INFORMATION TO USERS

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps.

Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6" x 9" black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.

Bell & Howell Information and Learning
300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346 USA
800-521-0600

Beyond Ethical Reflections: Neo-liberalism , Idolatry and Canadian Catholic Social Teaching

Dennis Stimpson

A Thesis

in

The Department

of

Theological Studies

Presented in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts at
Concordia University
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

July 2000

ABSTRACT

Beyond Ethical Perspectives: Neo-Liberalism, Idolatry And Canadian Catholic Social Teaching

Dennis Stimpson

Neo-liberalism is ideologically rooted in nineteenth-century laissez-faire capitalism, a form of economics that asserts the free market, unencumbered by government restraint, is the only path to human social and economic fulfillment. Canadian Catholic social teaching has approached neo-liberalism through the door of social ethics. However, some liberation and critical theologians believe that neo-liberalism contains a covert religious dimension complete with an absolutist dogma, a spirituality, a value system, a soteriology and embedded "God-concepts." These theologians maintain that when considered theologically, neo-liberalism is consistent with Scripture's perspective on idolatry. The study suggests that the theological theme of idolatry provides significant insight into the religious dimension that sustains neo-liberalism as an oppressive system of domination and a structure of social sin. The study includes recommendations for incorporating the theme of idolatry into Canadian Catholic social teaching so that the struggle for economic justice is presented as an issue of Christian faith as well an issue for social ethics.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my advisor, Prof. Michel Beaudin of the Faculty of Theology at the Université de Montréal in appreciation for his patience, encouragement and insight. Also, I wish to express my gratitude to Prof. Pamela Bright, Chair, Department of Theological Studies, Concordia University, who first encouraged me to write a thesis and whose words of reassurance helped me to persevere.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BCNI— Business Council on National Issues

CCCB— Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops

CELAM — Latin American Bishops Conference

DEI — Departamento Ecumenico de Investagacioñes,

ECPC — Ethical Choices and Political Challenges

EREC — Ethical Reflections on the Economic Crisis from Social Security Reform ?

IMF — International Monetary Fund

NGO — Non-governmental organization

SAP — The Struggle Against Poverty

SAP'S— Structural Adjustment Programs

WP — Will the Poor Have the Most to Fear from Social Security Reform?

WU — Widespread Unemployment : A Call to Mobilizes the Social Forces of Our Nation

CONTENTS

Introduction

In their 1997 letter, "Neo-liberalism in Latin America", the Latin American provincials of the Society of Jesus described neo-liberal economics as:

> ... a radical conception of capitalism that tends to absolutize the market and transform it into the means, the method and the end of all intelligent and rational human behavior. According to this conception, people's lives, the functioning of societies, and the policy of governments are subordinated to the market. This absolute market disallows regulation in any area. It is unfettered, without any financial, labor or administrative restrictions. [1]

The Jesuits observed that neo-liberalism, as an economic ideology, is rooted in nineteenth-century *laissez-faire* capitalism, a form of capitalism that asserts the free market, unencumbered by government restraint, as the only path to human social and economic progress. Yet, this progress benefits only the few while leaving multitudes in poverty, threatening cultural identity and destroying natural resources. [2]

In the North, the Social Affairs Commission [3] of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops also has been a vocal critic of neo-liberalism. Its sustained

---

[1] The Latin American Provincials of the Society of Jesus, "A Letter on Neo-Liberalism in Latin America," Promotio *Justitiae*, May 1997 [journal on-line]; available from http://web.lemoyne.edu/~bucko/sj_pj-67.html; Internet; accessed June 1998.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Joe Gunn and Monica Lambton write that the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops established the Social Affairs Commission to assist the bishops 'and the People of God through activities for justice and the transformation of society...In the light of these pastoral objective, the Commission has a responsibility to do research, education, and action on a variety of social justice concerns' both in Canada and internationally. The Commission is to fulfill its mandate by 1) undertaking social research, 2) preparing social messages; 3) engaging in social action; and 4) collaborating in pastoral initiatives." In Joe Gunn and Monica Lambton, *Calling Out the Prophetic Tradition: A Jubilee of Social Teaching from the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops,* (Ottawa, Ontario: Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1999), 6.

reflection on the values and priorities of Canadian economic policy has led the Social Affairs Commission to regard neo-liberalism as the root cause of a "moral crisis" plaguing the Canadian economy. Its critique of the neo-liberal agenda has led one observer of Canadian Catholic social teaching to call the Commission's statements "radical" and "daring" in their ethical challenge of Canadian economic policy.[4]

The bishops' use of ethics to challenge the values and priorities of the dominant Canadian economic model of neo-liberalism is rooted in the significant decision of the Second Vatican Council to be more open to the world and more deeply engaged with society. Prior to Vatican II, Canadian Catholic social teaching regarded society as an *organism,* a social unity based on mutual cooperation, shared values and a basic respect for social structures. The Church taught that within this organic context, social change would occur when *moral conversion* directed the good will and generosity of all to reforming the social order for the sake of the common good. It was the responsibility of the Church, of course, to promote moral conversion.[5]

E.F. Sheridan, S.J. describes the Social Affairs Commission as comprised of eight members of the CCCB (according to Gunn and Lambton the number was reduced to four in 1999 as a result of a cost cutting move by the CCCB) who have been assigned three major areas of study and reflection: Faith and Justice Perspectives, Justice Issues in Canada, Justice in the Third World. In E.F. Sheridan, S.J., ed., *Do Justice: The Social Teaching of he Canadian Bishops (1945-1986).* (Toronto: The Jesuit Centre for Social Faith and Justice, 1987), 46-48. See also, Gunn and Lambton , *Calling Out the Prophetic Tradition* 40-41

[4] Gregory Baum, *Compassion and Solidarity: The Church for Others* (Toronto, Ontario: CBC Enterprises, 1987), 63.

[5] Gregory Baum and Duncan Cameron, Ethics *and Economics: Canada's Catholic Bishops on the Economic Crisis* (Toronto, Ontario: James Lorimer and Company, 1984), 19-27.

But with the Second Vatican Council and the post-conciliar statements of the World Synod of Bishops (*The Church in the Modern World*, 1971), the Latin American bishops (the *Medellin* and *Puebla* documents), the work of liberation theologians and the social teaching of Popes John XXIII, Paul VI and John Paul II, the statements of the Canadian Catholic bishops on social issues began to take on a "radical, leftist edge". [6] With growing economic and social injustice affecting the lives of the poor, both domestically and globally, the Canadian bishops followed the call of the Latin American bishops at Puebla to demonstrate a "preferential option for the poor." The Canadian bishops found it unacceptable to ask those living under oppressive poverty to linger in their suffering until the "well-off" experienced a moral conversion. Consequently, the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCB), drawing from the methodology of liberation theology, began to develop a critique of capitalism from the perspective of the poor and the oppressed.

As a result of their analysis, the bishops concluded that the victims of socio-economic injustice must actively struggle for their own liberation. To this end, the bishops' statements urged the poor to form coalitions in solidarity with other citizens (including those non-poor who value social justice) in order to take effective public action to remove the causes of oppression from society. The role of the Church in this context was to support the poor and the marginalized in

---

[6] Ibid. 24-27.

their struggle for justice.[7] To this end, the Canadian bishops beginning with *Ethical Choices and Political Challenges* (1984) developed for the entire Church a pastoral methodology for addressing social issues. The elements of this pastoral methodology are:

a) being present with and listening to the poor;
b) developing a critical analysis of the economic, political and social structures that cause poverty;
c) making judgements in the light of Gospel principles;
d) stimulating creative thought and action regarding alternative visions and models for social and economic development;
e) acting in solidarity with-community based movements.[8]

This pastoral methodology closely follows the methodology of liberation theology and has provided a conceptual framework for the bishops' social teaching. However, whereas the social teaching of the Canadian bishops has focused on the ethical questions raised by neo-liberalism, liberation theology has maintained that neo-liberalism, in theory and practice, raises not only ethical questions, but serious theological questions which challenge the very core of Christian faith.

Some liberation and critical theologians believe that neo-liberalism contains a covert religious dimension. [9] They claim that, like a religion, neo-liberalism possesses an absolutist dogma, a spirituality, a value system, a

---

[7] Ibid., 23-27.
[8] Episcopal Commission for Social Affairs, "Ethical Choices and Political Challenges," in *Do Justice: The Social Teaching of the Canadian Catholic Bishops*, ed. E.F. Sheridan, S.J. (Toronto, Ontario: The Jesuit Centre for Social Faith and Justice, 1987), 412.
[9] The understanding of religion that guides this inquiry is that which Gregory Baum attributes to Erich Fromm. According to Baum, "Fromm understands religion as any style of thought and action, shared by a common group, which gives the individual a frame of orientation and an object of devotion." In Gregory

soteriology and "God-concepts." These critics claim that in proclaiming market capitalism as the sole organizing principle of society, neo-liberalism seeks to impose its doctrine over all aspects of human socio-economic affairs. Thus, like a "bad religion", neo-liberalism attempts to establish the unconditional subordination of human beings, indeed the whole of creation, to its own internal laws.[10]

Canadian theologian, Lee Cormie, and University of Ottawa professor of political economy, Duncan Cameron, have spoken of neo-liberal ideology (or market ideology) as a form of faith, which, both fear, poses a "new challenge" to the Church. Cormie warns that "if we don't start to ...discourse about the market as a theology, we won't be able to expose the stakes that (the Church and its) traditions have in it." He believes that the "question of the market is a *theological* question pertaining to the belief in idols in the most profound and straightforward sense". [11] Cormie and Cameron receive some support from Canadian scholar and social activist, John McMurtry, who has written that neo-liberalism, contains a "theocratic character" and who

---

Baum, *Religion and Alienation: A Theological Reading of Sociology* (New York, N.Y.: Paulist Press, 1975), 97

[10] In commenting on Hegel's *Early Theological Writings*, Gregory Baum writes, "Bad religion promotes the structures of domination in human history. Domination, not communion, is the key to human unity. The master-slave relationship which characterizes the divine-human encounter is projected upon the whole of humanity and people are made to define their relation to one another in terms of master and slave. People and groups are related to one another through power imposed on them from above..." In Gregory Baum, *Religion and Alienation,* 13-15.

[11] Duncan Cameron, "Market Ideology Should be Confronted and Transcended Through New Practices," *Compass: A Jesuit Journal*, (November/December, 1991): 22-23. Emphasis mine.

considers neo-liberal ideology a "covert religion whose theology is economics".[12]

The question as to whether an ethical critique of neo-liberalism that excludes an analysis of its "covert" religious dimension can provide adequate insight into neo-liberalism as a sinful social structure was first raised in Latin America. In 1978, certain liberation theologians[13] associated with the Ecumenical Research Department (*Departamento Ecumenico de Investagacioñes*, DEI) in San Jose, Costa Rica initiated a systematic dialogue with economists and economics. From the DEI dialogue emerged, what, in the view of some church observers, is the most systematic and radical Christian critique of capitalism to date.[14] The DEI critique determined that, in its ideology and processes, neo-liberalism functioned as a " quasi religion" complete with its own anthropology, virtues, ethical principles, and "sacrificial" system devoted to the market as a "god".

The DEI theologians have since been joined by political theologians in the North in exploring the religious dimension of neo-liberalism. One of these, German theologian and economist, Ulrich Duchrow, has observed that the market economy appears to be "in service" to an impersonal, objective purpose[15] to which it feels ultimately bound and to which it owes absolute

---

[12] John McMurtry, *Unequal Freedoms: The Global Market as an Ethical System* (West Hartford, Connecticut: Kumarian Press, Inc., 1998.), 17.

[13] (Notably, Franz Hinkelammert, Hugo Assmann, Julio de Santa Ana, and Pablo Richard)

[14] Michael Lowy, *The War of the Gods: Religion and Politics in Latin America* (London: Verso 1996), 125.

[15] Personified by Adam Smith in The *Wealth of Nations* as the "invisible hand" which guides the market.

obedience. In pre-modern cultures, claims Duchrow, this impersonal ultimate was called "God".[16]

According to DEI liberation theologian Pablo Richard, the inherent tendency of capitalism to absolutize the market system and to relativize human beings links neo-liberal capitalism to the biblical understanding of *idolatry*. Richard claims that in the bible, "idolatry occurs when human beings made gods or absolutes out of the work of their own hands, bestowing on them a transcendent universal authority in whose name they practiced injustice." [17] In theological terms," writes Richard, "*neo-liberalism* is that kind of *idolatry* which permits the system to destroy and kill without limits and without any qualms of conscience."[18] Liberation theologian, Franz Hinkelammert allows that the religious dimension of neo-liberalism is not the result of intentional action. Using Marx's theory of *fetishism*, Hinkelammert explains that the idolatrous character of liberal capitalism is the *invisible and unintentional* product of human interaction. It is the result of human beings unconsciously surrendering their nature as subjects to *things* and allowing things to objectify, relativize, and subjugate them as persons. [19]

---

[16] Ulrich Duchrow, *Alternatives to Global Capitalism: Drawn From Biblical History, Designed For Political Action*, (Utretch, The Netherlands: International Books, 1995), 124.

[17] Pablo Richard, " The Presence and Revelation of God in the World of the Oppressed," in *Where Is God? A Cry Of Human Distress*, eds., Christian Duquoc and Casiano Floristan (Chatham, Kent: SCM Press Ltd., 1992), 28-29.

[18] Pablo Richard "Word of God: Source of Life and Hope for the New Millennium," SEDOS *Bulletin on NET: Article in English* [journal on-line]; available from http//www.sedos.org/english/richard.html ; Internet; accessed 28 February 2000.

[19] Pablo Richard and Raul Vidales, preface to Franz Hinkelammert , *The Ideological Weapons of Death: A Theological Critique of Capitalism* , trans. Phillip Berryman (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1984), viii-xxi.

Theologians Michel Beaudin and Julio de Santa Ana point out that, as with all idolatrous systems, neo-liberalism contains its own "theology of sacrifice." [20] In the name of the "gods of the market" (e.g., economic growth, competitiveness, deficit reduction, debt servicing, foreign investment, etc.), millions of human beings around the globe innocently suffer extreme poverty, even death.[21] Hinkelammert writes that neo-liberalism's demand for sacrifices in human well being (e.g., cuts in social spending, health care, and education) establishes it as a type of modern-day Moloch, an "idol of death." [22] The Latin American provincials of the Society of Jesus, in their *Letter on Neo-Liberalism in Latin America*" state that by making the market the "absolute" determiner of "the meaning of life and human fulfilment", neo-liberalism claims for itself a role which belongs only to God.[23] Duchrow asserts that its claim to ultimacy places neo-liberalism's god of the market in conflict with the God of the Bible. This conflict between the God of the Bible and the "god of the market" changes the question of socio-economic injustice from a predominantly ethical question to a theological question: which God should we serve? The god of neo-liberal capitalism or the God of the Bible? [24]

---

[20] Michel Beaudin, "Cette idole qui nous gouverne. Le néo-libéralisme comme <<religion>> et <<théologie>> sacrificielles, *Studies in Religion / Sciences Religieuses* 24, no.4 (1995): 402-404.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Franz Hinkelammert, "The Economic Roots of Idolatry: Entrepreneurial Metaphysics" in *The Idols of Death and the God of Life: A Theology*, Pablo Richard et.al. trans. Barbara E. Campell and Bonnie Shepherd (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis), 191

[23] The Latin American Provincials of the Society of Jesus, "A Letter on Neo-Liberalism".

[24] Ulrich Duchrow, *Global Economy: A Confessional Issue For the Churches* (Geneva: WCC Publications1987), 177. Also, Jon Sobrino, S.J., Jesus *the Liberator* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1993), 180-192.

Though secular organizations may be far more adept than ecclesial ones in shaping technical responses to socio–economic issues, only the churches are capable of unmasking the idolatrous spirituality underlying systems of oppression. Some critical and liberation theologians believe that the churches can not effectively challenge the socio-economic injustice wrought by neo-liberalism unless they first confront its underlying religious dimension. [25]

In light of the above, one may propose that the challenge for Canadian Catholic social teaching, which has heretofore confronted neo-liberalism on ethical grounds, is to effectively engage the underlying religious dimension of neo-liberalism. Recent documents of the Social Affairs Commission of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops have included references to a market theology ("deify the 'free market'" [26], "the current idolatry of the free market" [27]). However, the Canadian Church has not developed a critique that recognizes the struggle against neo-liberalism as a religious struggle against idolatry as well as an ethical struggle against socio-economic injustice.

The objective of this inquiry will be to discover how insights drawn from liberation theology and critical theology might be used in Canadian Catholic social teaching to develop a response to the religious dimension of neo-

---

[25] Walter Wink, Engaging *the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1992), 167.

[26] Episcopal Commission For Social Affairs, "Will the Poor Have Most to Fear From Social Security Reform," no. 12. [on-line]; available from Microsoft Internet Page; Internet ; accessed 14 April 1996 .

[27] Episcopal Commission For Social Affairs, " A Citizens' Search for Alternatives: A Brief Presented to the MAI Inquiry by Bishop James Weisgerber," press release, p. 1 of 5, 13 November 1998 [on-line]; available from http:// www.cccb.ca/english/fullpresse.asp?ID=154; Internet; accessed 8 June 2000.

liberalism. Also, the paper will examine the implications for the mission of the church and for a Christian praxis resulting from a theological critique of idolatry applied to neo-liberalism.

In addressing the above question, I will follow the bishops' own methodology which has been heavily influenced by liberation theology. Thus my method of investigation will proceed through the following three stages central to liberation theology:

Social-analytic mediation: Liberation theology begins with an analysis of social reality to determine the actual conditions affecting the oppressed. The fundamental questions asked are: Who are the oppressed? Why is there oppression? What are the causes of oppression? Here, I will present the bishops' reading of the impact of neo-liberalism on Canadian and global social reality.

Hermeneutic Mediation: Stage two of liberation methodology addresses the question: What has the Word of God to say about the socio-economic oppression present in social reality? Here I intend to comment on the bishops' use of Scripture and Church social teaching in their reflection in the light of Christian faith on the Canadian socio-economic context.

Practical Mediation: From an analysis of social reality, through a reflection on the word of God heard through scripture and through the social teaching of the Church, the methodology of liberation theology enters a third stage: action for justice. This stage presents strategies designed for the transformation of society according to Gospel values. My task here is to present an overview of

the pastoral strategy proposed by the Social Affairs Commission to address the socio-economic disparity resulting from neo-liberal economic policies.[28]

Each of the above, will be complemented by chapters presenting alternative perspectives on neo-liberalism drawn from liberation theology and critical theology. These complementary perspectives present socio-analytic, hermeneutic and pastoral practice positions on neo-liberalism using the theological theme of idolatry as a level of analysis.

The selected documents that will form the basis of this inquiry are *Ethical Reflections on the Economic Crisis* (1983), *Ethical Choices and Political Challenges: Ethical Reflections on the Future of Canada's Socio-Economic Order* (1984), *Ethical Choices and Political Challenges-Free Trade: At What Cost?* (1987), *Widespread Unemployment: A Call to Mobilize the Social Forces of Our Nation Crisis* (1993), *The Struggle Against Poverty: A Sign of Hope for Our World* (1996), and *Will the Poor Have the Most to Fear From Social Security Reforms?* (1996).

In attempting to meet the above objectives, this inquiry will be guided by the following method and structure:

The first chapter will examine selected documents of the Social Affairs Commission of the CCCB on the economy written between 1983 and 1996. These documents are representative of the bishops' socio-analytic look into neo-liberalism capitalism. The intention in this stage

[28] My description of the three stages of liberation methodology is taken from, Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology*, trans. Paul Burns (Maryknoll, New York, 1987), 11-21.

is to ascertain what the bishops are saying about the social, economic, political, ideological and ethical dimensions of neo-liberalism.

The second chapter will present a description of the "religious" dimension of neo-liberalism neglected by the bishops and derived from complementary social-analytic perspectives developed by liberation theology, and critical theology.

The third chapter will provide a description of the hermeneutical perspective of the Social Affairs Commission. The intent here is to see how the bishops use Scripture and Catholic social teaching in speaking theologically about neo-liberal capitalism?

The fourth chapter will look at the theological critique of neo-liberalism developed by selected liberation and critical theologians. This chapter will examine the biblical roots of the assertion that neo-liberalism is a contemporary form of idolatry.

The fifth chapter will provide an overview of the strategies for social and economic development in Canada as proposed by the Social Affairs Commission in response to neo-liberalism.

The sixth chapter will examine alternative strategies developed by selected liberation theologians and critical theologians in response to neo-liberalism. These strategies describe an "anti-idolatry praxis of resistance" as appropriate and necessary for pastoral action.

The seventh chapter will reflect on how the critique of idolatry as developed by certain liberation and critical theologians might assist Canadian Catholic Social teaching on economic justice.

CHAPTER I

The Social-Analysis of the Episcopal Commission for Social Affairs On Neo-Liberal Capitalism

Since the early nineteen-seventies, the Social Affairs Commission of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops has made used of social analysis in its pastoral statements on socio-economic injustice.[1] The intention of the bishops' socio-analytic study of poverty in Canada and in the international arena has been to "stimulate ethical reflections on the values, priorities, and structures of (Canada's) socio-economic order." [2]

Using six of the social statements of the Social Affairs Commission written between 1983 and 1996, this chapter will present an overview of the bishops' social analytic reading of the Canadian experience with neo-liberal capitalism. It will begin with an analysis of what the documents are saying about the social, economic, and political dimensions of neo-liberalism as experienced by Canadian society during the period of 1983-1996 (the period during which the Social Affairs Commission wrote its more significant documents regarding liberal capitalism). The chapter will also present the observations of the Social Affairs

---

[1] As a sociological tool, social analysis helps to discover answers to the questions *who are the poor ?* and *why are they poor?* Thus, it can be used to uncover the underlying values and ideologies which legitimate wide-spread poverty as well as exposing the more direct causes and concrete conditions of poverty and oppression. Gunn and Lambton point out that the methodology of the Social Affairs Commission has been heavily influenced by the methodology of liberation theology of which the use of social analysis is a constitutive component. In Joe Gunn and Monica Lambton, *Calling Out the Prophetic Tradition* (Ottawa, Ontario: Concacan Inc., 1999), *20*-21.

