to keep the chancery informed of his whereabouts as a means of lessening the possibility of his being martyred like San Salvador's Oscar Romero, or of becoming *un desaparecido*. The bishop explains the matter more prosaically:

"Some years ago I realized that we work generally in the jungle and that priests, religious, and catechists were very isolated from each other. So I thought that CB radios might help to break this isolation. I put it off, however, because I did not want the government, or the local press, to say we were abetting any kind of guerrilla or insurgent groups, either from Guatemala or here in Chiapas. But now everyone has a CB, so I have encouraged our priests and pastoral agents to install them in their cars and jeeps."

At sixty-nine, Don Samuel does not like to aggravate or sensationalize the tense political and religious situations in his diocese. But in the early 1980s, when Guatemalan-based helicopters harassed the refugee camps in Chiapas and Guatemalan soldiers crossed the border in search of political prisoners, he demanded that the Mexican government protect the refugees and grant them temporary asylum. Along with other Mexican bishops, he helped promulgate the 1984 episcopal statement, "On the Situation of the Refugees."

Five years after Don Samuel became head of the once powerful diocese of Chiapas, the Vatican divided it into three dio-



ALBERTO HUERTA, S.J., *is an associate professor in the Department of Modern and Classical Languages at the University of San Francisco.*

ceses. "I was the bishop of all Chiapas," he says. "When it was divided into three dioceses, that of Tuxtla Gutiérrez (the capital of the state) and Tapachula on the Pacific Coast, I was left landlocked between the two."

Bishop Ruiz García is a product of the Second Vatican Council, and his diocese reflects its spirit. With eighty-eight priests, many religious women and men, and committed lay workers, he has been generous in delegating authority among a vicar general with seven associates, a chancellor, pastoral agents, and teams of catechists. He recently commented on these teams with childlike enthusiasm: "We have 7,000 indigenous catechists—Ch'ols, Tzotzils, and Tzeltals—working in these communities. They themselves are the autochthonous church of hope that *Gaudium et spes* eloquently affirmed when referring to the poor and those who suffer."

Asked to elaborate, Don Samuel turned sober, even ponderous. "Beginning with Vatican II, the subsequent various bishops' conferences in Latin America, and the meeting in Santo Domingo last year with the pope, the church has recognized the particular spiritual richness inherent in the expression of faith found among the indigenous peoples of the Americas. Do not forget that it was the African bishops at the Second Vatican Council who demanded recognition for the cultural expression of their faith as a valid interpretation of Christianity. The church has found itself in the enviable position of fostering this discovery of a God incarnating himself daily in the lives of the poor and oppressed. The pope affirmed this special role of the church in his addresses recently in the Yucatan."

That outlook is hardly universal in Chiapas, where the wounds of the conquest still fester in memory. A colonial-era law in the city of San Cristóbal required an *indio* to step off the sidewalk into the street on encountering either a *ladino* (one of the original Spanish heirs of the conquest) or a *coleto* (a descendant of the conquerors). The law stayed on the books until the early 1980s.

Yet it is in the heirs of the Mayas that Don Samuel has invested his fullest confidence. Time and again, in ordination ceremonies, he has reiterated, "The indigenous people with whom you work will evangelize you, and not the other way round." His latest pastoral letter, "In this Hour of Grace," was issued in August to mark the visit of Pope John Paul II to Mexico's indigenous peoples.

Don Samuel's respect and concern for the *indios* extends beyond his own flock. I talked with four Tzotzils and Tzeltals—a Catholic, a Presbyterian, an Evangelical, and a freethinker. All spoke of the bishop with affection and with gratitude for his defense of their human rights. I asked Don Samuel whether he was concerned that his ecumenical spirit might lead to defections. "Interestingly," he said, "that is one area where there is general agreement. The Catholic church and the mainline Protestant denominations are discovering their option for the poor by working with them. We are not disturbed with other evangelical efforts, so long as they address the real needs of the people, who often are being deprived of their own lands and harassed indiscriminately by the landowners and the law enforcement authorities."

Don Samuel looked annoyed when I said I thought I was hearing echoes of liberation theology, a sometime target of criticism from the Vatican. "You are confusing two different things," he said. "We are not doing theology in the European sense where you move through a deductive process, going from the universal to the particular. We find ourselves with many pastoral particulars—the poor, the hungry, the oppressed, those who suffer injustice. The conquest was an imposition of faith, yet every day we see the Incarnation of Christ in the Americas.

"On judgment day we will not be asked about our theological speculation. We will be judged on what we did with those whom God entrusted to our care. Our concern is pastoral. If theologians put a label on what is done, that is speculation."

If the evangelical spirit of love and compassion in the diocese reflects Bishop Ruiz García's commitment to Vatican II, it is also something of a throwback to earlier times. The first bishop of Chiapas was the legendary Dominican Bartolome de las Casas, who came here in 1545, and whose presence still permeates like the dense fog that fills the valleys around San Cristóbal at night. Las Casas defended the *indios* against colonial oppression, not only in his well-known protests to the Spanish court but also on the scene—at times excommunicating *ladinos* and *coletos* who mistreated the indigenous people. I learned from an American working in Chiapas of a priest who followed in the Las Casas spirit when he refused the Eucharist to several wealthy women as they approached for Communion. The night before at a fiesta he had overheard them speaking about recruiting their Indian maids to initiate their sons in sexual adventure. Later he met with the indignant women privately to educate them in the church's respect for the *indio*. Such pastoral courage seems common in the diocese.