[2] Episcopal Commission for Social Affairs, "Ethical Choices and Political Challenges," in *Do Justice!: The Social Teaching of the Canadian Bishops* , ed. E.F. Sheridan, S.J. (Toronto, Ontario: The Jesuit Centre for Social Faith and Justice, 1987) , 414.

Commission concerning the underlying values and the ideological dimension of neo-liberal economics.

1.1. The Social Affairs Commission's Reading of The Socio-Economic and Political Aspects of Neo-Liberalism in Canadian and Global Reality

From 1974, beleaguered by economic problems centering on high inflation and high unemployment as well as pressure from Canadian business leaders, the Liberal government of Pierre Trudeau decided to follow a neo-liberal [3] agenda for economic recovery.[4] Trudeau's decision was one among many taken by his Liberal government during the late 70's and early 80's at the behest of Canadian business interests, (particularly *the Business Council on National Issues*, or BCNI). In the view of the Canadian Catholic bishops, economic decisions that placed the interests of business ahead of the welfare of the people revealed a "moral disorder" in the structure of capitalism both in Canada and globally.

1.1.1.Ethical Reflections on the Economic Crisis (1983)

In 1983, the Social Affairs Commission of the CCCB spoke out on the state of the economy in its pastoral message, *Ethical Reflections on the Economic Crisis* (EREC). The opening section of this document established that

---

[3] Gregory Baum points out that, in the early nineteen-eighties, neo-liberal economic policies were introduced in the United States by President Ronald Reagan and in Great Britain by Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. At that time, neo-liberal economics was referred to as "neo-conservative" economics because of its affiliation with the political agenda of conservative political parties. However, according to Baum, in Canada, it was the Liberal party which first favoured reducing the role of government in the economy and in the self-regulating power of the market. Baum explains that in Quebec, Latin America, and Europe, critics of monetarism preferred the label "neo-liberal" since they considered monetarist economic policy a return to the laissez-faire liberalism of the nineteenth century. In Gregory Baum, "Are We In A New Historical Situation?"in *Stone Soup: Reflections on Economic Justice, Kevin Arsenault* et al. (Toronto, Ontario: Paulines, 1998), 27.

its analysis of the Canadian economy would be from the perspective of two fundamental Gospel principles: the preferential option for the poor (as developed by liberation theology) and the value and dignity of human work (based on the teaching of Pope John Paul II in *Laborem Exercens*).

EREC's examination of Canadian society in the early 1980's revealed disturbing economic and social realities. Describing a Canadian economy in "serious trouble," the bishops identified these "realities:

> Plant shut downs, massive layoffs of workers, wage restraint programs, and suspension of collective bargaining rights for public sector workers. At the same time, we have seen the social realities of abandoned one-industry towns, depleting unemployment insurance benefits, cutbacks in health and social services, and line-ups at local soup kitchens. ...[5]

The document recognized a broad cross-section of Canadians as the victims of the troubled economy: the unemployed, the welfare poor, the working poor, pensioners, native peoples, women, young people, small farmers, fisher-folk, factory workers small business people. According to the document, it was these Canadians who were being called upon to bear the brunt of the sacrifices (layoffs, wage restraints, cut-backs in social programs, and increased taxes to offset tax reductions for the wealthy [6]) which business and government claimed were needed for economic recovery. EREC stated that, at the close of 1983, the sacrifices demanded by the neo-liberal agenda had given the top 20% of the Canadian population 42.5% of total personal income while the bottom 20% were

---

[4] Tony Clarke, *Silent Coup: Confronting the Big Business Takeover of Canada* (Ottawa, Ontario: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, 1997), 25.
[5] Episcopal Commission for Social Affairs, *EREC*, in Sheridan, *Do Justice!, 400.*
[6] Ibid., 404-405.

left to share only 4.1%. The document also stated that in the Third World the restructuring of international capitalism had created a situation where the populations of nations of the South (approximately three fourth's of the world's people) were left with only one-fifth of the world's income on which to survive. [7]

It's socio-analytic inquiry led the Social Affairs Commission to realize that, contrary to what business and government leaders had encouraged Canadians to believe, the root cause of the recession in the early 80's was not the demand of labour for higher salaries and better working conditions, but the structural re-organization of the international system of capitalism. The Commission identified the following neo-liberal policies as responsible for this "structural crisis":

> (a) The attempt to neutralize the ability of governments to regulate capital through capital's internationalization. Using the newly evolving computer technology, transnational corporations and banks moved capital; at will, around the globe in search of locales with cheaper labor, lower taxes, fewer restrictions on working conditions, and lax environmental policies.
>
> (b) The trend to reduce labor costs with technology to replace workers. Business was becoming more capital-intensive in order to divert profits from job creation to the acquisition of more sophisticated technology. The long-range repercussions of a capital-intensive economy, the bishops warned, would be "permanent or structural unemployment."
>
> (c) The re-tooling of Canadian industry for the export market as opposed to focusing on meeting domestic needs. [8]

The Social Affairs Commission claimed that the recession, in fact, was the result of the decision by business and government to implement neo-liberal economic policies. Canadian business, the bishops maintained, created economic slowdown and high unemployment by choosing to lay-off workers, sell

---

[7] Ibid., 401.
[8] Ibid , 404-405.

off inventories and cut back on production in order to increase profits needed to "re-tool Canadian industries."[9]

EREC recognized that the state was complicit in creating the hardship resulting from the recession by bowing to the neo-liberal demands of business while ignoring the needs of ordinary citizens. The document pointed out that the Canadian government's "austerity measures"— wage restraints, cut-backs in social spending, high interest rates — were in line with the neo-liberal agenda of providing "a more favorable climate for private investment" by restricting government spending, especially in the social sector, and controlling the demands of labor. The document also challenged the government's decision to allow the private sector to set the agenda for economic recovery. This decision, the bishops claimed, revealed that Canada was no longer committed to full employment and enhanced social welfare.[10]

1.1.2. Ethical Choices and Political Challenges (1984)

A year after the publication of *Ethical Reflections on the Economic Crisis*, members of the Social Affairs Commission presented a brief, *Ethical Choices and Political Challenges* (ECPC), to the Royal Commission on the Economic Union and Development Prospects for Canada (also known as the Macdonald Commission). Established by the Trudeau government, the Macdonald Commission was to recommend a path for the Canadian economy to follow in the

[9] Ibid., 402-403.
[10] Ibid., 403-406.

dawning era of globalization (the movement to entrench neo-liberalism on a global basis).

In *ECPC*, the bishops observed that causes of economic injustice in Canada in the year following *EREC* remained the same: the structural crisis in the international system of industrial capitalism, the impact of technology on human work, the trans-nationalization of capital, the restructuring of economies for the global market, the accommodation of governments to the role of servants of capital, the re-assertion of capital as the dominant organizing principle of society.

As with, *EREC, ECPC* considered the effects of neo-liberalism primarily within a Canadian context. Yet, it did acknowledge the growing global impact of neo-liberal economic policies. For example, it referred to the trans-nationalization of capital as having "restored laissez-faire competition on a global basis as nation states compete with one another for investment by transnational corporations and banks." [11]

ECPC read some of the more striking signs of the times in this new global economy as:

a) structural massive unemployment;

[11] Episcopal Commission for Social Affairs, *ECPC*, in Sheridan, *Do Justice!*, 420-421. Competitiveness in the global market place is, in effect, a race to maximize profits by minimizing costs. Neo-liberalism regards labour as one of the greatest threats to capital. Therefore, in the global economy, corporations pit workers in the South against their Northern counterparts in a contest to determine who will provide the cheapest labour, the most favourable working conditions and the least noise about environmental protection. See David Ransom, "Globalization—an alternative view," *The New Internationalist* no. 296 (1997): 7-10. This race to the bottom in the name of competitiveness has resulted in a downward spiral in wages and working conditions in the North, and in the South, as well as the return of child-labour and "sweat-shop" working conditions reminiscent of the Industrial Revolution. See Sarah Cox, "The Rag Trade Goes South," *The New Internationalist*, no. 246 (1993): 8-10.

b) social deprivation as a result of monetarist[12] policies that demand cut backs in government social spending and the privatization of government social services;

c) wage-restraint programs and lay-offs designed to reduce human labour to a commodity as workers are compelled to accept lower wages and poorer working conditions in order to price themselves back into the labour market;

d) the replacement of workers with labour-saving technologies;

e) Economic disparities between classes as a result of tax and investment policies that favour corporations over people, between regions as capital leaves poorer regions of the country to relocate in metropolitan areas, and economic disparity as a result of a renewed reliance on the "trickle-down" theory which distributes income in society through the private sector. [13]

ECPC pointed to additional signs of the times apparent in the restructured global economy: the concentration of wealth and economic power in the hands of large corporations; excessive competition forcing plants, farms, smaller

---

[12] In the early 1980's, certain economists who favoured liberal economic policies were successful in convincing several leaders of Western governments to return to a form of laissez–faire capitalism called *monetarism* as the only effective means to fight inflation and burgeoning national deficits. Monetarist policy argued that government spending, especially in the social sector, was responsible for the economic recession of the late seventies and early eighties. Prominent among those advocating monetarist policies was Nobel Prize winner and University of Chicago economist , Milton Friedman. Friedman insisted that state spending had to be restrained in order to control inflation. In his view, the most efficient way to inaugurate government restraint was by eliminating or reducing government social programs, by eliminating government regulation of the private sector, and by privatizing government-owned agencies and institutions. The purpose of this "downsizing" of the state, was to offer relief to business by delivering huge tax breaks to corporations. Friedman heavily promoted the concept of free trade while arguing for restrictions on the bargaining powers of unions and an elimination of minimum wage legislation as obstacles to competition in a free trade environment. Another prominent Friedman theory was the Non Accelerating Inflation Rate of Unemployment (NAIRU) . As a monetarist, Friedman believed money to be the centre of the economy. Inflation devalues money, therefore, inflation must be controlled at all costs. In his view, two significant stimulants to inflation are deficit spending and full employment. As noted above, a way to control deficit spending is by reducing government expenditures. Another way to control inflation, in Friedman's opinion, is by maintaining high unemployment. Friedman's NAIRU (sometimes referred to as "the natural rate of unemployment") posited that there was a "natural" level to which unemployment levels should fall. Unemployment rates below this "natural " level would trigger inflation because of worker's increased bargaining power which would place upward pressure on wages. Friedman maintained that if unemployment went below the NAIRU, interest rates would rise. Rising interest rates would curtail hiring and economic expansion Therefore, he insisted, government policy must shift from fighting unemployment (i.e. keep unemployment levels high) to controlling inflation. A detailed critique of the impact of Friedman's theories on Canadian economic policy can be found in Linda McQuaig, *The Cult of Impotence* (Toronto, Canada: Penguin Books Canada Ltd., 1998).

[13] Ibid., 420-426.

businesses and even small towns to shut down when confronted by corporate power; the increased reliance on export-orientation to the detriment of production geared to meeting basic domestic needs; lower environmental standards as a means of attracting private investment; and increased foreign ownership of the economy.

1.1.3. Widespread Unemployment: A Call to Mobilize the Social Forces of Our Nation. (1993)

Ten years after, *EREC* the Social Affairs Commission published an another pastoral message on the Canadian economy, *Widespread Unemployment, A Call to Mobilize the Social Forces of Our Nation* (*WU*). The bishops issued the document in response to the Mulroney government's rigorous implementation of the BCNI's neo-liberal agenda, an agenda that focused on free trade and deficit reduction as Canada' s top economic priorities [14].

Under the Conservatives, the BCNI priorities had not delivered on the promise of increased prosperity. In fact, in the early 90's, Canadians were facing a serious unemployment crisis as the result of another recession brought on by the Canadian government's strict adherence to neo-liberal monetarist policies.

WU noted that in the years since *EREC,* over 1.5 million Canadians were still without work. However, if one factored in those people who, in frustration, had given up looking for work and people employed only part-time, the number of

[14] Clarke, *Silent Coup*, 25-33.

Canadians without full-time employment jumped to "a staggering 3.9 million", almost a quarter of the Canadian labour force.[15]

The document reproached the Canadian government for capitulating to the business sector by placing control of inflation above job creation. Likewise, it rebuked the government for attempting to reduce unemployment insurance benefits in the middle of the recession. This move, the bishops felt, would place a disproportionate burden on the unemployed by reducing their benefits right when they were most needed. In addition, the bishops questioned "the government policy ...of cutting jobs, starving and decentralizing social services, privatizing public enterprises, raising certain kinds of taxes...as the only hope of recovery from deep economic recession." [16] When recovery comes, they concluded, "the newly created wealth will surely go disproportionately to those who are already wealthy...." [17]

The bishops noted that unemployment was "a gaping wound" that had created a "social crisis." Not only had unemployment generated greater poverty but a host of related social disorders: a higher suicide rate, a higher crime rate, more violence (especially within families), infant mortality, and a general sense of hopelessness.[18] This sense of hopelessness made workers, especially unemployed women, "feel they are at the blind whim of a market over which they have little or no control."[19]

---

[15] Episcopal Commission for Social Affairs, "Widespread Unemployment: A Call to Mobilize the Social Forces of Our Nation," *Catholic New Times*, supplement, 2 May 1993, no. 8.
[16] Ibid., no. 16.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Ibid., no. 9
[19] Ibid., no. 10.

The bishops observed that the Canadian economy was moving from one, which had offered secure full-time employment to an economy where "precarious part-time employment" in the service sector had become the rule. They identified the "candidates for uncertain, poorly-paid, part-time employment" as "women, youth, and 'visible minorities' including native peoples, and other non-white persons, as well as new Canadians." [20] Unemployment, the bishops declared, was destroying the middle-class and widening the gap between the " 'haves' and 'the have-nots', between those who are secure in their jobs and those who are not." [21]

WU cited the neo-liberal priorities of restructuring business for competition in the global economy and increasing productivity with new technology as among the factors contributing to unemployment. It also revealed that, as the forces behind the drive for an integrated world economy, transnational corporations, banks and financial institutions had succeeded in re-forging the global economy through the manipulation of workers organizations, domestic industries and governments.

In this pastoral letter, the bishops criticized another priority of neo-liberalism: free trade. They spoke of the broken promises of free trade which "in spite of solemn reassurances on the part of the government ...(had multiplied) human suffering almost mechanically for millions of Canadian and Third World workers."[22] They pointed out that free trade agreements encouraged labour-intensive industries to leave Canada for the low wage countries in the poor South

[20] Ibid. no. 11.
[21] Ibid., no. 12.

where labour is cheaper and working conditions and environmental standards are deplorable. In addition, despite the promise of free trade supporters that the new capital-intensive high tech information industries would produce more jobs for workers in the North, the bishops noted that free trade had not delivered on the promise of greater job creation.[23]

1.1.4. The Struggle against Poverty: A Sign of Hope for Our World (1996).

In 1993, the Liberal party, under the leadership of Jean Chretien had regained control of the House of Commons. While in opposition, the Chretien Liberals had spoken out against the Mulroney government is dismantling of the Canadian Welfare State[24]. But once in power, the Chretien Liberals reversed course and proceeded to implement a ten-point blue print prepared by the Business Council on National Issues (BCNI) which was committed to dismantling

---

[22] Ibid., no. 15

[23] Ibid.

[24] In the aftermath of World War II, the business communities and governments of the Western democracies, out of a sense of obligation to workers who had risked their lives on the battlefields of Europe and in the Pacific, forged a new social contract with labour that respected the rights of workers, supported a policy of full employment, and provided a social assistance programs to people excluded from the market. This new consensus favoured the theories of the English economist, John Maynard Keynes who believed that only direct government intervention in the economy using the criteria of justice, equilibrium and peace could achieve the well being of post-war society. Keynesian economics set aside the laissez-faire doctrine that the common good could best be achieved through an autonomous self-regulating market. McBride and Shields quote Keynes as stating that, in fact, the economy was more like a boat "afloat without a rudder, and its own internal forces, if left to themselves, (were) as likely to ground the system on the rocks of deep depression as they (were) to steer it toward ...prosperity." Keynes maintained that a state managed economy should not only pass legislation delivering protection and security for workers, but should also become directly involved in guiding and supporting the economy, especially in times of recession, through a program of full employment and government action to control the pace of the economy. Under the Keynesian economic model, state expansion into the economy created what became known as the Welfare State. McBride and Shields comment that, "A common characterization of the welfare state is that it engages in large-scale public assistance through the direct transfers and public provision of goods and services... The emphasis... is upon the use of state power to modify the market for social ends. The idea of creating the conditions for equality of opportunity is of great importance here. The state enacts regulations that "entitle citizens to certain means of subsistence and some amount of care in case they cannot support

what was left of the Keynesian Welfare-State in Canada.[25] In October of 1996, in observance of the *International Day for the Eradication of Poverty, the* Social Affairs Commission released *The Struggle against Poverty: A Sign of Hope for Our World* (*SAP*), its third pastoral letter on the economy.

The document's social analysis began with a global perspective noting that in 1996, in countries in the South, one person in three lived in poverty and that 12.5 million children died yearly from malnutrition and preventable diseases. Primary health care, education, and adequate nutrition were available to only about a fifth of the world's people. The bishops emphasized that the above suffering occurred in a world where the incomes of wealthiest 20 per cent were 150 times greater than that of the poorest fifth.[26]

---

themselves by there own labour." In Stephen McBride and John Shields, *Dismantling a Nation: Canada and the New World Order* (Halifax, Nova Scotia: Fernwood Publishing, 1993), 9-16. .

[25] Clarke, *Silent Coup*, p.76

[26] Episcopal Commission for Social Affairs, *The Struggle Against Poverty: A Sign of Hope for Our World*, Section 1, *The Catholic Register*, supplement, 21 October 1996. The situation in the South has been further aggravated as a result of the impact of the neo-liberal structural adjustment programs (SAP's) imposed on the Third World by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. The intent of the SAP's was to force Third World countries to restructure their economies along neo-liberal free market lines in order to receive loans needed to service burgeoning debt. An important ingredient in this restructuring process was the implementation of measures designed to take the control of the economy out of the hands of Third World governments.

Consequently, during the 1980's, throughout the South:

> 1) restrictions were removed on foreign investment in local economies as well as restrictions on imports;
> 2) national economies were re-oriented for export production to the North (rather than for meeting the basic needs of local populations) in order to generate foreign exchange for debt servicing;
> 3) wage levels were slashed in order to provide foreign investors with a pool of cheap labour;
> 4) Government spending on health, education, and social assistance was reduced; government enterprises were privatized; national economies were deregulated thus freeing corporations from government intervention on behalf of labour and protection of the environment and natural resources. In Clarke, *Silent Coup*, 61-62.

The impact of the neo-liberal inspired SAP's has devastated the economies of Third World countries. The interventionist role of their governments having been neutralized, many of these countries now spend more on servicing their debt than on attending to the survival needs of their own citizens. For example, almost 76% of government revenue in Brazil goes to service debt interest payments while the Brazilian government devotes only 35 % of its expenditures to social services. Between 1990 and 1997 Third World

In considering the Canadian context, *SAP* expressed the bishops' disquiet that Canadian government economic policy focused on social spending cuts and deficit reduction rather than job creation and relief for the almost 5 million Canadians living in poverty, and the 17 per-cent of Canadians who were unemployed. [27]

SAP focused its socio-analysis on four particular groups where poverty in

---

countries transferred $77 billion more in debt service payments to financial institutions in the North than they received in new loans. In "Debt— the facts," *The New Internationalist,* May 1999, 18-19. [26]
With neo-liberalism entrenched in the world through globalization, the pursuit of self-interest by corporations and financial institutions in the North has created huge disparities in wealth between the world's rich and poor. As reported by the Canadian Ecumenical Jubilee Initiative, a recent United Nations Development Program study on world income distribution revealed that in 1960, the wealthiest fifth of the world's people received 30 times more income than the poorest 20 percent. By 1993, the richest fifth were receiving 61 times more income. When the disparity in income between the rich and the poor *within* countries is considered, the wealthiest 20 percent of the world's people are 150 times richer than the poorest 20 percent. In John Dillon, *Turning the Tide: Confronting the Money Traders* (Toronto, Ontario: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, 1997), 5-6.

The consequence of this growing gap between the rich and poor is that a fifth of the world' population, almost 800 million people, are chronically malnourished , 1440 children under five years old die every hour of every day from malnutrition and preventable diseases, 820 million people (30 percent of the world's work force) are either unemployed or under-employed, and 1.5 billion people subsist on less than one dollar a day, in Canadian Ecumenical Jubilee Initiative, *A New Beginning: A Call For Jubilee* (Toronto: Ontario: CEJI, 1998), 17-18. Also in Ten Days for Global Justice, "Closing the Gap: Introduction to the Ten Days 1999-2000 Programme," *Close the Gap Between Rich and Poor*(Toronto, Ontario: Ten Days for Global Justice, 1999), 1

John Mihevc of the Canada-based Inter-Church Coalition on Africa has written that most sub-Saharan African countries have joined the ranks of the "excluded" in that they are considered "irrelevant to global development". Mihevc reports that sub-Saharan Africa's foreign debt rose from US $6 billion in 1970 to US $300 billion by 1993. The World Bank and IMF imposed structural adjustment programs have resulted in 125 million Africans either unemployed or under-employed, health care spending reduced by 50% and education, 25%. The impoverishment of Africa has resulted in the deaths of over 10,000 African children per day because of hunger or lack of basic medical attention. Mihevc warns that under the neo-liberal economic banner, "Africa's share of the global infant deatht rate will rise to 40% by the year 2000". In John Mihevc , *The Market Tells Them So* (Penang, Malaysia: Third World Network, 1995),11.
The Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace also points to evidence of the growing disparity between the world's rich and poor. For example, in its publication *Eradicating Unemployment and Poverty: A Political Choice* (April, 1995), Development and Peace reveals that 358 billionaires in the world possess as much wealth as 45% of the world's population. In the view of Development and Peace "It is no coincidence that the largest increases in income inequalities have occurred in the economies where free market economic policies have been pursued most zealously."

[27] Episcopal Commission for Social Affairs, *SAP,* 11-12.

Canada seemed more concentrated:

Women: The bishops pointed out that the highest poverty rate in Canada was among single-parent mothers younger than 65 who had children under 18 years old. They indicated the social injustice of not remunerating women for the long hours they have given to such "invisible" yet socially valuable work as caring for and educating children, preparing meals and maintaining the home.

Aboriginal People: The infant mortality rate of native people is twice that of the Canadian population, the unemployment rate is triple. The personal incomes of aboriginals are less than half of the Canadian population, their life expectancy almost ten years less.

Uprooted Persons: Poverty rates among families headed by new arrivals in Canada is higher than the rate for families headed by a Canadian–born person.

Families: Neo-liberalism has had a detrimental effect on families. Cut backs in social programs (health care, education, unemployment insurance) hurt families. In 1994, one child in five in Canada lived in poverty. Children in single-parent families were four times more likely to live in poverty than those in dual parent households. Despite a 1989 Canadian government pledge to eliminate child poverty by 2000, by 1996, the number of poor children in Canada had risen 55 percent. In a neo-liberal economy, both parents are often required to work long hours, thus being unavailable to their children.

SAP observed that the global work force had become polarized into two distinct groups: the majority of service workers and a "privileged minority" of knowledge workers. The document declared the bishops' concern that the neo-liberal vision, which had been embraced by powerful Canadians ,would result in

the creation of a dispossessed social sector comprised of the "excluded", citizens permanently cut off from full economic participation in Canadian society.

1.1.5.Will the Poor Have the Most to Fear From Social Security Reform? (1996)

In the wake of the federal government's 1996 review of Canadian social policy, the Social Affairs Commission published the pastoral message, *Will the Poor Have the Most to Fear From Social Security Reform? (WP). WP* expressed the Commission's concern that the economic policy of the new Liberal government under Jean Chretien had only one clear purpose— "the desire to remake the Canadian economic and social fabric in such a way as to position the nation to respond to the expansively competitive demands of international markets."[28] The Social Affairs Commission viewed the proposed reforms of the Chretien government as another step along the path to neo-liberal orthodoxy.

They pointed out that the neo-liberal priority of free trade had disrupted the social framework of communities by placing considerable pressure on many countries, including Canada, to configure their social policies to that of the United States, a country which traditionally advocates a limited role for government in the area of social policy. The bishops were also disturbed over the direction taken by the international division of labour. They were worried that the poor countries of the South would be perceived by the transnational corporations of the rich North primarily as a locus of cheap labour. This, the bishops warned, would produce an imbalance in the relationship between North and South that

would make it more difficult to achieve international cooperation on economic issues. [29] In addressing the Canadian scene in the mid-1990's, *WP* expressed great concern" over the state of widespread poverty in Canada:

> The extent of poverty in Canada is of great concern, even if the economic recession has ended. Over the last decade, the number of working-poor families rose by 30%. Six of every 10 lone-parent mothers now live in poverty and for young mothers with small children the number jumps to more than 8 of every 10. The poverty rate among young families has risen by 40%. And the government has noted the particularly sad fact that there are currently more than 1.2 million Canadian children living in poverty— almost one in five.[30]

Given the above, the Commission insisted that social policy reform in Canada, should be based on peoples' needs and "not be driven by the urgency to cut the deficit." The bishops advised the government that neo-liberal imperatives should not serve to blind political leaders of their obligations to the general welfare of Canadian society .[31] The bishops reminded the government that paramount among these obligations was the need to provide for social security by developing an economic strategy that would create full-time meaningful employment as the most effective remedy for poverty.

In their social-analytic reading of the concrete reality of Canadian and global society between 1983 and 1996, the Social Affairs Commission identified some of the more prominent economic, political, and human consequences of neo-liberal economic policies. Beginning in 1983 with *EREC*, the Social Affairs Commission warned, "the structural changes in the global economy had

---

[28] Episcopal Commission For Social Affairs, "Will the Poor Have Most to Fear From Social Security Reform," no. 12. [on-line]; available from Microsoft InternetPage; Internet ; accessed 14 April 1996 .
[29] Ibid, no.12.
[30] Episcopal Commission For Social Affairs, *WP*, no. 21.

produced not only "social breakdown", [32] but a "moral crisis" as well.[33] In using social analysis to identify the symptoms of this moral crisis, the bishops also raised fundamental questions concerning the values and priorities of neo-liberal capitalism. The following section presents a general look at the concerns raised by the Social Affairs Commission regarding the under-lying value system of neo-liberalism.

1.2. What Are the Bishops Saying About Neo-Liberal Values?

The social analysis of the Social Affairs Commission does not entertain the notion promoted by neo-liberal economists that economics is a positive, value free science. The Commission subjected neo-liberalism to an ethical scrutiny[34] and reveals in it 's pastoral statements the bishops' concern that as an economic and political model, neo-liberalism poses fundamental ethical questions about the values and priorities of our society. The Commission found neo-liberalism to be under-girded by a system of values linked to the *laissez-faire* theories of nineteenth century liberal capitalism, theories which stand in conflict with traditional Church teaching on economic policy.

In brief, the pastoral statements of the Social Affairs Commission contend that neo-liberalism devalues the well being of people and human

---

[31] Ibid.
[32] Episcopal Commission for Social Affairs, *EREC*, in Sheridan, *Do Justice!* , 425-426.
[33] Ibid., 403-404.
[34] John Philip Wogaman writes: "Economics analyzes the processes of production and distribution of actual and scarce values, the values that people actually desire whether or not they should desire them. Ethics subjects the values themselves to critical scrutiny in the light of some transcendent source. Ethics, applied to economics, is partly concerned with evaluating the actual goods and services to be produced and distributed. But it is also concerned with exploring the moral values that may be gained or lost through the processes of production and distribution themselves." John Philip Wogaman, "Towards a Method for

communities in favor of profit, possessive individualism, self-interest, and competition. In each of the above documents, the Commission observes that certain priorities of neo-liberalism raise questions about the values that govern Canada's socio-economic order. *Ethical Choices and Political Challenges, Free Trade: At What Cost?* Summarizes these "market values" as follows:

> (a) the tendency to define human beings and social relations in terms of the demand and supply forces of the market place. As a result, human beings, human labour, and human needs are largely treated as commodities to be bought, sold, or exchanged in the market place. (*EREC, ECPC*)
>
> (b) the emphasis on possessive individualism, self-gratification, personal selfishness, material consumption, and the accumulation of personal wealth as ultimate values in a market society. (*ECPC*)
>
> (c) the priority given to competitiveness as the supreme law of economics. Here, the doctrine of the "survival of the fittest" prevails. The strong survive while the weak are eliminated. (*EREC*)
>
> (d) the emphasis on the maximization of profits, technological expansion, and economic growth as "development" priorities in a market oriented society. Here, capital takes priority over human labour and the basic needs of people, resulting in distorted forms of development. (*EREC, ECPC*)
>
> (e) the belief that the market contains some kind of built-in system of "natural justice" whereby accumulated wealth in the hands of the few trickles down to the many. (*EREC, ECPC*) [35]

The documents of the Social Affairs Commission observed that neo-liberalism subordinate's human labour and human dignity to the needs of

---

Dealing with Economic Problems as Ethical Problems," in *Christian Ethics and Economics: The North South Dialogue*, eds. Dietmar Mieth and Jacques Pohier (New York: The Seabury Press, 1980), 77.

[35] Episcopal Commission for Social Affairs *Ethical Choices and Political Challenges- Free Trade: At What Cost?*, (Ottawa, Ontario: Concacan Inc., 1987),18-19.

"anonymous forces" of the market.[36] These market forces, in turn, assert the maximization of profits and growth, self-interest, and competition as absolutes in a neo-liberal economy. The bishops note that in the name of these absolutes, some human beings are excluded from full participation in Canadian economic life.[37]

The Social Affairs Commission points out that, in the neo-liberal value system, to promote the communal dimension of human society is viewed as a rejection of competitiveness. To reject the value of competitiveness leads individuals and societies to join the ranks of those "losers" who must suffer whatever fate befalls them since market values demand that society's resources be directed toward the development of market efficiency and not to the fulfillment of basic human needs. [38] This separation of human society into "winners" and "losers" results in "social polarization", a condition the bishops describe as "morally unacceptable to the Christian because it destroys that minimum human solidarity and compassion without which a truly human society is impossible." [39]

The bishops note that within the neo-liberal values system there is a "tendency for people to be treated as an impersonal force having little or no significance beyond their economic purpose in the system."[40] In the view of the Social Affairs Commission, when human well being and human solidarity are devalued in favour of the accumulation of profit, technology, competitiveness and

---

[36] Episcopal Commision for Social Affairs. *WU*, no. 23.
[37] Ibid., 23-25.
[38] Ibid., 23.
[39] Episcopal Commission for Social Affairs , *WP*, no. 12-13.
[40] Episcopal Commission for Social Affairs, *EREC*, in *Do Justice!*, 403.

self-interest, then a "deepening moral disorder" exists "in the values and priorities of our society."[41]

1.3 What Are the Bishops Saying About Neo-Liberal Ideology?

The Social Affairs Commission does not enter into a detailed analysis of the ideological dimension of neo-liberalism. However, its pastoral statements do recognize some of the more prominent themes of neo-liberal ideology.

Among these is the abstraction that the market is a spontaneous natural order, an inevitable force, self-creating and self-perpetuating, governed by its own internal laws. Guided by "an invisible hand," [42] which, if kept "free" of human interference, inevitably fulfills all human needs, the market must be allow to follow its own "anonymous forces". Indirectly, the bishops note the corollary of this abstraction — the principle that government has no place in the economy, even when acting on behalf of the common good:

> "... the state has the responsibility to intervene in the operations of an economy to ensure that basic human rights and moral

---

[41] Ibid., 402.

[42] Episcopal Commission for Social Affairs, *WU*,, no. 18. In *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1776) , Adam Smith maintained that just as there are physical laws regulating nature, so too are there "natural" laws (such as supply and demand) to regulate human economic relationships. He developed an analogy between Newton's physics and economics in support of his point. The human being, as an economic agent, he suggested, was guided by a natural organizing force analogous to the laws of gravity. Smith referred to this "force" as the " invisible hand". He maintained that it was this universal and autonomous "invisible hand" that kept the market operating fairly and efficiently. Moreover, it was the invisible hand that in guiding the individual in the pursuit of his/her own self-interest directed each person along the path which was most beneficial to the whole of society. In Robert G. Simons, *Competing Gospels: Public Theology and Economic Theory* (Alexandria, Australia: E.J. Dwyer Pty. Ltd., 1995), 29-32. Gerald Berthoud writes that for Smith, "(t)o be human is ...to be able to exercise one's individual rights to accumulate goods within a culturally recognized competitive context....according to Adam Smith and his numerous followers, we should all behave like 'merchants' if we really want to achieve our objectives as human beings." Gerald Berthoud, "Market," in *The Development Dictionary: A Guide to Knowledge as Power*, ed. Wolfgang Sachs (Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey: Zed Books, 1992), 83.

> principles are realized....and act on behalf of the common good with special concern for the poor and powerless groups of society."[43]

The Commission recognizes that market values such as competition and self-interest are to be allowed to regulate social relations. For example, the Commission notices that the neo-liberal value of competition has placed a "renewed emphasis" on the nineteenth century theory of the "'survival of the fittest' as the supreme law of economics".[44] The bishops contend that Darwinian thinking divides society into "winners" and "losers," with the strong surviving and the weak being eliminated. Such thinking, in the view of the Commission, legitimates "the domination of the weak by the strong" and the concentration of wealth and power in the hands of the few. [45] The bishops comment:

> These patterns of domination and inequality are likely to further intensify as the "survival of the fittest" doctrine is applied more rigorously to the economic order. While these Darwinian theories partly explain the rules that govern the animal world, they are in our view morally unacceptable as a "rule of life" for the human community.[46]

In its pastoral statements, the Social Affairs Commission identifies other prominent features of neo-liberal ideology. These include the following:

> (a) the action that yields the greatest financial return to the individual or firm is the one that is most beneficial to society;
>
> (b) the market must "rule" society, free from government intervention and regulation regardless of the consequences in social damage and from union demands for the protection of workers' rights;

---

[43] Episcopal Commission for Social Affairs, *ECPC*, in Sheridan, *Do Justice!*, 419.
[44] Ibid., 403
[45] Ibid.
[46] Ibid.

(c) state owned enterprises, goods and services must be privatized;

(d) the concepts of individual self-interest and individual responsibility take priority over the concepts of the common good or community;[47]

(e) capital and technology are the dominant organizing principles of the socio-economic order; [48]

In addition, the bishops consistently call for the development of alternative economic strategies based on "self-reliance " and designed to "serve the basic needs of ...communities."[49] This call is made in tacit recognition of the neo-liberal proposition that there is *no alternative* for human communities but to accept neo-liberalism as the primary organizing principle governing all human relationships.

1.4 Conclusion

Over the past two decades, the social teaching of the Canadian Catholic Church has recognized neo-liberalism as more than a mere economic model. The Social Affairs Commission of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops has also identified neo-liberalism as a social-project intent on restructuring human economic relationships and human communities in the image of the market. The bishops have revealed that neo-liberalism is sustained by an ideology and subsequent value-system that legitimates social deterioration in the name of market principles considered as absolutes (there is *no* alternative). In reading the "signs of the times" evident in the global and

[47] Episcopal Commission for Social Affairs ,*WP*, no. 12-14.
[48] Episcopal Commission for Social Affairs, *ECPC*, in Sheridan, *Do Justice!*, 421.
[49] Ibid., 430.

Canadian socio-economic order, the Commission has identified the following conditions of poverty and economic oppression as evidence of social deterioration due to neo-liberal theory and practice:

- the widening gap between the rich and the poor
- massive unemployment
- The reduction of human labour to a commodity.
- The exclusion of thousands of human beings from full economic participation in a high tech, globalize economy because they are deemed "unneeded."
- the resurgence of 19th century style "sweat shop" conditions in the free trade manufacturing zones of the South
- the re-structuring of national economies as export only economies
- the "down-sizing" of the state through privatization and deregulation
- the destruction of the natural environment .[50]

Social analysis has assisted the Social Affairs Commission in exposing the neo-liberal imposed organization of the economy as the root cause of poverty and socio-economic suffering in this country and globally. However, there are those who believe that the type of social analysis conducted by the Canadian bishops encounters only the external dimensions of neo-liberalism (as listed above) and not its *totality.*

The social analysis of liberation theology has concluded that neo-liberalism is grounded in a spiritual *ethos* which serves as a formidable partner of neo-liberal socio-economic oppression. This spiritual ethos transmutes neo-liberalism into a covert "religion" which provides neo-liberal economics with the propositions, values, beliefs and principles needed to legitimate and sustain its

[50] Ibid., 420-426.

prevailing contradictions and injustices. [51] With its focus squarely set on the ethical issues arising from neo-liberal economic policies, the Social Affairs Commission fails to recognize the parallels between neo-liberalism and religion. These parallels have important implications for society and for theology. However, for insight into these implications, we must turn to other sources.

[51] Pablo Richard, "The Presence and Revelation of God in the World of the Oppressed," in *Where is God? A Cry of Human Distress*, eds., Christian Duquoc and Casiano Floristan (Nijmengen, The Netherlands : Stichting Concilium., 1992), 27-37.

CHAPTER II

THE RELIGIOUS DIMENSION OF NEO-LIBERALISM

The careful analysis of Canadian socio-economic reality constructed by the Social Affairs Commission is primarily based on ethics.[1] As a result, its pastoral statements on the economy tend to overlook important questions raised by other critics of neo-liberalism regarding neo-liberalism as a form of "religion". This question is prompted by certain liberation theologians and critical theologians as well as some secular observers of global economics who maintain that embedded in neo-liberalism is a fundamental faith in capitalism as the source of ultimate meaning and value. They claim this faith[2] imparts to neo-liberal economics many of the characteristics common to religion. Among these is the suggestion that neo-liberalism contains a quasi-transcendent dimension (personified by the "invisible hand") linked to the divine and from which human beings can derive the *absolute* path to human fulfillment.

These critics question whether ethical considerations alone can provide sufficient insight into neo-liberalism, can penetrate beyond its visible *excesses* to encounter its essence or "spiritual" dimension which acts to transform neo-liberalism from an economic theory into a movement of faith, a religion. They

---

[1] Gregory Baum, *Compassion and Solidarity: The Church For Others*, (Montreal: CBC Enterprises, 1987), 62

[2] I am using faith here in the sense described by liberation theologian, Juan Luis Segundo. According to Segundo faith is a *meaning-structure*, "...we can say that faith *structures* a whole life around some specific meaning. Life is valued, is considered meaningful, to the extent that concrete valuations converge towards that which has been chosen as the culminating thing in terms of value, of what ought to be." In Juan Luis Segundo , *Faith and Ideologies*, trans. John Drury (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis, 1984), 7.

argue that "theological" categories must be incorporated into social analysis in order to detect and unmask the "spirituality" which sustains and legitimates neo-liberalism as a movement of faith.

The purpose of this chapter is to present an overview of what these critics are saying about the spiritual or religious dimension of neo-liberalism and the role this religious dimension plays in sustaining socio-economic injustice.

2.1. Voices from Critical Theology

The concept that there is a religious dimension to neo-liberalism has been explored by Quebec critical theologian, Michel Beaudin who has recognized a number of similarities between religion and neo-liberalism: there is a divine being (the Market), a creed (liberal capitalism), clerics (business leaders, bankers, ministers of finance), a theology (neo-liberal ideology), theologians (economists), religious practices (investing, sacrifice, consuming), pastoral care (personal financial services), a Gospel (competition), temples (banks, the stock exchange, shopping centres), churches (corporations, enterprises, consumer clubs), sins (ignoring the laws of the Market, indebtedness, socialist alternatives), penance and sacrifice (deficit reduction, "tightening the belt" cut-backs), forgiveness (debt "forgiveness" in relation to the Third World debt), commandments and dogma (laws of the market, privatization, de-regulation, free trade, "survival of the fittest..."), the practice of charity

(philanthropy), a heaven (riches, power and all the happiness money can buy for those who follow the laws of the market).[3]

Beaudin states that a religious belief is typically expressed in terms of the sacred. He notes that a prominent doctrine of a neo-liberalism is the belief that the market and virtually all of its constitutive elements is a sacred sphere.[4] He states that the sacralization of the market is grounded in the belief that market laws are fully natural laws, spontaneous, self-regulating, and under the all-knowing guidance of the providential "invisible hand". According to Beaudin, the belief in the market as sacred makes the economy inviolate to human intervention. Indeed, neo-liberal orthodoxy insists that exterior intervention into market affairs is highly immoral, a sacrilege, in that it is akin to interfering with a divinely ordained natural process. Beaudin states that with the belief that the market is absolute and the first principle of social reality, neo-liberalism fulfills one of the functional roles of a religion— to provide society with a total world interpretation that relates people to the "ultimate" conditions of their existence.[5]

Beaudin also points to the fact that religions almost invariably practice rituals, which may take the form of sacrifice. He maintains that neo-liberalism, likewise, has a doctrine of sacrifice. The primary sacrifice in neo-liberal theology is the sacrifice of the capitalist who, in order to accumulate wealth, must curtail

---

[3] Michel Beaudin. " 'Sotériologie' capitaliste et salut chrétien," *Seul ou avec les autres? Le salut chrétien à l'épreuve de la solidarité,*. Actes du 28e congres de la Société canadienne de théologie in Montreal, Quebec , October 25-27 1991, edited by Jean- Claude Petit and Jean-Claude Breton, pp. 238-240.
[4] Michel Beaudin, "Cette idole qui nous gouverne. Le néo-libralisme comme "religion" et "théologie" sacrificielles," *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* , 24 , no. 4 (1995), 403-406.

his spending and increase savings and investments. There is always the element of risk for the investor who is ready to "sacrifice" all for the sake of wealth accumulation. But, Beaudin states, there are other forms of sacrifice legitimized by the sacralization of the market system. Since the market is a sacred sphere, almost anything, even the sacrifice of human lives is justified—especially the lives of the poor through cutbacks in government social spending reduced wages and unemployment— when done in the name of the market values of privatization, efficiency, competition, deregulation, and an opening of the economy. In neo-liberalism, Beaudin insists, such sacrifices are perceived as necessary and inevitable.