But life in Chiapas is hardly idyllic. When Graham Greene trekked here on a mule in the spring of 1938, he was investigating the state of Catholicism ten years after the blood bath of priests and nuns that resulted from the Mexican government's persecution of the church, an experience that gave birth to *The Lawless Roads* and *The Power and the Glory*. Greene also discovered an interesting syncretism of magic and dogma, and encountered an emotional depth of faith he had not previously known. At the same time he detected a Kafkaesque darkness in the continuing struggle between faith and ideology, which included the destruction of churches and the burning of statues in neighboring Villahermosa under the ruthless Garrido Canabal.

As late as September 1991, the conflict flared again when a pastor, Father Joel Padron of Simojovel, was arrested without a warrant and detained in the state capital, Tuxtla Gutiérrez. The governor—Patrocino Gonzalez Garrido, a descendant of the infamous Garrido Canabal—had approved the arrest. The pastor was accused of inciting the *indios* to repossess land to which they claimed title. Immediately Don Samuel, his vicar

general, and the diocesan human rights commission denounced the arrest as a flagrant act of oppression directed against the church. Finally, when more than 4,000 *indios* marched on Tuxtla Gutiérrez, Fr. Joel was released. In an irony Greene would have appreciated, the Salinas government then appointed Gonzalez Garrido minister of the interior, a post that endows him with considerable power over the Mexican police. Chiapanecos wait to see what vengeance the new minister may exercise against the church and the poor in San Cristóbal and elsewhere.

Don Samuel remains vigilant; the diocesan human rights commission carefully documents every instance of abuse. If that makes him a "Red," it is not because of ideology but because he follows in the long line of Catholics who have risked martyrdom in Mexico. It may be that Cardinal Juan Jesus Posadas Ocampo of Guadalajara, killed last May in a volley of bullets fired at close range, is the most recent. The event has nurtured a popular string of conspiracy theories implying complicity, hypocrisy, and corruption at very high levels. There are conflicting accounts of Posadas Ocampo's death. While the Vatican and Mexican authorities agreed that it was a matter of mistaken identity, a forensics expert stated on a Guadalajara newscast that the close range of the gunshots pointed to an assassination. Rebroadcast of the segment was later blacked out. Some believe the cardinal was killed because he planned to issue a pastoral letter condemning the growing Guadalajara-based narcotics industry.

Though Don Samuel may be spared a physical martyrdom, he and his diocese are suddenly experiencing a state of siege from a different quarter. On October 25, the Vatican's apostolic delegate to Mexico, Archbishop Girolamo Prigione—the man credited a year ago with reestablishing diplomatic relations between the Vatican and Mexico after a hiatus of sixty-five years—informed Don Samuel that the Congregation for Bishops was requesting his "retirement," a euphemism for his removal. Surprised and confused, the bishop asked the nuncio for an explanation, but Prigione refused to give particulars. Thinking the delicate matter an in-house affair to be resolved privately, Don Samuel decided to remain silent.

But the matter ceased to be private when Jesús Aranda of *La Jornada* (October 26) obtained and publicized a document from a meeting between the nuncio and a diocesan commission concerned about Don Samuel's future. Without spelling out particulars, the document stated that the Vatican was very concerned for Don Samuel's doctrinal and pastoral errors and his difficulties with the Mexican government that "went against the church and offended the Holy Father." When Prigione was challenged by the diocesan commission on these matters, the nuncio responded, "It is not about what Don Samuel says in his diocese, but about what he affirms in lectures and meetings, especially abroad." As an afterthought, the nuncio added that he did not know whether the Mexican government had requested Don Samuel's removal.

In an interview with Rodrigo Vero in *Proceso* (November 8), Prigione tried to vindicate his actions by saying he had only carried out the Vatican's request: "I limited myself to forwarding to Don Samuel the letter that the pope has sent him through the Congregation of Bishops. The rest is not my affair." Bishop Reynoso Cervantes of Cuernavaca, spokesman for the Mexican Bishops' Conference, corroborated Prigione's account. "Prigione ended his vacation in Italy in October and stopped by Rome....It was there he was given the letter requesting Bishop Ruiz García's retirement. At first Prigione did not wish to carry out this disagreeable mission, but was told that Pope John Paul II had already approved the document. He was ordered by Cardinal Bernardin Gantin to personally give Don Samuel the letter. When Prigione arrived in Mexico, he had to call Don Samuel in Brazil, where he was attending a meeting in São Paulo....Prigione had nothing to do with the Vatican's decision to remove Bishop Ruiz García."

A source close to Don Samuel, who wished to remain anonymous, told me that "for some time now, people in important positions in Mexico and Rome have wanted [Don Samuel] and his diocese to rectify and change their positions favoring the poor, the indigenous peoples, and the refugees. They have wanted to put on notice those who think as Don Samuel does. This action by Rome seems to be their way [of doing this]."

And what will Don Samuel do now? He is still waiting to hear what the alleged charges are all about, but he has decided to conduct a self-evaluation in his diocese with the leaders and the faithful before deciding whether or not to resign. Reaction in Mexico and elsewhere has not been muted. The Mexican hierarchy is divided over the matter, and civil rights activists, including Nobel Peace Prize winner Rigoberto Menchu, have publicly protested the Vatican's action. Still other sources in Mexico speculate that Rome's decision had less to do with doctrinal matters than with threats to Don Samuel's life. But without Rome's apparent support, Don Samuel will need more than a CB radio in his car to prevent him from one day joining the long and growing line of Mexican Catholic martyrs. □

SCREEN

STUNTS
'REMAINS' & 'CARLITO'S WAY'

Mary McCarthy once wrote that some of the best novelists of her time used first-person narration in such a way that their books became "impersonations, ventriloquial acts; the author, like some prankster on the telephone, is speaking in an assumed voice—high or deep, hollow or falsetto, but in any case not his own...[the reader] senses the author, cramped inside the character like a contortionist in a