Finally, Beaudin contends that neo-liberalism has a "soteriology" that promises a capitalist salvation, or "heaven". Understood in terms of unlimited wealth, the neo-liberal paradise is the reward held out to those who follow "the Way" of sacrifice and strict adherence to the principle of competitiveness. [6]

The American theologian, Harvey Cox, in his essay, "The Market As God: Living in the New Dispensation", also, notices common elements in neo-liberal capitalism congruous with religion. Cox claims that neo-liberalism possesses a "comprehensive ...business theology" complete with "sacraments

---

[5] Gregory Baum, " Definitions of Religion in Sociology," in *Religion in the Eighties-What is Religion? An Inquiry for Christian Theology*, Mircea Eliade and David Tracy, eds. (New York: Seabury Press, 1980), 27.

to convey salvific power to the lost, a calendar of entrepreneurial saints, and what theologians call an 'eschatology'-- a teaching about the "end of history."[7] Cox observes that there is embedded in business "an entire theology, which is comparable in scope if not in profundity to that of Thomas Aquinas or Karl Barth."

According to Cox, at the apex of the "business theology" or market theology is a doctrine of the market as deity. In market theology this deity is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent.[8] Cox describes omnipotence as "the capacity to define what is real. It is the power to make something out of nothing and nothing out of something".[9] He proceeds to note how in neo-liberal theology, the market is revered for its "inexorable ability " to convert all of creation into a commodity. He describes it as a doctrine of transubstantiation in reverse. To illustrate, in the Catholic mass, ordinary bread and wine, through the action of God, are made sacred. In market theology, things held sacred— air, water, land, even the human body — are desacralized by the market and transmuted into consumer goods.[10]

Cox describes market omniscience as a presumed comprehensive wisdom that in the past "only the gods have known." The market as deity now is

---

[6] Michel Beaudin, "L'idolâtrie sacrificielle néo-libérale." *Relations* no. 614 (1995): 244.
[7] Harvey Cox , "The Market As God: Living in the New Dispensation," *The Atlantic Monthly*, March 1999, 18-20.
[8] Ibid., 20.
[9] Ibid.,

able to determine what human needs are, what these needs should cost, and how much other human beings should be paid in providing them.[11] According to Cox, market omniscience, (or the divine will of the market) is made known to people through Wall Street prophets who discern the "mood" of the market deity then reveal whether it is "apprehensive", "relieved", "nervous", or "jubilant".[12] To ignore the will of the market god is to risk "excommunication" (exclusion from economic life). Cox claims that in neo-liberal theology, the widening gap in wealth between the rich and the poor is perceived in terms of both blessing and curse. The market god confers blessings on those who follow its wisdom and curses those who choose to follow an alternative path (particularly socialism). Thus, an attempt to intervene in the market to redistribute wealth vexes the market god and brings retribution.

Cox states that all religions teach the divinity as omnipresent. He alludes to the neo-liberal concept of the "total market" [13] (the attempt to extend market calculations into all aspects of human life) as a market corollary of divine

---

[10] Ibid., 20-21.
[11] Ibid., 22.
[12] Ibid., 22-23
[13] Franz Hinkelammert uses the phrase "total market" to describe "a worldwide capitalist system which operates as a totality in its attempt to control and include all aspects of the market and all consumers thereof. As a totality, it rejects all other market arrangements or concepts and operates in an aggressive manner to control the world market place...", Franz Hinkelammert, "The Politics of the Total Market, Its Theology and Our Response," in *North and South Dialogue*, (Washington: EPICA, 1985), 2-8.

omnipresence.[14] Cox points out that as markets for material goods become glutted, the market deity embraces the human spiritual quest: "the Market makes available the religious benefits that once required personal prayer and fasting without the awkwardness of denominational commitment or tedious ascetic discipline". He cites as examples the claim to spiritual renewal promised by expensive adventure vacations into "unspoiled wilderness" and inspirational workshops or "retreats" offered, for a price, by motivational consultants. [15]

Cox views the "religion of the Market" as "the most formidable rival" facing traditional religions. He explains that neo-liberalism is not generally perceived as having a religious dimension, yet, through its pervasiveness, power, and wealth, it works, insidiously, to re-create human life, human relationships, and human communities in its own image. Cox recognizes the dangers here and asserts that traditional religions should realize that they are locked into a "contest between faiths" and "much is at stake". [16]

2.2. Voices From Liberation Theology

DEI liberation theologian and economist, Franz Hinkelammert, has linked the origins of the religious character of neo-liberal capitalism to Marx's theory of fetishism. Hinkelammert's analysis is too lengthy and too complex to

---

[14] Cox, "The Market As God," 23.

[15] Ibid. Deepa Babington reports in *The National Post* that MAXX International expects "to strike gold in what (owner Rick Garson) calls 'the spirituality marketplace' in which are offered products and services that fulfill spiritual longings that transcend the lines of organized religion." Babington states that Garson's company intends to market products, (credit, calling, and debit cards) using images from the Vatican art collection . In addition, the company will produce CD's of songs based on prayers written by Pope John Paul II and sung by rock stars. Garson expects to earn US$25.3 million in the first year of his venture into the "spirituality marketplace." In Deepa Babington, "Will the Ceiling be Unlimited on a Vatican Visa Card?," *The National Post,* 5 July 2000, sec. C13.

discuss in detail here, but put very simply, the DEI theologian believes that capitalism fetishizes[17] commodities by infusing objects with meaning unrelated to their use-value and in the process conceals the full social significance of the relationships involved in their production (e.g. exploitative working conditions, low wages, child labour, environmental degradation). Appearance is given supremacy over essence. Things are perceived as having inherent value as part of their physical existence when, in fact, their actual value is the result of specific human actions.

Hinkelammert remarks that fetishism tends to impart greater significance to the value of things, than to the human beings who created them. Because capitalism gives preference to things over people, in the fetishized, morally inverted world order of capitalism, things are made subjects and given power over human beings. [18] Hinkelammert claims that neo-liberalism fetishizes the market, imbuing it with powers and properties believed to be spontaneous,

---

[16] Cox, "The Market As God," 23.

[17] In their book, *Idolatry*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1992) Hebrew University professors Moshe Halbertal and Avishai Margalit describe fetishism as a religious concept which attributes to a material object (a fetish) inherent powers or meaning which the object does not naturally possess.. In Moshe Halbertal and Avishai Margalit, *Idolatry* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1992), 42. In his book, *The Codes of Advertising: Fetishism and the Political Economy of Meaning in the Consumer Society*, Sut Jhally, refers to the nineteenth century English anthropologist, Edward Tylor in positing that fetishism is "the practice by which objects become the temporary home of some spirit which if worshipped and appeased can have a beneficial influence on the worldly existence of the owner of the fetish...Once this spirit is installed in the object then it is treated as being able to see, hear, understand and act." In Sut Jhally, *The Codes of Advertising: Fetishism and the Political Economy of Meaning in the Consumer Society*, (London:Frances Printer , 1987), 54.

universal and eternal. In neo-liberal capitalism, the "invisible hand" of the market provides the means of life. [19] Treated as an autonomous entity independent of human control, the market, a human construct, is made *Kurios*. It alone determines the absolute value of commodities and the relative worth of human beings. According to Hinkelammert , neo-liberalism's fetishized market is a sacrosanct sphere, "a central object of devotion" to whose will all human beings must conform .[20]

The DEI theologian suggests that the spiritual or religious dimension resident in market capitalism manifests itself in social reality like a fundamentalist religion.[21] Those who accept neo-liberal dogma follow the path of virtue; those who dissent or who seek alternatives are heretics and "sinners". A primary virtue in neo-liberal spirituality is humility. But humility in neo-liberal dogma means being humble before the laws of the market so as to leave its mechanisms free to follow their "natural" course. Those who practice market humility will be rewarded with "economic miracles"; those who defy the market by directing its mechanisms toward "special interests" (e.g. social programs for the

---

[18] Franz Hinkelammert, *The Ideological Weapons of Death: A Theological Critique of Capitalism* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1986), 30-33.
[19] Franz Hinkelammert, "The Economic Roots of Idolatry: Entrepreneurial Metaphysics, in *The Idols of Death and the God of Life: A Theology*, Pablo Richard et al. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1980), 166-168.
[20]Ibid., 165-192.
[21] Ibid

poor and marginalized) or by seeking community-based economic alternatives are guilty of the "sins" of hubris, arrogance, and pride and are subject to punishment. According to Hinkelammert under neo-liberalism, to refuse to subject oneself to the market and its indices is an overt negation of humility and is to be regarded as a "mortal sin". In Hinkelammert's Latin American context, those who challenge market orthodoxy are to be demonized ("communists", "subversives") and exorcised (death squad action in Chile, El Salvador, and Guatemala).[22]

In the view of Hinkelammert's former student, Brazilian theologian, Jung Mo Sung, market humility means bowing to the neo-liberal dogmatism inherent in the structural adjustment policies of the IMF and the World Bank, even if these policies result in "unemployment and death for millions of poor children and adults."[23]

Sung, likewise, recognizes elements in neo-liberalism that are common to religion. These include a doctrine of "original sin", the promise of a "paradise" and the requirement to "sacrifice" in order to achieve paradise.[24] Sung explains that the neo-liberal doctrine of original sin has its genesis in the economic theories of F.A. Hayek, an Austrian philosopher-economist who many consider to be the founding father of neo-liberalism. [25] According to Sung, Hayek believed

---

[22] Ibid., 190

[23] Jung Mo Sung, "Against the Idolatrous Theology of Capitalism" , trans. Richard Renshaw,csc, ReLat [journal on-line] available from http:www.uca.ni/koinonia/koinonia.htm; Internet; accessed July, 1997.

[24] Ibid., 3.

[25] Friedrich Hayek believed that the State held "coercive powers" that restricted the individual's freedom to act. As a libertarian, Hayek accepted the assumption that social inequality was inevitable and even

that the origin of all social and economic evil is rooted in the misguided attempt by human beings "to do good". Hayek maintained that when human beings claim sovereignty over "the invisible hand" in order to direct its course on behalf of the common good, they challenge the primacy of competition and open the door to government control of the economy. In Hayek's view, the latter was a great evil in that it restricted individual freedom in the market place. According to Sung, neo-liberals influenced by Hayek's theories believe that social issues are best resolved in the context where governments act only to nurture a "survival of the fittest" climate in the market place. Neo-liberal dogma contends that according to the virtue of competition, the market will attend to a "just" distribution of wealth (a "just" distribution of wealth defined as rewarding the industrious and dispossessing the weak).[26]

---

desirable. He believed that since societies consist of human beings with varying levels of abilities and talents, those who "have" should not be restricted in the exercise of their individual liberty by governments acting on behalf of the "have not" majority. This type of government intrusiveness Hayek insists permits a tyranny of the majority. For Hayek, the only legitimate role of government is to maximize personal gain opportunities for the "haves" who, in the libertarian view, provide others with the appropriate economic circumstances required for survival. In Hayek's view, government should not interfere with the workings of the free market by taxing the rich in order to redistribute wealth to the poor through government social assistance programs. As did most libertarians, Hayek based his belief on the social- Darwinian view that the market is the best distributor of wealth for it amply rewards the "fittest" while eliminating those who are weak. Other libertarians inspired by Hayek began to disseminate his ideas throughout the 1970's and 1980's. For example, in Britain, Ralph Harris, a Hayek disciple with the Institute for Economic Affairs, labeled governments immoral since they interfered with the "natural" laws of the market. Another student of Hayek , Arthur Seldon, wrote that "the rejection of the state (is) the source of the good life." In Tony Clarke, *Silent Coup :Confronting the Big Business Takeover of Canada,* (Ottawa, Ontario: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, 1997), 50-53.

[26] Jung Mo Sung, "Against the idolatrous theology of capitalism," 4-5.

Sung traces the notion of "paradise" in neo-liberal religion to the claim by Rand Corporation social scientist, Francis Fukuyama, that the capitalist system has brought humanity to "the end of history". Sung points out that Fukuyama is not referring here to the end of historical events but to the end of historical evolution. In other words, the capitalist market system is the highest point humankind will ever reach in its social development. There are no more utopias; *there are no alternatives.* The "paradise" to be enjoyed in this "end of history" era, according to Sung, "lies in the infinite progress that the accumulation of riches makes possible." Since the market system does make infinite technological progress possible, it holds out the promise of the infinite availability of goods and services to satisfy every human need, desire, and ambition.[27]

However, like the Kingdom of God, the "paradise" of the neo-liberal religion is not yet here in its fullness. Sung explains that the response of neo-liberal doctrine to the issues of on-going economic and social problems is to proclaim that "such problems do not arise from the system of *the* market but from the lack of its full implementation...When the market is the 'all in all', social problems will end." [28]

Sung mentions that Fukuyama is not the sole voice creating links between the market and the Kingdom of God. He cites the claim by Michael Novak, head of the Theology department at the American Enterprise Institute, that the

---

[27] Ibid., 3.
[28] Ibid.

capitalist market is "the incarnation of the Reign of God in history."[29] Likewise, Sung comments on an address delivered in 1992 by then Secretary General of the International Monetary Fund, Michel Camdessus, to the National Congress of the Association of Christian Managers of Business. In his speech Camdessus implied that the market driven structural adjustment policies imposed on poor countries by the IMF to facilitate debt servicing were consistent with the values of the Kingdom of God since debt payment results in more efficient economies and efficient economies generate greater solidarity between nations. After declaring that businessmen and their allies in the process of globalization have been given a mission through the Gospel to care for the poor, Camdessus states that the most effective way to fulfill this mission is global solidarity created through the mechanisms of the market.

Sung quotes Camdessus:

> You are the men of the market and of the enterprise in (the) search for efficiency in solidarity. The IMF was created to place international solidarity at the service of countries in crisis and to make an effort to assure more efficient economies. And you know as well as I how related efficiency and solidarity are to one another.[30]

Sung observes in Camdessus' comments the influence of neo-liberal dogma— solidarity with the poor is achieved more effectively through market

[29] Ibid., 7
[30] Ibid.

efficiency.[31] In other words, pursue self-interest through the market and leave the redistribution of wealth to the "invisible hand".[32]

Sung continues his critique of neo-liberal religion with a look at its notion of sacrifice. He shares with Beaudin the view that neo-liberalism has a "theology of sacrifice". In the neo-liberal religion, sacrifice is tied to the notion that "(t)o the extent that one believes that the capitalist market system is the only way...toward 'paradise' and 'for life in abundance' everything ends up justified and legitimate in its name."[33] Thus, comments Sung, the suffering and death of the poor are considered as part of the "redemptive process" which brings about economic growth and leads to the "paradise" of wealth accumulation. Cuts in social spending and the exclusion of the "un-needed" from a high tech work force are the "necessary sacrifices" that must be paid "in the name of the laws of the market that promise unlimited accumulation."[34] Sung points out that many, perhaps the majority in society, have faith in that promise. To them, the sacrificial logic which justifies cut backs in welfare payments to the

---

[31] Hinkelammert quotes additional remarks on solidarity and the market made by Camdessus in this March 1992 speech. Hinkelammert states that Camdessus attempts to link market capitalism to the Social teachings of the church on human solidarity: " Of course, the marketplace is the most effective mode of economic organization for increasing individual and collective richness; we should not have an attitude of embarrassment that some generations of our social catholic brothers felt with respect to the market: this "yes, but...". The matter is resolved and the Holy Pope left the point very clear in the *Centesimus annus*. For the effectiveness that it assures, the market can permit greater solidarity. From this point of view, the market place and solidarity do not oppose each other but rather can be reunited. Besides, the impresarial economy, as you well know, is an economy of responsibility wherein human beings can develop to their fullest dimension." According to Hinkelammert , Camdessus is attempting to proclaim that "even solidarity is in practice as a result of the marketplace." Franz J. Hinkelammert, "Liberation Theology in the Economic and Social Context of Latin America: Economy and Theology, or the Irrationality of the Rationalized," in *Liberation Theologies, Post-Modernity, and the Americas,* David Batstone et al., eds. (New York, N.Y.: Routledge, 1997), 41.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Ibid , 5.

poor in order to reduce the deficit is accepted as rational, even natural. The general acceptance of the notion in capitalist society that some have to pay the price in order to achieve economic "salvation" explains the lack of a widespread out cry against the sacrificial logic of neo-liberalism. According to Sung in neo-liberal doctrine, human suffering has salvific value.

Brazilian theologian and former DEI member, Hugo Assmann, agrees that the rationalization of human sacrifice is central to the neo-liberal faith. In his analysis of neo-liberal economics, Assmann points out that neo-liberalism has succeeded with some skill in masking its doctrine of sacrifice by "hijacking" and incorporating into its own categories of thought certain ethical and religious notions. [35]

---

[34] Ibid., 6.

[35] Hugo Assmann, "JPIC and the "Warm God" of the Global Market", *The Ecumenical Review*, 1 January 1990, 55. German critical theologian, Ulrich Duchrow, as well as Hinkelammert also write on the use of scripture by neo-liberals to support the contention that the market system is divinely ordained. Duchrow describes *Towards the Future — Catholic Social Thought and the US Economy*, a letter written by a group of Catholic laity critical of *Economic Justice for All*, the pastoral letter on economic injustice written by the American bishops in 1986, as "a good example of the ideological misuse of the Bible and theology to legitimize the present global capitalist system." In reacting to the letter, Duchrow points to the following uses of scripture and theological themes by neo-liberals to support the claim that neo-liberal capitalism is divinely ordained:

1) The principle of self-interest is derived from the golden rule of love of neighbour. Duchrow explains that neo-liberal belief holds the industrial revolution responsible for altering traditional modes of life by holding out the vision of the "Good Society" on this earth for all humankind.
2) Genesis 1:26 presents the entrepreneur,"who supplied the intellectual vision putting labor and capital together as a co-creator. Economic activism is a direct participation in the work of the Creator himself."
3) According to Matthew 25: 14-30, economic talents are not meant to be buried. 'Preserving capital is not enough — it must be made to grow. Then it will be possible to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, educate the unlearned and assist the millions of all nations.

For example, *justice* in the neo-liberal kerygma is understood as the protection of private property rights *sans* any recognition of the principle of a "social mortgage" regarding private property. Assmann writes:

> The "structural adjustments" imposed so that we can continue to pay the interest on the debt enable us to understand better the sacrificial demands made by (this) particular concept of "justice". It is "just" to pay: to forgive, to remit the debt, would be unjust! [36]

---

4) Profit serves the common good by allocating resources creatively and stimulating entrepreneurial activity...The Christian scriptures themselves borrow abundantly from the language of profit ...the concept of incentive and reward is by no means foreign to Christianity.
5) The market is a social institution expressing the social nature of humankind. ..Further, the market teaches all who participate in it to be alert to the needs and wants of others. No one can succeed in markets without a considerable degree of other-regardingness...A market system is a system of service to others.
6) Matthew 25 reveals that Christ does not speak about the distance (i.e., income gap) between rich and poor but about the real needs of the poor which must be met. Such systematic needs can only be met by systems designed to conquer scarcity. In Ulrich Duchrow, *Global Economy: A Confessional Issue For the Churches?* , trans. David Lewis (Geneva, Switzerland: WCC Publications, 1987), 169-171.

Also, Franz Hinkelammert recognizes in the work of prominent American theologian Michael Novak, the director of the theological department of the American Enterprise Institute, an attempt to link capitalism with divine sanction. Hinkelammert points out that in his "A Theology of Corporation", Novak states:

> For many years, one of my favorite texts from Scripture has been Isaiah 53:2-3 "He hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; he was despised and we esteemed him not." I would like to apply these words to the modern business corporation, a much-despised incarnation of God's presence in this world.

Hinkelammert claims that Novak's theology equates neo-liberal capitalism with the expression of God's will on this earth." Hinkelammert writes that according to Novak: "Capitalism is the bearer of Christ's commission...As God's incarnation, as an exponent of Christ's peace and love, and as Christ crucified, the capitalist enterprise becomes transcendent and exalted, achieving divine status. It becomes an absolute subject..." The effect of Novak's theology, claims Hinkelammert, is to perpetuate the view that the social impact of neo-liberal ideology and practice is divinely sanctioned. "The real intention of (this theology)' writes Hinkelammert, "is to destroy hope in the Kingdom of God and its consequences for our life here on earth." See Hinkelammert, "The Politics of the Total Market, Its Theology and Our Response," in *North and South Dialogue*, (Washington: EPICA, 1985), 2-8.

[36] Ibid., 59.

Likewise, *peace* is understood as the "peace of the global market". But , claims Assmann , like the "*Pax Romana*", the "*Pax Mercati Totalis*" in reality is oppression disguised as peace. Assmann refers to the neo-liberal reverence for "the spirit " of the market. According to the Brazilian theologian, the spirit of the market is the 'warm God'— paraclete, counselor, consoler, and inspirer of ecstasy... (who) gives infinite promises of grace" to those who humble themselves before its omniscience. Assmann contends that the religion of neo-liberalism fosters a belief in the necessity of submitting to this "warm God", as the one sole life-giving spirit which unites the imperfect particular markets around the world through " the fullness of its divine perfection and life". [37] Those who accept the spirit of the market as "a mystery of revelation," claims Assmann, "know that the imperatives of 'economic rationality' which emanate from the market are sacred".[38] These sacred imperatives acknowledge global poverty and economic disparity as injustices, but offer the market values of individual self-interest and competitiveness as "the one way" to eliminate economic inequality and to build the common good. Furthermore, these sacred imperatives insist that market efficiency is the most effective mechanism for fulfilling the divine commandment to love one's neighbour. If love of neighbour is defined as attending to human economic wants and desires— which Assmann implies is the neo-liberal understanding of the gospel of love— then love of neighbour is achieved through a more efficient production and distribution of material goods.

[37] Ibid., 54-58.

Assmann makes it clear that the neo-liberal practice of love of neighbour made efficacious through efficient market mechanisms is not motivated by a sense of human solidarity. The Brazilian theologian explains that neo-liberal anthropology regards the human being as "defined by his preferences, wants, and desires" (*homo oeconomicus* [39]). Therefore, in the neo-liberal faith, the common good is determined through the pursuit of economic self-interest. The wealth that is produced through the pursuit of economic self-interest will eventually "trickle down to the poor, thus benefiting all. In words that parody a hypothetical voice among the neo-liberal faithful, Assmann asks —

> So why should we continue to cling to the delusion that human beings are motivated by love? The self-interest of each, without any intention of doing good to others, in aggressively competitive interplay with the self-interest of others, creates the mechanisms of the self-regulating market, and we thus achieve the common good in the best way possible—spontaneously, naturally, and inevitably—by the operation of the "invisible hand" of providence. At last the best way to love one's neighbour has been discovered.[40]

For Assmann, the religion of neo-liberalism has "expropriated" transformed, and incorporated into the "spirituality" of the

---

[38] Ibid., 58.

[39] Laissez-faire anthropology regarded the human person as an economic entity (*homo oeconomicus)* out to improve his/her situation through the self- interested pursuit of wealth. Berthoud contends that the market definition of the human being is "to be human is to participate in market exchanges." Gerald Berthoud, "Market, " in *The Development Dictionary: A Guide to Knowledge as Power,* ed. Wolfgang Sachs (Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey: Zed Books, 1992), 83.

[40] Assmann, "JIPC and the Warm God of the Global Market", 58.

market, religious and ethical concepts which it uses to legitimize human suffering. In neo-liberal spirituality it is, then, acceptable to allow the "sacrifice" of some human beings in the name of the market if it is understood that such sacrifices (made, of course, in the neo-liberal spirit of love) are necessary for the greater good (i.e., profitability, reduced inflation, deficit reduction).

Assmann joins his voice with the other theologians mentioned above in arguing for the incorporation of theological categories in social analysis in order to assist sociology and ethics in revealing the totality of neo-liberalism, its *internal* as well as its external dimensions .[41]

2.3. Voices From Secular Society

In her address to the *Conference on Economic Sovereignty in a Globalising World* in Bangkok in March 1999, associate director of the Transnational Institute, Amsterdam (the international wing of the Washington-based Institute for Policy Studies) and critic of neo-liberalism, Susan George, referred to neo-liberalism as "the major world religion with its dogmatic doctrine, its priesthood, its law-giving institutions and perhaps most important of all, its hell for heathen and sinners who dare to contest the revealed truth."[42] George claims that for the neo-liberal, the "the invisible hand" of the market functions "like God". In neo-liberal doctrine only the "invisible hand" is "wise" enough and "good"

---

[41] Ibid., 55..

[42] Susan George, "A Short History of Neo-liberalism: Twenty Years of Elite Economics and Emerging Opportunities for Structural Change" [on-line}; available from http://www.globalexchange.org/economy econ101/ neoliberalism.html; Internet; accessed 18 March 2000 1:07 PM.

enough to be able to determine the socio-economic fate of human beings. [43] Consequently, according to neo-liberal dogma, it is fitting for the market to dictate its rule to society and not the other way around.[44]

George points out that in the neo-liberal religion, the central virtue of competition is believed to bring good out of evil. If inequality is an evil, George claims, then, in the neo-liberal belief-system, competition serves to "separate the sheep from the goats." George explains that to the neo-liberal, "(p)eople are unequal by nature, but this is good because the contributions of the well-born, the best-educated, the toughest, *will eventually benefit everyone.*[45] Nothing in particular is "owed to the weak, the poorly educated, what happens to them is their own fault, never the fault of society." [46] According to George, in the religon of neo-liberalism it is right and fitting to 'glory in inequality' and not to worry about "those who might be left behind in the competitive struggle." [47]

Canadian social ethicist and activist, John McMurtry describes neo-liberalism as a "covert religion whose theology is economics."[48] In his book, *Unequal Freedoms: The Global Market as an Ethical System*, McMurtry gives considerable space to the concept of "the market as God". He states that the doctrine of "economic theology" is quite similar to that found in a fundamentalist religion. McMurtry points out that a fundamentalist theology has a number of

---

[43] Ibid., 3-4
[44] Ibid., 2
[45] My italics
[46]Susan George, " A Short History of Neo-Liberalism,", 3-4
[47] Ibid.

established features. In listing these, he suggests that if the term "the global market" is substituted for "the Supreme Ruler", or "the Ruler's order and laws" one can test the extent to which market theory and practice resembles that of a fundamentalist theology. McMurtry offers the following as some of the characteristics of a fundamentalist theology:

a) It posits an invisible Supreme Ruler whose order of rule and laws are conceived as universal, inevitable, and absolute.

b) This order of rule and its laws are conceived as immutable and inalterable, and any interference in their nature or structure is construed as abhorrent.

c) The Supreme Ruler rewards those who are disciplined in their adherence to this order and its laws and is unforgiving to those who rebel against, or fail to submit to its inevitable design.

d) The rewards granted by the Supreme Ruler are happiness and prosperity, which are distributed to all subjects in proportion to their competitive satisfaction of the order's demands; the punishments are poverty, degradation, and suffering, which inevitably befall all those who flout, shirk, or do not adapt to the Rulers commands...

e) If necessary sacrifices are made by a society to ensure that its fundamentals are right and improper adjustment to the Supreme Ruler's re-structuring demands, then prosperity or miracles will transfigure that society by the workings of the Supreme Ruler's invisible hand.

f) Those who doubt or criticize the perfection of the design of the Ruler, the justice of the order's distribution of goods or punishments, and the global inevitability of the system's rule are repudiators of the only

---

[48] John McMurtry, *Unequal Freedoms: The Global Market as an Ethical System.* (West Hartford, Connecticut: Kumarian Press, Inc., 1998), 16.

hope for human salvation and prosperity, and are to be known as heretics and subversives.

g) Any and all societies, parties, or governments that seek to live by any alternative order of social life-organization than ordained by the Supreme Ruler are forces of evil opposed to the freedom of humanity, and are to be warred against until expelled from the community of nations and eradicated.[49]

McMurtry contends that, like a fundamentalist religion, neo-liberalism lays claim to being a "...cosmic, globally binding order that prescribes universal truths "and issues a global imperative that "people everywhere...submit to its demands." [50] These demands, McMurtry states, are based upon what he calls neo-liberalism's underlying "ten commandments of social order" :

1) Private property is good in all things, without right to limit its legal acquisition in any possession.

2) The money-price system optimally distributes goods and services through society.

3) Protectionism of domestic production of any kind is bad, and to be repudiated wherever it is counseled or raised.

4) Government intervention in the market is bad unless it promotes profitable market activities.

5) Profit-maximization is the engine of social well being, and is not to be hedged in by public regulation or ownership.

6) Individual consumer desires are permanently increasing, unlimited, and a good in their satisfaction.

7) Freedom to buy and sell in money exchanges is the basis of human liberty and justice.

---

[49] Ibid., 71-72.
[50] Ibid., 67.

8) Pursuit of personal maximal income is natural, rational, and required for society to work.

9) Economic growth is permanently desirable and necessary, with no inherent environmental or human limit to the conversion of life into saleable commodities.

10) The great majority who have only their labour and service to sell must do so if we are to continue to live in a free and prosperous society. [51]

McMurtry states that in market theology these "ten commandments" have been received as an "absolutist moral doctrine, prescriptive, universal, overriding, and subject to punishment for their violation." What is particularly unnerving, he maintains, is that unlike the Ten Commandments of the Judaic-Christian tradition, the ten commandments of the neo-liberal religion have been accepted by almost every state on the globe as the ordering framework of their societies and "the inevitable requirement for their survival in the new global order."[52]

2.4. Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter has been to refer to liberation theology and critical theology to establish that, embedded in neo-liberal capitalism, is what neo-liberal consider a sacred and unassailable spiritual centre, a realm of belief akin to religious faith. A social analysis of neo-liberalism that includes "religious" categories makes it possible to detect and expose this underlying dimension of

[51] Ibid., 60-61.
[52] Ibid., 61.

neo-liberalism, a task which ethics and sociology might otherwise overlook. An analysis of neo-liberalism that includes religious categories allows for a more comprehensive understanding of neo-liberal capitalism, an understanding that regards neo-liberalism as more than a particular theory or practice of economics but as a meaning-structure, a *faith*. Liberation theologian, Pablo Richard comments that it is this spiritual centre of the free-market economy that allows the system to oppress and kill "without limit and with a clear conscience."[53]

The Social Affairs Commission of the CCCB examines neo-liberalism almost exclusively through the optic of ethics. This chapter suggests that the use of theological criteria included in their social analysis may better assist the bishops in exploring the full implications of neo-liberalism, not only for society but also for the Church. Indeed, except for one or two recent references to a deified market [54], the Canadian bishops seem to miss the significance of neo-liberalism as a meaning-structure, a "faith". The bishops' focus seems fixed on the externalities of neo-liberalism overlooking its *essence.* In establishing their ethical ground vis-a-vis neo-liberalism, the bishops miss the implications for Christian faith of neo-liberalism's underlying religious dimension. This oversight is evident even in their use of scripture and Church teaching, as we shall see in the following chapter.

---

[53] Pablo Richard, "The Presence and Revelation of God in the World of the Oppressed," in *Where is God? A Cry of Human Distress*, Christian Duquoc and Casiano Floristán, eds. (Chatham, Kent: SCM Press Ltd., 1992), 30.

[54] Episcopal Commission For Social Affairs, "Will the Poor Have Most to Fear From Social Security Reform," no. 12. [on-line]; available from Microsoft InternetPage; Internet ; accessed 14 April 1996 .

Chapter III

The Use of Catholic Social Teaching and Scripture by the Social Affairs Commission in Its Theological Reflection on the Economy

In the methodology of liberation theology, where social analysis reveals the ongoing mechanisms of poverty and marginalization, liberation hermeneutics reads the socio-analytic context in the light of faith. The purpose here is to determine the presence or absence of God's grace and salvation in the social reality affecting the poor and oppressed and to discern what God is attempting to say to the faithful concerning that social reality.

Liberation theologians, Leonardo and Clodovis Boff, state that a task of the hermeneutics is to read the secular data disclosed through social analysis into "theological material." They state that this is done through an appraisal of reality "through the 'reading glass' of Christian faith".[1] The Boffs state that because the discourse of social science does not normally contain a theological element, this element has to be constructed. Thus, a theological reading of the social text attempts to extract the theological dimension from socio-economic reality and disclose it to the committed faithful in order to help them discern whether social reality is or is not in conformity with God's will for humankind, particularly as it affects the poor.[2]

Employing the methodology of liberation theology, the Social Affairs Commission, thus, incorporates in its social teaching a theological

---

[1] Clodovis Boff and Leonardo Boff, *Salvation and Liberation: In Search of a Balance Between Faith and Politics* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1984), 50-55.

reflection on what the bishops observe as the "moral crisis"[3] in the Canadian economy. The bishops devote much less space in their pastoral statements to theological reflection than they do to social-analysis do. Nevertheless, they firmly proclaim throughout their teaching that they have a right and a "responsibility" as pastors and ethical teachers to "raise fundamental social and ethical issues pertaining to the economic order", issues inspired by the moral vision of the social teachings of the Roman Catholic Church and "the Gospel message of Jesus Christ (with its) concern for the poor, the marginalized and the oppressed."[4] The purpose of this chapter is to explore the hermeneutics of the Social Affairs Commission in order to determine how the bishops use scripture and Catholic social teaching in their critique of neo-liberalism.

3.1. The Use of Catholic Social Teaching by the Social Affairs Commission

As noted above, the social analysis of the Social Affairs Commission views neo-liberalism primarily through the optic of social ethics. Thus, in the post-counciliar light of Vatican II, of the social teaching of John Paul II (particularly *Laborem Exercens*), and of the statements of the Latin American bishops at Medellin, Columbia (1968) and Puebla, Mexico (1979), the Social Affairs Commission uses Catholic social teaching to affirm that there is an ethical order to be followed in developing the economic and social policies of nations. The

---

[2] Ibid., 46-47.

[3] The Episcopal Commission for Social Affairs, "Ethical Reflections on the Economic Crisis," in . *Do Justice!: The Social Teaching of the Canadian Bishops,* ed. E.F. Sheridan, S.J.(Toronto, Ontario: The Jesuit Centre For Social Faith and Justice, 1987), 403

bishops state that Catholic social teaching maintains that this ethical order is founded on the theological principle that the human being is created in the image of God, and, therefore, the human person should be the primary agent of society and the centre of its socio-economic organization. According to the Canadian bishops a socio-economic order founded on the principles of Catholic social teaching is structured around certain fundamental ethical themes:

a) Economies should develop their resources to serve the common good. Therefore, a just economy gives all people the right to full participation in economic decisions affecting their lives and provides for the common good by allowing all members of society access to the life-sustaining goods produced by the economy, namely food, clothing, shelter, education, employment, health care. All other rights, including those of property and free commerce are subordinated to this principle (*Populorun Progressio*, no. 22; *Laborem Exercens* , no. 14).

b) Governments have a responsibility to ensure that their national economies are organized to serve the basic needs of all their peoples (*Justice in the World*, nos.13-19, *Laborem Exercens* ,no. 18).

c) Economic development is not based exclusively on maximizing profits or economic and technological growth, but encompasses social, cultural, and spiritual, needs as well (*Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation*, no. 2, *Populorum Progressio*, no. 14).

d) A just international economic order requires new forms of solidarity between people and nations (*Populorum Progressio*, 43ff, *Laborem Exercens.*) [5]

In *Ethical Choices and Political Challenges: Free Trade, At What Cost?* the bishops cite Church social teaching (particularly their own social statements) in insisting that a just economic order founded on the above ethical themes

---

[4] Episcopal Commission for Social Affairs, "Ethical Choices and Political Challenges," in *Do Justice!: The Social Teaching of the Canadian Bishops* , ed. E.F. Sheridan, S.J. (Toronto, Ontario: The Jesuit Centre For Social Faith and Justice, 1987), 414.

[5] Episcopal Commission for Social Affairs, *Ethical Choices and Political Challenges: Free Trade, At What Cost?* (Ottawa, Ontario: Concacan Inc., 1987), 17.

must establish "basic ethical priorities ...in developing economic and social policies". [6] These ethical priorities include:

a) the needs of the poor take precedence over the wants of the rich (*EREC,* Sec. 1*; ECPC,* no. 5);

b) the *priority of labour principle*— the rights of workers are more important than the accumulation of machines or the maximization of profits (*Laborem Exercens*, no. 12; *EREC, ECPC,* no. 5);

c) the participation of marginalized groups take precedence over the preservation of a system that excludes them (*Populorum Progressio; EREC,* Sec. 1 *);*

d) the basic economic needs of people are best met through community-based, self-reliant economic models of development (*Justice in the World* 1, 13-19);

e) the stewardship of the environment takes priority over models of development that exploit nature (*From Words to Action, ECPC*, 1). [7]

In its pastoral statement, *Widespread Unemployment*, the Social Affairs Commission states that it is Catholic social teaching which "has compelled the Canadian Bishops to speak out on numerous occasions on behalf of the victims of injustice in our society — in order to identify a particular situation of injustice, and to ask that it be corrected." [8] Yet, though the social teachings of the Church have clearly inspired the bishops' reflection on the Canadian socio-economic order, the Social Affairs Commission emphasizes that the ethical principles and priorities that are at the core of their social teaching are rooted in the moral vision of the Scriptures.

---

[6] Ibid., p. 18.
[7] Episcopal Commission for Social Affairs, *ECPC* in Sheridan, *Do Justice!*, 418.

3.2. The Use of Scripture by the Social Affairs Commission

In constructing its hermeneutic or theological reading of Canadian socio-economic reality, the Social Affairs Commission uses scripture to present a challenge to neo-liberalism based on the Gospel derived ethical principles of the preferential option for the poor and the value and dignity of human work.

From the Hebrew Scriptures the bishops draw upon Genesis to establish that God has entrusted human beings, as subjects of creation, with the responsibility of being co-creators. According to the bishops, this means that God intended the human person to be "co-creator of an economy and the subject of production." [9] The Social Affairs Commission refers to Genesis 1 and 2 and Psalms 8, 19, and 104 to reaffirm that God intended the resources of Creation be used to "equitably serve the needs of all people for a more fully human life."[10] Employing the liberation theme of the God of the oppressed, the Commission refers to the God of Exodus who led his people out of slavery. This God reveals a special love for the poor, the unprotected, the enslaved.[11] The bishops see within the Torah a struggle on the part of the Israelites to eradicate poverty "as a sign of the presence of God and a cause of hope for a better world."[12] The Social Affairs Commission identifies itself with "the prophets of old who constantly reminded the people of Israel of their social obligations to the widow and

---

[8] Episcopal Commission for Social Affairs, "Widespread Unemployment: A Call to Mobilize the Social Forces of Our Nation," *Catholic New Times*, supplement, 2 May 1993, no. 3.
[9] Episcopal Commission for Social Affairs, *ECPC*, in Sheridan, *Do Justice!*, 415.
[10] Ibid., 415-416.
[11] Episcopal Commission for Social Affairs, "The Struggle Against Poverty: A Sign of Hope for Our World," *The Catholic Register*, 21 October 1996, 12.
[12] Ibid.

orphan,"[13] and who spoke the Word of God calling for justice and a transformation of society through social solidarity.

The Canadian bishops emphasize the ethical dimension of the New Testament. They present a Jesus who is concerned with the plight of the poor and the oppressed, a Jesus who "made just and loving treatment of our poor and oppressed neighbour an essential dimension of preaching his Gospel and promoting the Reign of God among us."[14] They quote Luke 16 and Mark 4:19 in stating that Jesus " took a critical attitude towards the accumulation of wealth and power that comes through the exploitation of others." [15] The bishops use Matthew 25 to demonstrate that the concern of Jesus for the poor, the marginalized and the oppressed was so deep that he chose to personally identify with them.[16] The Commission states that the moral vision of Jesus inspired the early Christian community to place "tremendous value...on the communal sharing of earthly goods" so as to live out the Gospel imperative of love for one another (Acts 2:44-45; 4: 36-37).[17]

3.3. *Conclusion*

In their use of scripture and Catholic social teaching, the Social Affairs Commission relies almost exclusively on ethical themes. This is understandable given that the bishops have stated that their "primary role" vis-a-vis society is to serve as "moral teachers".[18]

---

[13] Episcopal Commission for Social Affairs, *W U, no.* 3.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Episcopal Commission for Social Affairs, *ECPC*, in Sheridan, *Do Justice!*, 417.
[16] Ibid., 399.
[17] Episcopal Commission for Social Affairs, *S A P*, 12.
[18] Episcopal Commission for Social Affairs, *ECPC*, in Sheridan, *Do Justice!*, 414.

However, by concentrating almost exclusively on ethical themes in their use of scripture, the Social Affairs Commission presents a hermeneutics that virtually ignores a more salient theological challenge for the Church—the challenge to faith posed by the religious dimension of neo-liberalism.

Though heavily influenced by liberation theology in other aspects of its methodology, the Social Affairs Commission in its use of scripture makes no attempt to pursue a thorough theological analysis of neo-liberalism as a movement of faith. Thus, the bishops evade "the God question" which liberation theology considers central to its critique of neo-liberalism: Which god is present in the ideology and structures of neo-liberal capitalism? The God of the Bible or the "god" of the market?. As pastors, the bishops would seem to have a responsibility to address this question. Yet, aside from one or two references alluding to a deification of the market[19] or a mention of "an idol. . . a false god," [20] the Social Affairs Commission remains within its carefully constructed framework of ethical reflection.

Liberation theologians and even the Latin American Conference of Bishops (CELAM) have been less reluctant to pass theological judgement on neo-liberal capitalism. The Medellin and Puebla documents refer to the socio-economic oppression experienced in Latin America as a "'situation of sin', or 'social sin'. [21] *Sin* is a theological, not an ethical category. If neo-liberalism is a social structure that acts in opposition to God's will for humankind as determined

---

[19] Episcopal Commission for Social Affairs, *WP*, no. 12.
[20] Episcopal Commission for Social Affairs, *SAP*, 12.
[21] Gustavo Gutierrez, "The Violence of a System," in *Christian Ethics and Economics: The North-South Conflict*, eds. Dietmar Mieth and Jacques Pohier (New York: The Seabury Press, 1980), 94-95.

by scripture and Catholic social teaching, then it is a *sinful* social structure. If as a sinful social structure acting against the Kingdom of God, it also proclaims as absolute its own will in respect to the socio-economic affairs of human beings, then, according to the Latin American bishops, neo-liberalism verges on idolatry. [22]

The theme of neo-liberalism as "idolatry" has been taken up by liberation theology and is integral to its critique of neo-liberal economics. Liberation theologians contend that the "idolatrous" dimension of neo-liberalism poses a clear challenge to Christian faith. Yet, this theological theme is virtually absent from Canadian Catholic social teaching. Consequently, for fuller illumination on the issue of neo-liberalism as idolatry, we must look to liberation theology.

[22] Enrique Dussel, "Analysis of the Final Document of Puebla: The Relationship between Economics and Christian Ethics," Ibid., 103-106. The Latin American bishops at Puebla declared: "The cruel contrast between luxurious wealth and extreme poverty which is so visible throughout our continent and which is further aggravated by the corruption that often invades public and professional life show the great extent to which our nations are dominated by the idol of wealth. Forms of idolatry are concretized in liberal capitalism..." in *Puebla and Beyond, eds.* John Eagleson and Philip Schaper (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1979), 193-194.

Chapter IV

A Biblical Reading of Neo-Liberal Capitalism: Perspectives from Liberation Theology and Critical Theology

In previous chapters we noted that the Social Affairs Commission of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops has chosen to approach neo-liberalism through the door of ethics. We saw how the bishops' ethical reflections on neo-liberalism begin with a socio-analytic look into the material conditions of Canadian and global society. The bishops' social-analysis revealed that, in their view, a "moral crisis" exists within the structure of liberal capitalism as manifested in widespread economic injustice both in Canada and globally. This moral crisis, the bishops claim, is due, in part at least, to the inverted moral order established in society by the values and priorities of neo-liberalism as the dominant economic system. These values and priorities were held up to the scrutiny of theological ethics by the bishops and were found inconsistent with the moral vision presented in Scripture and Catholic Social teaching.

Several observers of Canadian Catholic Social teaching believe that the attempt of the bishops to interject ethical themes into their analysis of Canadian economic policy has helped to enlightened the faithful, and society in general, to the fact that there is an ethical dimension to public policy and

economic decision making.[1] However, other observers point out that a focus on ethical reflection alone is inadequate if the Church hopes to fully understand the challenge of neo-liberalism. These observers from liberation theology, with the support of certain critical theologians, state that there is a need to move beyond the ethical dimension of neo-liberal economics to consider its underlying spiritual dimension, a dimension which they declare is inherent in free market capitalism and the root cause of the very socio-economic injustice the bishops oppose in their pastoral statements. These theologians claim that when the religious dimension of neo-liberalism is subjected to a biblical critique using the theological category of *idolatry*, the nature of neo-liberalism as a structure of sacrificial idolatry becomes apparent.

This chapter will present an over view of what liberation and critical theologians (specifically, Pablo Richard, Gustavo Guiterrez, Elsa Tamez, Jon Sobrino and German critical theologian, Ulrich Duchrow) are saying about neo-liberalism as idolatry. Since the Bible is the court of last appeal on the theme of idolatry, the focus of the chapter will be on how scripture is used by these theologians to determine the nature of idolatry, idolatry's link to systems of wealth accumulation and oppression, biblical notions of resistance to idolatry, and the biblical roots of the assertion that neo-liberalism is a contemporary form of idolatry.

---

[1] Lee Cormie, "The Churches and Economic Crisis," *The Ecumenist: A Journal for Promoting Christian Unity* 21 (March/April 1983) : 33-38.

4.1. Pablo Richard on Idolatry

Chilean scriptural scholar, sociologist and DEI theologian, Pablo Richard writes that the question of God in liberation theology does not focus on the faith-atheism antithesis common to traditional theology but on the antithesis of faith-idolatry. The central theological question in Latin America, Richard writes, "is not atheism —the ontological question of whether or not God exists— (but) idolatry —a worship of the false gods of the system of oppression." [2] In Richard's view, neo-liberalism contains an idolatrous spirit, or fetish, that gives globalization (the entrenchment of free market capitalism on a global scale) its force and its character as a system of oppression. The Chilean theologian points out that

> ...the problem is neither the process of globalization in itself ... but it is one of the spirit within that process, its rational basis, logic, ethic, ideology, culture, and spirituality...This spirit of the system is generally known as neo-liberalism. Neo-liberalism, as an ideology, hides the reality of death which is on the increase in the process of globalization and lends it its justification as the best and only system possible. In theological terms, neo-liberalism is that kind of idolatry which permits the system to destroy and kill without limits and without any qualms of conscience. [3]

Richard posits that neo-liberalism is as much a religious issue as it is an economic issue. He suggests that it is difficult to seek the God of Jesus Christ today without confronting the indwelling "idols and fetishes" of the religious

---

[2] Pablo Richard, "Biblical Theology of Confrontation with Idols," in *The Idols of Death and the God of Life: A Theology*, Pablo Richard, et al., trans. Barbara E. Campbell and Bonnie Shepard (Maryknoll, N.Y. : Orbis, 1983), 1.

[3] Pablo Richard, " Word of God Source of Life and Hope for the New Millennium", *Sedos Bulletin on Net: Articles in English:* p.1 [journal on-line]; available from http:// www.sedos.org/english/richard.html; Internet; accessed 28 February 2000.

dimension of modern capitalism." [4] Richard contends that, in the neo-liberal era, the Christian faith has one essential task:

> The fundamental theological task in the world of the oppressed is not so much to prove the existence of God, but to distinguish the True God from the false idols. The problem is not how we can know if God exists, but to show which God we believe in. The theological battle is not against atheists to prove the existence of God, but against idolaters to show where God is, what God is like, who God is with, who God is against, what God's plan is and how God makes himself present and reveals himself in history.[5]

Richard writes that in the Hebrew scriptures idolatry has two distinct sources of meaning: idolatry by perversion, which occurs within the cultic worship of Yahweh where the proper sense of God is misused and idolatry by substitution where Yahweh is replaced by other or false gods.[6] Both these images, Richard claims, are antithetical to the liberating and lifesaving activity of Yahweh as formulated in the opening words of the Decalogue: "I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before me. . . .You shall not carve idols for yourselves" (Ex. 20:2-4; Deut. 5:6-8). [7]

Richard refers to Exodus 32 as an example of idolatry by perversion. [8] He claims that this text discloses how the "Yahwist idols" distort the name or the image of God in order to sustain oppression. He writes that the sin of idolatry in Exodus 32 lies in the people's crisis of faith over the image of God as Liberator.

---

[4] Pablo Richard, "Biblical Theology of Confrontation With Idols," 4.
[5] Pablo Richard, "The Presence and Revelation of God in the World of the Oppressed", in *Where Is God? A Cry of Human Distress,* eds., Christian Duquoc, and Casiano Floristan (Nijmegen, The Netherlands: SCM Press, 1992), 28.
[6] Richard, "Biblical Theology of Confrontation," 5.
[7], Ibid.

In refusing to follow Moses, the Israelites choose to retreat into idolatry. They reject the liberating leadership of Moses, God's servant, and replace him with an object of gold, a symbol of domination. Rather than follow a liberator God to freedom, the Israelites wanted God to exercise another type of leadership with which they felt more comfortable, "God-consoler-in-oppression." Richard writes that the people were attempting to refashion God in their image, a god of the status quo, rather than "God-leader-out-of-slavery".[9] The image of God as consoler in oppression, Richard contends, is idolatrous because it distorts or perverts the revelation of God in Exodus as a liberating God. Richard argues that "(a)ffirmation of the transcendence of God is...an affirmation of the plan to liberate the people. A refusal of this objective is ...an act of idolatry— not the idolatry of other gods or false gods, but the idolatry that is possible only from within the worship of the true God."[10]

Richard states that the biblical texts that inform us on idolatry by substitution (e.g., 2Kings 21:1-18; 2Ki. 23:10; Isa. 1: 4-31, 44:9-20; Jer. 7:8-10; 10:1-16; 19:4-5; 22:17; 32:35; Mic. 3:9-12; Psalm 10; Wis. 13-15) equate the worship of false gods with the practice of injustice. Here idolatry is simultaneously a political and a religious problem. The people, particularly, the wealthy and powerful, place their trust in foreign gods rather than in Yahweh. They are enticed by these foreign gods and false idols with the promise of greater power, wealth and influence. Richard argues that the power of the false

---

[8] Ibid., 5-7.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Ibid. p.7

idols was real enough in that such power could be used by the privileged classes to subdue and dominate. But the source of the power of the foreign idols lay not in the idol itself, but in human institutions (political, cultural, economic, military and religious) through which the power of the idol was exercised. In commenting on Wisdom 13 to 15, Richard writes that:

> the yoke of power engenders idolatry, and thus corrupts life. Idolatry is a trap, in which oppressive power gains access to a" spiritual" and "transcendent" world that hides and legitimizes oppression. This trap impedes both the oppressor and the oppressed from becoming aware of oppression, and simultaneously acts as an obstacle to knowing God (Wis 14:22-30). . . . Those who fall into the trap of idolatry, under the yoke of power, pervert their consciences, thus reversing the values of truth, justice, and peace, and simultaneously erring in their knowledge of God. Because idolatry arises from oppression, idols are exposed as gods who cannot redeem (Wis. 15:14-15).[11]

Richard identifies four theological perspectives on idolatry in the Christian Scriptures.

a) *Idolatry destroys human beings, nature and history.* In commenting on Acts 17: 16-34 and Col. 1:15, Richard points out that the transcendent presence of God in human beings, in nature, and in history is "totally antagonistic to all idolatrous practices and all fabrication of idols because now all God's liberating deeds in history have become . . . a sign through which God is revealed and wherein humans can know him in the light of faith." Idolatry, he maintains, is revealed through history as linked to the destruction of human beings and of nature. Anything and everything that is destructive of human life and human liberation is idolatrous because it stands opposed to God's transcendence.

b) *The idolatry of money.* (1 Cor. 5:9-13; 6:9-11; 10:14-17;Gal. 5: 19-21; Col. 3:5; 1 Pet. 4:3; Matt. 6:24). Idolatry is listed among many vices destructive to personal and social relations and thus incompatible with faith. Featured among these vices is greed. According to Richard, money in itself is not the problem, but the pursuit of and the submission to the power associated with the accumulation of money. Money becomes an idol when human beings turn money into a fetish to which they submit all personal, social and political relationships. Richard points out that to fetishize money is to turn away from God for Jesus declares that "You cannot serve God and Money."

c) *Idolatry of the law.* (Gal 4:8-11; 4:21-5:1; Mark 2:1-3:6). Richard explains that in Paul's theology, being a slave to the Jewish law was the same as being a slave to an idol. In itself the law was beneficial to human beings. But when it was absolutized as the only way to salvation, it became an idol of death (e.g. the death of Jesus in the name of the Law). Richard claims that some of the controversy stories in the Gospels have Jesus advancing an anti-idolatry theology that opposes the law. The salvation that Jesus promises is antagonistic to the fetish of the law created by the Pharisees ("The Sabbath was made for humankind and not humankind for the Sabbath"). Richard concludes that those who confess Jesus as Lord must "profess, communicate, and celebrate their faith only as part of a practice of continual struggle against false gods, the false transcendent and supernatural

---

[11] Ibid., 18.

divinizations and spiritualizations that wield money and the law as instruments of domination."[12]

d) *Idolatry of oppressive political power* (Rev. 13:11-18; 14:9-13; 15:1-4; 16:2; 19:20). Idolatry is presented in Revelation as submission to "the beast" (the visible representation of the *spirit* the Roman Empire). He writes that in the Roman Empire "idolatry permeates everything, and everything is at the service of the idolatry of the empire. "The beast" is the entire system, in its economic, political, social dimension, and especially its religious, theological, and spiritual dimension."[13] Richard claims that the *images* of the beast have power not in themselves, but through the political, economic, cultural, and political power of Rome (the beast). Without the beast, he writes, the images are nothing. However, the images do serve the interest of the beast in that through them it imposes and legitimizes its power. Richard argues that "the submission to the political power of the Roman Empire could be transformed into religious worship. Within this worship of submission, persons seek salvation and the experience of the supernatural, the transcendent, the divine."[14] Richard maintains that the faith of the early Christian community in the God of Jesus Christ led the first Christians in to praxis of "de-idolatarization of the Roman Empire which reduced the divinized image of the empire to its status as a "beast". The unmasking of the empire by early Christianity negates "the whole transcendent, supernatural, divinized

---

[12] Ibid., 22.

[13] Pablo Richard, *Apocalypse: A People's Commentary on the Book of Revelation*, (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1995), and 114.

dimension manipulated by the emperor in order to dominate and oppress." [15] Richard links the total and universal system of the Roman Empire with the current neo-liberal market system. He comments that *Revelation* uses an economic image of buying and selling to depict full integration into the Roman system. He refers to Revelation 13:16-17: "(the beast) causes all, both small and great, both rich and poor, both free and slave, to be marked on the right hand or the forehead, so that no one can buy or sell who does not have the mark, that is the name of the beast or the number of its name."[16] Since the early Christians reject the idolatry of the beast, they do not wear its mark, are not identified as belonging to the empire, are made outcasts and are ultimately sacrificed.[17] "They are sentenced to death economically," Richard claims, "by being excluded from the market, and they are sentenced to death politically, culturally, and spirituality for not acknowledging the beast as god. Christians refuse to be turned into objects of Baal. . . into objects of Mammon."[18] As with life within the Roman Empire, "something similar is happening today in the Third World vis-à-vis a total market system that imposes a single system of values and a market religion that is utterly opposed to Christian faith."[19]

---

[14] Ibid., 23.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Revelation 13: 16-17, NRSV.
[17] Richard, *Apocalypse*, 116
[18] Ibid. , 24.

4.2. Gustavo Gutierrez: Three Characteristics of Idolatry in the Hebrew Scriptures

In his book, *The God of Life*, Gustavo Gutierrez, states that the God of biblical revelation is a God who gives and sustains life. Therefore, any thing or belief that stands opposed to life stands opposed to the God of the Bible and, accordingly, is an idol of death. [20] For Gutierrez, idolatry is foremost behaviour or a practice that rejects the recognition of the God of the Bible as the God of Life. In his view, the essential question to ask in reading any social reality is: Whom, in practice, does that reality serve? The God of Life or an idol of death? [21] Gutierrez points out that the biblical texts on idolatry in the Hebrew scriptures revel three characteristics of the practice of idolatry.

a) *Trust and submission*: Psalm 115, Psalm 31, Zep. 1:18, Jer. 9:22-23 describes idolatry as an act of subjugation in which one gives one's life to something that is not God. Singled out in these texts are those who practice injustice by absolutizing wealth and power as the source of life's meaning.

b) *Works of our hands*: Is. 44:12-17, Jer. 10:3b-5, Psalm 115:4, Hosea 8:4-6, Wis. 13 speak of idols as human constructions; things made of human hands. They are lifeless and cannot save. Yet human beings turn to them to seek power, influence and fulfillment.

c) *Idols demand human victims*: 2Ki. 23:10, Jer. 19:4-5, 22:17,32:35, Sir. 34:18-22; Eze.23: 39, Wis. 14:12-31 show that because idols are

---

[19] Ibid., 24.
[20] Gustavo Gutierrez, *The God of Life* (Maryknoll,, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1991), 49.

lifeless things, their invocation can only lead to death. Idols produce victims. They dehumanize those who pay them homage and these, in turn, victimize others in the name of the idol. In the Bible a god in whose name death is produced stands opposed to the God of Life. In a system of domination which absolutizes wealth and power, there is no room for the anâwîm: orphans, widows, refugees, the poor, the weak, the excluded. In an idolatrous system, those with whom the God of Life identifies become irrelevant and expendable.[22]

4.3. Elsa Tamez: Idolatry Linked to Poverty and Oppression

Elsa Tamez writes in Bible *of the Oppressed*, that scripture relates poverty and oppression to idolatry. She states that in the Bible, oppression is the basic cause of poverty, since "the principle motive for oppression is the eagerness to pile up wealth. This desire, she argues, "is connected with the fact that the oppressor is an idolater."[23]

Tamez contends that nearly all the biblical texts that speak of oppression and the accumulation of wealth are, to some degree, linked to idolatry. She points out that all the pagan nations that oppress Israel have gods other than Yahweh. The prophets rebuke these false gods made by human hands (Jer. 51:17; 1Sam. 12:21) because they can not speak out against oppression as does Yahweh. Rather, these idols of death are used to give oppression legitimacy. Human beings who submit to the system of oppression do so

---

[21]Ibid.
[22] Ibid., 49-54.

because it is the will of the idol that they humble themselves (Isa. 2:8-9) According to Tamez, the oppressor cannot proclaim Yahweh as God since to do so, would require that he renounce "the desires of his heart " which make him "greedy for gain" (Ps. 10:3-4). [24]

The prophets, Tamez claims, accused the privileged classes of idolatry when the desires of the rich and powerful for gain lead them to abandon God's original plan for Israel, with its vision of freedom, to build a social system established on the slavery-based model of the nations. As a result, Tamez claims, the religion of the elite in Israel "became a religion of 'fetishes', a religion of false gods that enslave and kill: the fetishes of anti-utopia[25] and subjugation. [26]

4.4. Jon Sobrino: The Anti-Idolatry Praxis of Jesus

Liberation theologian, Jon Sobrino, S.J., believes that though perceived in modern secular society as an archaic, cultic irrelevancy, the critique of idolatry is germane to the discussion of economic injustice linked to neo-liberalism.[27] Sobrino explains:

---

[23] Elsa Tamez, *Bible of the Oppressed* (Maryknoll, N.Y. : Orbis , 1982), 3.
[24] Ibid. ,34.
[25] Tamez uses utopia in the sense of "concrete utopia". In discussing Ernest Bloch's conception of utopia, Gregory Baum describes how Bloch distinguished a *concrete* utopia from an *abstract* utopia. Baum writes that for Bloch concrete utopias are "imaginations of future fulfillment which are sufficiently close to the possibilities of the present that they give rise to practical ideas of what to do and summon forth some form of action; abstract utopias, on the other hand, present the imagination of the new future in such a remote way, wholly unrealizable in terms of present possibilities, that it paralyzes the practical intelligence, leads to inaction, and makes people empty dreamers...abstract utopias are really ideological," in Gregory Baum, *Religion and Alienation: A Theological Reading of Sociology* (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press,1975), 283.
[26] Tamez, *Bible of the Oppressed*, 33-35.
[27] Jon Sobrino, *Jesus, The Liberator: A Historical Theological View* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis , 1993), 185.

> (a) idols are not a thing of the past nor realities that occur only in the religious sphere, but currently and really exist; they are actual realities that shape society and determine the life and death of the masses; (b) these realities are classed as idols in the strict sense, since they take on the trappings of divinity: ultimateness (they are "transcendent" and there is no appeal beyond them, as witness the strictly theological saying "business is business"), self-justification (they do not need to justify themselves to us), untouchability (they cannot be called into question and those who do so are destroyed); (c) the idol, by definition, originator of all the others, is the economic configuration of society, which is unjust, structural, lasting, with many other organs at its service: military, political, cultural, juridical, intellectual, and often religious, which partake analogously of the being of the idol; (d) these idols demand rites (the cruel practices of the ruling capitalism in our countries) and an orthodoxy (the ideology that goes with these), and promise their followers salvation (making them like the rich and powerful of the First World), but de-humanize them...; (e) finally, and decisively, these idols through their adherents produce millions of innocent victims, whom they dispatch to the slow death of hunger and the violent death of repression.[28]

Sobrino regards Jesus' entire ministry as a struggle against idolatry. Sobrino explains that for Jesus the archetypal plan of God for human beings is life. Therefore, the fulfillment of life is the first mediation of the reality of God. In defense of this reality, Jesus struggles against a conflicting notion of God as proclaimed by the Temple theocracy and the alternative divinities represented by wealth and the political-religious power of the Roman Empire.

Sobrino points out that in his criticism of the privileged classes (Luke 6:24-26; Matt.6: 24), Jesus reproaches those who choose to serve Mammon (an idol of wealth) rather than the God of Life. Jesus refers to the gods of wealth as

---

[28] Ibid., 185-186.

'masters' and, marks them as opposed to God. In serving *Mammon*, they serve an idol of death that produces victims (the poor). [29]

Also, Sobrino sees within the controversy stories a conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees over conflicting images of God that involve different understandings of the reality of God. Sobrino points out that at the core of the controversy stories is the breaking of social norms (fasting, violating Sabbath laws, and avoiding the company of sinners) by Jesus and his disciples. When he is attacked for his "anti-society" attitude, Jesus responds with an explanation that reveals his understanding of the God of Life (Matt. 12:9-14). Sobrino's Jesus believes firmly that God gives life to human beings. Any use of God's name or God's image to prevent the furtherance of life is a distortion of the divine will for the human being must not be dehumanized in the name of the God that gives life. In reference to Matt. 12:1-4, 9-14, Sobrino explains that Jesus' defense of his actions on Sabbath is a defense of the rights of God and the rights of human beings against a conflicting image of God that would justify the denial of life in the name of religion:

> In the Jewish mentality of the time, the Sabbath served as the day of God's celebration with the angels in heaven, and the Jewish people, by reason of its divine election, was allowed to participate in that celebration. Hence it appeared to them that nothing could be allowed to impede or threaten the divine celebration. However, Jesus claims that the rights of God cannot be in contradiction to the rights of humans, when these rights are what foster human life.[30]

According to Sobrino, in Jesus' view the rights of human beings to life supercede conventional notions of God's will if the latter is used to oppress

---

[29] Ibid., 187.

human beings and deprive them of life. [31] Jesus' defense of human life (and not social norms or the Law) as the fundamental mediation of the reality of God causes the Jewish authorities to seek his destruction (Jn. 11:45-57). Sobrino explains that, as the true mediator of God, Jesus is condemned by those opposed to the God of Life. Though these others condemn Jesus in the name of the divinity, their divinity is not the God of Life, but a distorted notion of God—the "Yahwist idol" of the Law in whose name Jesus must die (Jn. 19:7).

Sobrino places the death of Jesus within the framework of what liberation theology calls a "battle of the gods." Jesus as the mediator of the God of Life and the mediation, the Kingdom of God, is in conflict with the idols of death and their mediations— the false gods of the *Pax Romana* and the Yahwist idol of the temple theocracy. Sobrino claims that it is difficult to find within the Gospels an adequate cause for Jesus' death other than his defense of the God of Life against the idols of death. In Sobrino's view

> (the) simple , but vital conclusion is that the New Testament and Jesus shed light on the question of God by making people take account of the existence of other contrary gods (mammon...) and therefore faith in God must, at the very least, be an anti-idolatrous faith. And Jesus sheds light on idols by declaring that their worship is dealing in death to others. [32]

Sobrino states that when considering the dialectic of atheism-idolatry in relation to the New Testament, Jesus does not reveal to us *that* God exists. Rather he reveals to us *what* God exists. Sobrino concludes that since this God

---

[30] Jon Sobrino, *Jesus in Latin America* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1987), 112-113.
[31] Ibid., 113-115.
[32] Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*. 188

of Jesus "is antagonistic to and in conflict with the other gods" faith in the God of Life "has to be anti-idolatrous."[33]

4.5. Ulrich Duchrow and Resistance to Idolatry in the Bible

Hermeneutic mediations from liberation theology and critical theology claim that according to the Bible, the only appropriate response to an idolatrous system of oppression is resistance. This resistance can take two forms: prophetic and apocalyptic.[34]

German critical theologian, Ulrich Duchrow, states that prophetic resistance takes place within the context of an existing social reality that has turned away from God but can still be influenced to reform.[35] Here the prophet confronts the offending social order that speaks of itself in absolute terms over against the sovereign rule of God. Prophetic resistance challenges the established order's economic and political macro-structures, their ruling elites, and the gods that produce and inhabit the oppressive system. Its purpose is to destabilize the unjust social order that presents itself as the absolutized solution "to all social needs and hopes." The prophet confronts the system of domination with the critical question: What functions as God within this society? This question is critical to prophetic resistance because everything concerning what is to reign as sovereign in society follows from it. By posing the God question, prophetic resistance forces those who participate in the system of domination to

---

[33] Ibid., 191-192.
[34] Ulrich Duchrow, *Alternatives to Global Capitalism: Drawn from Biblical History, Designed for Political Action* (Utrecht, The Netherlands: International Books, 1995), 229.
[35] Ulrich Duchrow, "Biblical Perspectives on Empire: A View From Western Europe," *Ecumenical Review* 46, no. 1 (1994): 22.

acknowledge that there is an alternative to social reality as defined by the system: "If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him" (1 Kings 18:21). The faithful must choose; there can be no co-existence between the God of Life and the idols of death. Against these idols of death, prophetic resistance asserts the alternative truth of the God who liberates. [36]

Duchrow, gives as examples of prophetic resistance the socio-economic criticism of Elijah, Elisha, Amos and Micah who were allied with the oppressed peasant lower classes against the wealth accumulation system of the monarchy. (e.g. 1 Kings 21). Duchrow maintains that prophetic resistance is most appropriate in a context where the dominant system can still be "turned" or influenced to reform as a result of "the prophet's decisive perspective." This prophetic perspective sees the turning of the system toward justice, law and solidarity as identical to turning back to Yahweh. Duchrow notes that the prophets use "live" consistently over against the system of kingship, "which brings death and destruction": "Seek me and live" (Am. 5:4) and "Seek good and not evil that you may live" (Am.5: 14). [37]

By contrast, apocalyptic resistance occurs when the previous social reality itself has been destroyed and replaced by a new social reality that excludes the faithful. [38] Apocalyptic resistance requires living within the new

[36] Duchrow, *Alternatives to Global Capitalism*, 149-155
[37] Ibid., 155.
[38] Duchrow, "Biblical Perspectives on Empire," 22.

reality without being a part of it. Duchrow describes the Book of Daniel as "the canonical example of apocalyptic resistance theology." [39] Duchrow explains that

> Daniel 3 describes the totalitarian political-economic-ideological system of the Hellenistic kind of empire as a whole: the king (political power) has an image built out of gold (economic power), before which people have to prostrate themselves (ideological power)...Antiochus IV had, according to 1 Macc.1: 41f., drafted a decree, according to which all the peoples of his Empire had to give up their cultural and legal autonomy and become one imperial people. That means that ideological unity was now to follow the economic (through money) and political (through military power of conquest) unity that had been achieved. Everyone falls on their knees, all but. . . Daniel and his friends. Although they will be thrown into the fiery furnace, they refuse. "...be it known to your majesty that we will neither serve your god nor worship the golden image that you have set up." (3:18)[40]

Duchrow contends that in the story of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, the Bible reveals that resistance in an idolatrous totalitarian system requires "a clear confession, even at the cost of martyrdom, against idolatry of absolute economic and political power." [41] Duchrow states that in an apocalyptic situation where oppression and injustice seem victorious, faith and hope in the liberating justice of God and God's ultimate victory inspire and empower the faithful to face persecution and death. In commenting on Daniel (3), Duchrow adds:

> In this story the men are saved from the furnace by their God, but before that they say: God can save us, but even if he doesn't we declare that we will not fall down. So they are prepared for martyrdom. That is the price to be paid for breaking the arrogant, total power of the world-system. For power cannot exist unless it is worshipped, i.e. unless it is recognised as absolute power. Power cannot exist if its legitimation and loyalty to it are withdrawn. Today

[39] Duchrow, *Alternatives to Global Capitalism*, 176.
[40] Ibid., 176-177.
[41] Duchrow, "Biblical Perspectives on Empire", 23.

that sort of power means that there is no alternative to the capitalist market.[42]

According to Duchrow, the New Testament presents the Jesus movement and the messianic communities of *Acts* as examples of apocalyptic communities in resistance. In the midst of the totalitarian systems of Rome and the Temple theocracy, Jesus proclaims the Kingdom of God as an alternative society that gives priority to the excluded, the impoverished, and the oppressed.[43]

Against the idolatry and accompanying oppression and exploitation of the *Pax Romana*, Jesus proclaims, "whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant" (Mark 10: 42). *Diaconia*— mutual service—becomes the central value of Jesus' alternative society in resistance to the power and greed of Empire. Duchrow asserts that in the Kingdom, mutual service is "far from meaning organised charitable work in a social system otherwise defined by exploitation and authority." Rather, Duchrow states that in the Kingdom's alternative society, service is understood as typifying a counter-culture in which exploitation and oppressive authority are put aside and replaced by social solidarity. [44] Thus, resistance takes the form of rejecting *Mammon,* the power seeking, "treasure-storing" spirit of Rome, in order to build a new society that places a priority on meeting people's basic needs (Acts 4:32-35).[45]

---

[42] Duchrow, *Alternatives to Global Capitalism*, 177-178.
[43] Ibid., 184
[44] Ibid., 186-187.
[45] In commenting on Acts 4: 32-35,Duchrow adds: " ...the joy spoken of in these texts...reminds us of the feasts and the sharing with the poor of the surplus yield, as described in Deut. 14f. There it says only: 'Let there be no poor among you' (15:4); but here it says that there were in fact no longer poor among them: 'None of their members was ever in want' (Acts 4:34). A life sustaining economy! That is why between the sentence about the common use of their goods and the one about there being no want, there is another sentence: 'The apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus with great

According to Duchrow , in the midst of an idolatrous totalitarian system, apocalyptic resistance begins in alternative communities living in the spirit of the Kingdom of God. Jesus inaugurates these alternative communities in resistance through "concrete acts of liberation and healing among the poor and oppressed, inspiring them with the messianic spirit..." In turn, this messianic spirit empowers his followers to live out the signs of the Kingdom of God, acting in the spirit of the Kingdom to come, refusing to co-operate with the idolatrous totalitarian system of Rome and living in the hope of its ultimate collapse. The messianic communities in resistance form a contrast society, a counter-culture, establishing signs of God's justice and love among subjected people, putting an end to the type of unjust relationships which characterized the Roman system of domination. [46]

For Duchrow, apocalyptic thinking is present in the response of liberation theology to neo-liberalism. In the context of the excluded of the South where the majority of people have experienced both the "lethal consequences and the absolute arrogance " of the market economy apocalyptic is received as the hope of the poor. In equating market capitalism with biblical empires of domination, — Egypt, Babylon, Greece, Rome— Duchrow quotes Pablo Richard in revealing how the poor in Christian base communities in Latin America look to the Bible' s

---

power,and they were all given great respect" (4:33). Witnessing to Jesus' resurrection, to life's victory over death, occurs when an alternative society succeeds, in the midst of a system of death, of the Horsemen of the Apocalypse (Rev. 6), in making provision for the life of all and sharing like sisters and brothers," in Ulrich Duchrow, *Alternatives to Global Capitalism*, 190.

[46] Ibid., 209-211.

apocalyptic literature for inspiration in facing the totalitarian power structure of market capitalism:

> The basis of apocalyptic literature is the confrontation between the people of God and the empire. It is not so much a political and military confrontation as a cultural, ethical, spiritual and theological confrontation. The murdering and idolatrous empire confronts the people of God, who are building God's kingdom here on earth...Christians today are also faced with the empire and its cultural consumption, which is characterized by individualism and a spirituality and ethics of death and lies, a spirituality of fetishism and idolatry. In the face of the empire the base communities take on themselves the project of the kingdom of God.[47]

Duchrow contends that the apocalyptic model of small faith-based communities in resistance to the dominant system reveals that small groups of people, living out the signs of the kingdom of God, can act to unmask the idolatrous spirituality of totalitarian power structures.

As mentioned above, Richard, like Duchrow, believes that by looking to texts of apocalyptic character, Christian communities can discover a biblically–based method of resistance to idolatrous systems of domination. For example, Richard uses Eph. 6:10-12 to identify the actual enemy to be resisted as "the spiritual forces of evil" [48] which sustained the Roman system and not the flesh and blood authorities of the empire. Moreover, Richard points out that according to *Ephesians*, the "armor" to be used in resisting the "cosmic powers of this present darkness" [49] are the signs of the Kingdom: "truth, justice peace,

---

[47] Duchrow, "Biblical Perspectives on Empire", 24.
[48] Ephesians 6: 12, *NRSV.*
[49] Ibid.

faith, prayer, constant vigilance and particularly the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God." [50]

Richard also uses Paul 's *Second Letter to the Thessalonians* to discern the nature of apocalyptic resistance to idolatrous systems of domination:

> Paul speaks of the *apostasy*, the *diabolic power,* and the mystery of *iniquity*. At the same time, he points out "that which now holds back the impious one." The idolatry of the market is today's mystery of iniquity which is at work in the world. Confronted with this iniquity one can either seek *refuge* in *apostasy* or in the practice of truth. That which prevents the total apostasy of humanity is the cultural, ethical, and spiritual resistance against the very soul of the system of neo-liberal globalization. It is the Christian community which resists the idolatry of the market, which believes in the God of life and which works out a theology critical of the iniquity of the system. It is the force of the Spirit, of the Word and of solidarity.[51]

Richard concludes that. . . "if the Church were only able to reconstruct the identity of its origins and regain the power which the Word had over the first communities, the Word of God today would *become life and hope* for the majority of people who are rejected and without hope, as well as for the cosmos which is groaning under the burden of human progress."[52]

4.6. Conclusion

Liberation hermeneutics reveals that the biblical tradition finds idolatry tied to a system of domination and wealth accumulation and espouses a sacrificial theology intended to subjugate human beings to the immutable and

---

[50] Richard, "Word of God",1.
[51] Ibid., 2
[52] Ibid.

inviolable will of a false god or to a false conception of God.[53] Liberation theology's hermeneutic mediation into neo-liberal capitalism identifies god-like attributes (e. g. claims to ultimacy and autonomy, the metaphysical " invisible hand", the encouraging of human sacrifice) which neo-liberalism confers on the market and which recall the qualities of the false gods and Yahwist idols of the Bible (the golden calve, Molech, Baal, Mammon). The orientation of theology toward life is the essence of liberation theology.[54] Consequently, liberation theologians believe that faith is to be lived in the struggle for life against life-denying systems of oppression. In this context, faith assumes an anti-idolatrous dimension in order to negate the "false, "fetishizing gods that are so alive and indispensable in the faith of dominators." [55] Costa Rican theologian and DEI member, Victorio Araya states:

> . . . the Bible denounces all the mystification that we resort to in contriving ideas of God, according to our convenience and interests. We invent gods to protect our interests, to justify our blameworthy equanimity in the face of evil, to spare us the effort to strive for a better world ...and then we worship them, but in reality we are worshipping ourselves. Jesus said ...that one "cannot worship God and Mammon" . . . and Paul said that "greed is idolatry"-in other words, the worship of false gods. True we do not always realize what we are doing—sometimes because we do not attach a religious significance to it. Some of us say that we are not religious, that we are not interested in religion; but we have made some creaturely thing (wealth, power, comfort) a god, and we sacrifice everything to it. Or, what is worse, we call ourselves Christians...but in reality we conceal under (that) name our own selfish group or class interests. We have kept the name of God, but we have emptied it of content. There can be no true faith if these false gods are

---

[53] Julio de Santa Anna, "Sacralization and Sacrifice in Human Practice," in *Sacrifice and Humane Economic Life,* World Council of Churches Commission on the Churches' Participation in Development (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1992), 17-40.
[54] Gutierrez, Gustavo, *The God of Life,* 3-19.
[55] Victorio Araya, "The God of Strategic Covenant," in Richard et al., *The Idols of Death and the God of Life,* 111.

> not destroyed. This is the central problem: in order to believe in God we must first disbelieve in the gods we have contrived...[56]

When liberation theology examines the ideology, values and practice of neo-liberalism in the light of scripture, it concludes that neo-liberalism shares many of the qualities associated with the Biblical notion of idolatry, particularly the proclivity to cause oppression and death in the name of a self-absolutized system of domination. By denying life to the poor, the unemployed, the marginalized, the excluded, neo-liberalism rejects the God of Life to serve the idols of death. Thus, liberation theology regards neo-liberalism as a structure of social sin rooted in idolatry.

A fundamental presupposition of Christian faith is that the human being, in his/her creature-hood is under the sovereign action of God— Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Christian ethics evaluates all human action in relation to this principle since the nature and location of ultimate good are discovered in the nature and action of God as revealed in the Bible.[57]

As we have seen above, neo-liberalism raises significant theological questions respecting the sovereignty and nature of God and of humankind's disposition toward God. Yet, the Social Affairs Commission's use of ethical themes in their hermeneutics neglects these important theological questions relative to neo-liberalism— especially, the question of what functions as God within our society? Though critical of neo-liberalism on ethical grounds, the

---

[56] Ibid.

[57] Charles L. Kammer III, *Ethics and Liberation: An Introduction* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1988), 54-59.

bishops' hermeneutics do not denounce neo-liberalism as a negation of the God of Life and a repudiation of the kingdom proclaimed by Jesus. As a result, their social teaching does not pass theological judgement on neo-liberalism as a structure of sin rooted in idolatry.

In the methodology of liberation theology— the methodology which the bishops themselves employ in their social statements— social analysis and hermeneutics lead to pastoral action. The fact that the Canadian Catholic bishops do not recognize the God question as central to their critique of neo-liberalism has implications for their strategies for action on neo-liberalism. In the absence of a strong *theological* link between faith and economy, the perception among many Christians is that their Christian faith and economic issues have nothing in common. This attitude may contribute to the indifferent manner in which the Commission's social statements have been received by a majority of the Catholic faithful.

Chapter V

The Practical Strategies for Action on Neo-Liberalism of the Social Affairs Commission

The guiding ethical principles of Canadian Catholic social teaching— the preferential option for the poor and the priority of labour— lead the Canadian bishops to voice their concern to promote the common good in the making and implementation of public and economic policy. As a result, the Social Affairs Commission, following upon its social-analytic examination of neo-liberalism and its reflection on the neo-liberal socio-economic order in the light of faith, proposes practical strategies for action to address the "moral crisis" in the Canadian economy. As the third stage in the methodology of liberation theology, here the Church becomes an agent for social change.[1] Here the faith community attempts to raise awareness that social reality is in the need of transformation if society is to live in conformity with the Kingdom vision of social justice, human dignity and community. Furthermore, the faith community conceives and proposes specific courses of action springing from the matrix of faith itself for effecting social change.[2] This chapter will review the strategies for action proposed by Social Affairs Commission. Specifically, the chapter will look at what the Canadian bishops are saying through the Social Affairs Commission to governments, to business and to the Christian

---

[1] Leonardo Boff, O.F.M., *Faith on the Edge: Religion and Marginalized Existence*, trans. Robert R. Barr (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1989), 64.

[2] Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff, *Salvation and Liberation: In Search of a Balance between Faith and Politics*, trans. Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis , 1984), 55.

community in order to move the Canadian socio-economic closer to the liberating vision of the Gospel message .

5.1. The Bishops Speak to Governments

Its ethical critique of neo-liberalism leads the Social Affairs Commission to propose strategies for action that are intended to help create a more humane socio-economic order by reorienting society's hierarchy of values. This reordering of values begins with a "basic shift" that advances the "goal of serving the human needs of all people in our society...over the maximization of profits and growth."[3] This shift in values must also include precedence given to the priority of labour principle in economic decision making.

The Commission appears to be following in the tradition of prophetic criticism by speaking the truth to those in power: neo-liberal dominance is not absolute. The Commission rejects the "there is no alternative" mantra of neo-liberal ideology and challenges society's policy makers in government and business, to stretch their creative imaginations to envision alternatives to the neo-liberal socio-economic order. In speaking to the public sector, the Commission acknowledges "the diminishing ability of governments to plan and influence economic events," but insists that the public sector has the responsibility to intervene in the economy in order to assure the common good.[4]

---

[3] Episcopal Commission for Social Affairs, "Ethical Reflections on the Economic Crisis," in *Do Justice!: The Social Teaching of the Canadian Catholic Bishops* , ed. E.F. Sheridan, S.J. (Toronto, Ontario: The Jesuit Centre For Social Faith and Justice, 1987), 405.

[4] Episcopal Commission for Social Affairs, "Widespread Unemployment: A Call to Mobilize the Social Forces of Our Nation", *Catholic New Times,* supplement , 2 May 1993 ,no. 26

The bishops advise governments that they should not rely on market forces alone to provide for the common welfare. "Anonymous market forces," the Commission claims, "cannot be left alone to determine either production and labour conditions or the fulfillment of human needs. This is because many basic human needs and rights find no place in the market."[5] Also, the bishops suggest that governments cooperate with one another on the international level to establish structures and mechanisms to guarantee that the economic, social, and environmental policies of transnational corporations are placed at the service of human dignity.

The Social Affairs Commission denounces economic strategies that prioritize monetarist policies[6] (e.g., fighting inflation, deficit reduction) over meeting people's basic needs. Primary among these needs is the right to meaningful employment. Therefore, the Commission recommends that government develop economic alternatives that emphasize "the value and dignity of human work in order to counteract the "social evil" of unemployment in Canada and in the international arena.[7]

5.2 The Bishops Speak to Business

In speaking to business, the Commission calls upon owners and managers to transform the workplace in to "human communities" by forming a social partnership with workers. [8] But the bishops also remind corporate policy

---

[5] Ibid., no. 23.
[6] See note 12 , page 20 above.
[7] Episcopal Commission for Social Affairs, *WU*, no. 20.
[8] Ibid., no. 29.

makers of the "frightening social responsibility they bear before all peoples of the planet, present and future."[9] Thus, the bishops urge business to join with the public sector, labour and community organizations to form a "new social ethic of partnership" that would put aside the "pervading mentality of competition" in order to develop alternative policies, programs, and structures to benefit the common good. [10] The Commission urges the private sector to shift its focus from capital-intensive industries that do not value human labour to more labour intensive, "socially useful forms of production.[11]

5.3. The Bishops' Proposals to Both Public and Private Sectors

The bishops propose specific alternative economic strategies to government and business based upon the Gospel derived ethical principles of the priority of labour and the preferential option for the poor. The Commission's alternative strategies for economic development include:

a) "an economic model that would place emphasis on socially-useful forms of production; labour –intensive industries; the use of appropriate forms of technology; self-reliant models of economic development; community ownership and control of industries; new forms of worker management and ownership; and greater use of the renewable energy sources in industrial production".[12]

b) a comprehensive industrial strategy to strengthen production in the agricultural, manufacturing and resource sectors of the economy;

---

[9] Ibid., no.26.
[10] Ibid no. 30.
[11] Episcopal Commission For Social Affairs , *EREC* in Sheridan , *Do Justice!*, 405-408.
[12]Ibid., 406-407.

c) programs to revitalize the public sector by providing new kinds of social services, such as day care, and renewing public infrastructure, including highways and railways;

d) a green plan to provide more effective environmental standards, develop green industries, including waste disposal, and enhance renewable forms of energy and resource development.[13]

5.4. The Bishops Speak to the Christian Community

The bishops also speak to the Christian community, calling upon the faithful to become involved in the struggle for economic justice and social transformation. The Social Affairs Commission encourages the faithful to participate in this struggle by taking a critical look at the values and priorities of government and business. In *ECPC,* the Canadian bishops refer to the particular pastoral methodology, drawn from liberation theology, which they had developed as a guide in "the formation of our ethical reflections."[14] The bishops have proposed their pastoral methodology to all members of the Christian community as a process for addressing social problems.[15] This pastoral methodology for social change is based on the conviction that the Church must act as a prophetic community by committing to solidarity with the poor in the task of transforming society according to God's will.[16] We recall from the Introduction that the levels of intervention in the Commission's pastoral methodology are:

a) being present with and listening to the poor;

---

[13] Episcopal Commission For Social Affairs, *WU,* nos. 27-29.
[14] Episcopal Commission For Social Affairs, *ECPC,* in Sheridan , *Do Justice!,* 412-413.
[15] Episcopal Commission for Social Affairs, "The Struggle Against Poverty: A Sign of Hope for Our World," *Catholic New Times* 21 October, 1996, 12-13.
[16] Ibid.

b) developing a critical analysis of the economic political and social structures that cause poverty;

c) making judgements in the light of Gospel principles;

d) stimulating creative thought and action regarding alternative visions and models for social and economic development;

e) acting in solidarity with community-based movements.[17]

In regards to step (d) in the bishops pastoral methodology, Canadian Catholic social teaching specifically urges Christian communities to network with other concerned groups from various social and economic sectors[18] to stimulate public debate on alternative economic visions and strategies by organizing community forums and public hearings on economic justice. The bishops' propose that these public debates focus on the following:

a) specific struggles of workers, the poor, and the unemployed in local communities;

b) analysis of local and regional economic problems and structures;

c) major ethical principles of economic life in the Church's recent social teachings;

d) suggestions for alternative economic visions;

e) new proposals for industrial strategies that reflect basic ethical principles.[19]

The Commission intends that local parishes, by bringing together various sectors of the community, will become part of a collaborative effort to design

---

[17] Ibid.
[18] Episcopal Commission for Social Affairs , *WU,* no. 33.
[19] Episcopal Commission for Social Affairs , *EREC* , in Sheridan , *Doing Justice!* , 407.

common objectives and strategies for building strong local economies as alternatives to the neo-liberal driven policies and practices of globalization. The bishops pastoral strategy calls upon all Christians, but particularly those who do ministry in the Church (e.g. homilists, catechists, Catholic schools, religious leaders, and Catholic associations), to ensure that the Church's social teaching and action for justice becomes an integral part of their ministry. Here, the bishops hope that the Christian community will develop a social analysis that will inspire prophetic action to "build up a more just and human society."[20] The path of prophetic action encouraged by the Social Affairs Commission is the path of solidarity. The bishops intend that, by publicly denouncing the social sin of economic injustice and by joining in solidarity with "the victims of global economic restructuring" and those community or peoples' organizations which represent them, Christians will participate in the liberating work of God by creating a more humane socio-economic order.[21]

In the process of forging "new directions" for a just economic order, the Social Affairs Commission sees its role as limited to stimulating "public dialogue about alternative visions and strategies" and generating "critical awareness in local Christian communities." [22]

5.5. Conclusion

The practical strategy for action proposed by the Social Affairs Commission follows in the tradition of prophetic criticism. The bishops

---

[20] Episcopal Commission for Social Affairs, *WU*, no. 32-36.
[21] Episcopal Commission for Social Affairs, *SAP*, 13-14.
[22] Episcopal Commission for Social Affairs, *ECPC* in Sheridan, *Do Justice!*, 432.

challenge the dominant neo-liberal economic system by contradicting its absolute claims, and by encouraging an alternative economic vision based on the ethical principles that guide Canadian Catholic social teaching.

However, the bishops' practical strategy ignores the theological, dimension of the debate on market capitalism. Reasoning primarily from Christian social ethics, they offer proposals for socio-political action in order to "tame" the socio-economic order. Without question, the struggle for economic justice is an ethical struggle to be waged in the socio-political sphere. Yet, as we have seen, the Church's encounter with neo-liberalism is not exclusively socio-political, but entails a religious dimension. Therefore, in speaking to the Christian community it would be appropriate, even necessary for the bishops to present theological reasoning alongside the ethical in articulating the Church's pastoral strategy regarding the economy. Thus, the bishops would emphasize the *theological* imperative to work for socio-economic justice, i.e., to have faith in a Triune God of Life and Community means to struggle against the false gods of the anti-kingdom in whose name human beings become disposable and communities destroyed.

The response of social ethics to economic injustice is socio-political action designed to affect the *structures* of social injustice, not the underlying "spirituality" which sustains and legitimates oppression. In this regard, the Social Affairs Commission would propose a strategy designed not only to "tame" the structures of the system, but also to expose and de-legitimate the idolatrous spirituality embedded in neo-liberalism as a system of domination.

Liberation theology and critical theology have proposed such strategy— an *anti-idolatry praxis of resistance.*

Chapter VI

Alternative Strategies for Action on Neo-Liberalism From Liberation Theology and Critical Theology

We have noted that the struggle for socio-economic justice is not exclusively an ethical struggle. Liberation hermeneutics has demonstrated that there is a theological dimension to the encounter with neo-liberalism which involves a contest of faiths: the Judeo-Christian faith tradition over against neo-liberalism as the absolute prevailing logic of global society. The absence of a pastoral response by the bishops to this theological dimension in the debate on neo-liberalism leaves the impression that the struggle for economic justice is primarily a struggle that can be won through criticism of public policy and collective social action. This impression is reinforced by the nature of the bishops' argumentation for the involvement of the Church in socio-economic affairs which appears merely secular rather than theological. Liberation and critical theologies have proffered argumentation for involvement in the struggle for economic justice on the basis of faith. This chapter will present some of these arguments.

6.1. Faith as Apostasy: An Anti-idolatry Praxis of Resistance

Liberation hermeneutics has claimed that neo-liberalism (as with all systems of domination) is ideologically linked to idolatry. A neo-liberal idol (the market) has acquired concepts of ultimacy, omnipotence, and omniscience— concepts Christianity attributes only to God— which are invoked to sustain

oppression and human sacrifice.[1] We have established that the idolatrous spirit of neo-liberalism attempts to create falsified forms of the notion of God in order to legitimate its oppression. Though social criticism and social action are essential elements in any struggle for economic justice, liberation theology and critical theology contend that the Church has the additional and unique responsibility of leading society, but particularly the faithful, in a discernment of and a struggle against the underlying spirituality of systems of oppression which stands opposed to God's will for humankind. Jon Sobrino characterizes this process of discernment and theological struggle as an encounter between the Kingdom and the *anti-Kingdom*. On this point, Sobrino writes:

> History contains the true God (of life), God's mediation (the Kingdom) and its mediator (Jesus) as well as the idols (of death), their mediation (the anti-Kingdom) and mediators (oppressors). The two types of reality are not only distinct, but conflictually disjunctive, so mutually exclusive, not complementary, and work against each other. This structure of reality is what explains Jesus' prophetic praxis and *the theological dimension* (my italics) of this praxis. It is needed because the positive proclamation of the Kingdom has to be made in the presence of the anti-kingdom. Its purpose is to overcome and destroy the anti-Kingdom by upholding the true God.[2]

In the view of the DEI theologians, the authentic practice of faith involves the practice of "apostasy" (*i.e.*, a rejection of the false gods of the system through the confession of and a lived witness to the sovereignty of God in history) from the false gods of the anti-kingdom. Liberation theologian Victorio

---

[1] See note 26 page 25 above.

[2] Jon Sobrino, *Jesus, The Liberator* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1993), 161-162.

Araya states:

> There is no genuine faith without a conscious "apostasy from idols. In order to believe in God, one must disbelieve in the gods of oppression. You have to begin by being an atheist with respect to the gods of the system...An abjuration of the gods of oppression and death has now become essential to faith in the God who delivers, to faith in the God of Life.[3]

For Araya and his DEI colleagues, faith becomes the practice of an anti-idolatry atheism which "can be effectuated only in confrontation with and denunciation of the idolatrous worship of the powers of this world, the false deities of death, with their demand for human victims."[4] Araya states that the essential ecclesial task in a system of oppression is to discern the idols of the system and "any manipulation of God's name in order to sacralize structures of oppression, repression, and death."[5] Thus, liberation theology holds that lasting social transformation can not occur without the prior theological task of unmasking and de-legitimating the idols of the dominant system.[6] According to critical theologian, Ulrich Duchrow, responding to neo-liberalism calls for a clear confession of faith in the God of life and a rejection of the deification of the

---

[3] Victorio Araya, *God of the Poor: The Mystery of God in Latin American Liberation Theology*, trans. Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1983), 103-104.

[4] Ibid., 104.

[5] Ibid.

[6] In his book , *The Prophetic Imagination*, noted scriptural scholar, Walter Brueggemann explains that the theological task of denouncing the gods of the system is essential to liberation:

"The radical break of Moses and Israel from imperial reality is a two-dimensional break from both religion of static triumphalism and the politics of oppression and exploitation. Moses dismantled the religion of static triumphalism by exposing the gods and showing that in fact they had no power and were not gods. Thus, the mythical legitimacy of Pharoah's social world is destroyed, for it is known that such a regime appeals to sanctions that in fact do not exist. The mythic claims of the empire are ended by the disclosure of the alternative religion of the freedom of God. In place of the gods of Egypt, creatures of the imperial consciousness, Moses discloses Yahweh the sovereign one who acts in his lordly freedom, is extrapolated from no social reality, and is captive to no social perception but acts from his own person

market. "In other words, says Duchrow, "we are faced not simply with a question of ethics but with the choice between God and false god, between true worship and idolatry."[7]

As we have seen, Ulrich Duchrow, and Pablo Richard, propose that a praxis of anti-idolatry resistance can take two forms: a prophetic form which acts *within the system* (*i.e.* shouting a clear "No" to the system, de-legitimizing its idols, and calling it to transformation) or an *apocalyptic* form which operates *outside the system* (*i.e.* building visible alternative communities that witness to the God of Life over against the dominant system of oppression).

6.2. Duchrow's Double Strategy

In his investigation into the biblical foundations of a life giving economic order, Duchrow points out that the Hebrew Scriptures reveal Yahweh as "a god who had tied himself exclusively to a group at the bottom of the pile." In Duchrow's opinion, Yahweh's identity as a God who protected the weak and the oppressed demonstrates that social justice "was from the start not understood as a sociological — or 'social ethical' — problem, but as a theological one." [8]

Moreover, Duchrow argues that in discussing neo-liberalism, the Church cannot rely on ethics alone in addressing the issue of God's sovereignty. On

---

toward his own purposes," in Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1978)16.

[7] Ulrich Duchrow, *Global Economy: A Confessional Issue For the Churches?* (Geneva, Switzerland: WCC Publications, 1987), 177.

[8] Ulrich Duchrow, *Alternatives to Global Capitalism: Drawn From Biblical History, Designed For Political Action* Utretch: The Netherlands: International Books, 1995), 147.

this point, Duchrow makes a surprising reference to noted sociologist, Max Weber, an advocate of liberal capitalism:

> Max Weber is right when he states that a pure market system leaves no room for ethics. It is about "service" to an impersonal, objective goal: that of making money...In view of this...an ethical approach to the "real-capitalist" market economy is in principal too superficial to assess its problems and set alternatives against those of its structures and effects which endanger life. [9]

According to Duchrow, Weber understood "service" in the above context as *latreia,* one of the two Greek words (the other being *diakonia*) carrying the meaning *to serve.* Duchrow explains that to the Greeks *latreia* concerned service to the gods (i.e., that which is of the ultimate concern of a society and the individuals who comprise it, the authority to which they feel bound and to which they must be faithful). [10] Duchrow continues:

> So when, according to Weber, the capitalist market economy defines as its nodal point "service" of an impersonal, objective purpose, it makes in its own context a statement about what in pre-modern cultures was called "God". Thus, it does not matter whether in modern economic, political or cultural-ideological texts the word "god" appears or not— Adam Smith still discerns an "invisible hand" at work in the market. But even economists who in modern, scientific style do without the "working hypothesis of God" are thereby saying something about their theo-logy, their talk about what does and does not concern them ultimately.[11]

Duchrow maintains that the Church, when questioning society's economic or political system on ethical grounds, is required by its very nature as the Body of Christ, to ask the God-question: who or what are we allowing to

---

[9] Duchrow , *Alternatives to Global Capitalism,* 122-123.
[10] Ibid., 123.
[11] Ibid., 124.

serve as absolute god in our society?"[12] He suggests that a Church-based strategy for action emanating from the God-question should begin with a clear repudiation of neo-liberalism as an idolatrous system of domination. In his view, because the capitalist market system is idolatrous, a mere "taming" of the system is insufficient. The entire system must be repudiated. He reminds the churches that the Bible has shown that idols retain their power for only as long as they are worshipped. Without recognition and legitimation, idolatrous power cannot exist. Therefore, Duchrow insists, the churches must shout a clearly defined "No" to neo-liberal structures and policies:

> The unrelenting logic of money accumulation (fetishism) removes the market from its rootedness in the basic needs of society and instead develops an ideology of making sacrifices-just as to the idols in the Old Testament. Theologians and churches wanting to respond to the liberating and life creating God have, for theological reasons, to denounce the transnational market that is solely subject to the laws of money accumulation and aspires to total dominance.[13]

In Duchrow's view, this "No" to the market economy includes an unmasking, a prophetic naming of names, to reveal the parties, business interests and governments that are the driving forces behind neo-liberalism.[14] Duchrow warns the churches that anything less than a clear denunciation of the "moloch of a world market" leads to "Church theology"[15] which he likens to the

---

[12] Ibid., 205.
[13] Ibid. 234-235.
[14] Kairos Europa, "Document Kairos pour l' Europe," [online]; available from http://www.c3.hu/~bocs/kaird-f.htm; Internet; accessed 1 April 1999.
[15] Duchrow takes the term "Church theology" from The *Kairos Document: A Theological Comment on the Political Crisis in South Africa* (London: Catholic Institute for International Relations, 1085), 9-16. The document describes "Church theology" as "inter-related theological assumptions' expressed by Church leaders. These theological assumptions include 1) the Church remains neutral in a situation of

accommodationist strategy of the priestly upper class in Judaea which sought to protect the institutional interests of the Temple by compromising with the Romans.[16]

"Church theology", explains Duchrow, is an attempt to protect Church interests by preaching accommodation in a situation of injustice. In Duchrow's opinion, "Church theology" encourages passive conformity to the ruling powers and it curbs or attempts to avoid prophetic confrontation with them when, according to the Bible, the God who liberates demands such confrontation.[17] Duchrow points out that "Church theology" in a global community dominated by neo-liberal capitalism would reconcile the Bible and the Christian theological tradition with an economic system that serves other lords rather than Jesus Christ. According to Duchrow, whenever it seeks to avoid confronting multinational power and money in a situation of injustice, the church harmonizes itself to an idol of death to which the lives of millions of poor people are sacrificed to ensure a better life for the few.[18]

Duchrow does not believe that a strategy of prophetic criticism alone will succeed in bringing systems of domination under the sovereignty of God.

---

injustice and preaches reconciliation without demanding a corresponding expression and demonstration of repentance by the oppressors; 2) the justice is accepted as the justice of *reform*. Reform justice is usually determined by those in power: there is nothing wrong with the system, *in principle* . It just needs to be fixed. Reform justice has the churches appealing to the consciences of those who wield oppressive power, and calling for their "individual conversion" rather than for the demolition of the oppressive social structure; 3) the Church states that it condemns all violence, but speaks out less against the violence exercised by the powerful to protect their interests.

[16] Duchrow, *Alternatives to Global Capitalism*, 208.

[17] Ibid. Duchrow also claims that a form of "Church theology" is evident in the *First Letter of Clement* which praises the Pax Romana after the great persecution of Domitian .

Despite its appeal to governments and business, the Churches have not been able to "tame the structures of power and money by raising their prophetic voice."[19] He observes that Jesus, himself, did not choose directly to "tame" the Roman Empire.

> For his part, Jesus set his hope in messianic groups to leaven the lump, and he vehemently attacked the temple aristocracy and the Judaean upper classes; he never went to lengths of directly confronting the puppet king Herod or representatives of the Roman Empire. In other words, he did not expect a reform of the totalitarian empire and its substructures to be possible, waiting instead for a (self-inflicted) collapse of the type mentioned in Daniel 2 and 7, as well as simply preparing for a new age with the forces of God's imminent kingdom emerging from below.[20]

In the current context of global neo-liberalism Duchrow does not deny that prophetic criticism and political action still have important roles to play, particularly in regards to the call for solidarity with those excluded from participation in the economy: "The impoverished are fighting themselves for their relative political aims, and doing so from the periphery. Should not those living in the power centres fight the system too?"[21]. But, Duchrow maintains that the most effective faith-based response to neo-liberalism is mounted through a pastoral strategy of rejection of the dominant system and the building of small-scale alternative communities, coupled with the exercise of political influence when possible. Duchrow refers to this program of resistance as a "*double strategy*" in that it combines the two biblically based responses to idolatrous

---

[18] Ibid. p. 279
[19] Ibid.
[20] Ibid., 278-279.
[21] Ibid., 279.

systems of domination: (a) a destabilizing *prophetic movement* intended to counter the absolutism of the idolatrous system through prophetic criticism ; and (b) an *apocalyptic movement* of active resistance which rejects the system of domination and builds small scale faith-based communities as visible alternatives.[22] In proposing his double strategy to the churches, Duchrow hopes that it will result in the churches creating a countervailing spiritual movement to neo-liberalism that will bring human economic affairs under the sovereign rule of the God who liberates.

In brief Duchrow suggests the following courses of action as integral to his *double strategy* praxis.

(1) *Prophetic Movement*: The churches speak directly to those responsible for economic injustices, exerting maximum influence for radical change.[23] This maximum influence includes not only a questioning of the economic system which generates flagrant injustice, but an attempt to *destabilize* the system through prophetic action such as the use of church-initiated boycotts and sanctions, as well as, through Church support of economic alternatives in consumption and financial investment.[24] As well, the churches intensify public criticism of

---

[22] Ibid., 229.

[23] Duchrow, *Global Economy*, 196.

[24] Duchrow, *Alternatives to Global Capitalism*, 237-238. Duchrow refers here to the use of boycotts and sanctions against the Apartheid system in South Africa and to the campaigns against Nestle (the company was attempting to persuade Third World mothers not to breast feed their infants in order to increase sales of its infant formula, a practice which Duchrow says had fatal consequences for the infants due to the fact that the formula had to be mixed with water which in many Third World communities was heavily

unjust social institutions and, as an integral part of their mission, engage in a "scientific theological analysis of secular institutions" in order to help bring about "the downfall of idolatrous totalitarianisms." [25]

(2) *Apocalyptic Resistance*: Like pre-monarchical Israel and the messianic communities of the New Testament, the churches become "contrast societies" to the dominant system. They withdraw their co-operation and support from political and economic institutions that practice social and economic injustice and shift it to alternative economic models such as workers co-operatives, sustainable agricultural projects, micro-financial institutions modeled on the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh, fair trade companies, and community economic development corporations. The churches withdraw their *moral legitimation* from institutions and value systems that perpetuate social and economic injustice as part of their renunciation of the idolatrous spirituality that sustains such institutions. Finally, the churches play a theoretical and practical part in building a countervailing power to the idolatrous spirituality of neo-liberalism by co-operating with resistance groups from every faith and from secular society in developing life-giving alternative economic communities based on the vision of God's kingdom. [26]

---

polluted) and DelMonte (which was guilty of using socially unjust labour conditions on its plantations in the Philippines).

[25] Duchrow, *Global Economy*, 198.

[26] Ibid., 196-201

Duchrow believes that in applying the double strategy, the first group to get on side must be God's faithful people themselves. The churches must convince their members of the need to work with social movements on the basis of faith, not just social ethics. Like the prophets of the Hebrew scriptures who worked with the peasant lower classes against the wealth accumulation system of the monarchy, and like the early Christian communities in the *Pax Romana*, the faithful as members of Christian communities would witness to a biblically based alternative vision of human economic relationships.[27] Duchrow

---

[27] Duchrow, *Alternatives to Global Capitalism*, 240-277. Duchrow sees in the *NGO Forum Treaty on Alternative Economic Models*, developed in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in 1992 an alternative economic vision that is consistent with the biblical understanding of economic justice. Duchrow quotes from the treaty :

"Our vision of the alternatives to the current economic models is grounded on the following principles:

1. The fundamental purpose of economic organization is to provide for the basic needs of a community, in terms of food, shelter, education, health, the enjoyment of culture, as opposed to a concentration on the generation of profit and on the growth of production for its own sake. Economic life must also be organized in such a way that it enhances rather than destroys the environment and safeguards natural resources for the use of future generations.
2. An alternative to the current system must be based on indigenous, community-based, people-empowering models that are rooted in people's experiences, history, and eco-cultural reality. This implies, incorporating diversity of alternative production systems, decision-making processes, and technologies, especially those drawn from indigenous peoples and peasant communities.
3. An alternative economic model must recognize and institutionalize a central and equal role for women in shaping economic life.
4. An alternative economic model should be based on the relative self-sufficiency of communities, regions, and nations, rather than on free trade, the world market, and large domestic and transnational corporations as the central institutions that determine production and distribution.
5. Economic life must be informed by bottom-up development strategies, in which people and communities have the power to make economic decisions that affect their lives, in contrast with the dominant model which marginalizes grassroots communities and fosters international economic relations in which the centre subjugates the periphery.
6. One of the central ethical foundations of an alternative economic model is the interdependence of all peoples and the interdependence of peoples and communities and the non-human material world. This interdependence demands a system of sharing resources based on autonomy, equality, participatory democracy, and solidarity. As members of a community, individuals must also take responsibility for living within the limits of the earth's resources, in contrast with the Northern model of excessive consumption.
7. Human and economic development indicators should no longer exclusively or principally reflect material growth and technological advance but must take into account individual, social, and environmental-well being. Such indicators would include health, gender equalities, unpaid family work, equalization in the distribution of income, better care of children, and the maximization of human happiness with minimal use of resources and minimal generation of wate.

believes that by expressing their dissent through public witness, the faithful will be placing in concrete form an unambiguous confession of faith in the God of Jesus Christ who stands opposed to an idolatrous global economic system. [28] Duchrow emphasizes that a clear confession of faith in the face of idolatry is not only a question for social ethics, "but *the* theological question" with regard to the role of the churches in the era of neo-liberalism. [29]

6.3. Creating a Spiritual Counter-climate

Like Duchrow, American critical theologian, Walter Wink, recognizes the importance of building a countervailing spirituality to oppose the spiritual ethos of neo-liberalism. In his book, *Naming the Powers*, Wink, recalls Hinkelammert's claim that systems of domination are sustained by *fetishism* (i.e., the idolatrous spirituality institutionalized in systems of domination that deifies the mechanisms of the system and reduces human beings to mere objects). Wink states that the spirituality of systems of domination is idolatrous because it provides the ideological justification for the system's imposition of its will as absolute in the lives of human beings. [30]

Wink claims that the duty of the church is "to discern and engage *both* the structure and the spirituality" of oppression.[31] He, too, maintains that the Church cannot be content, with addressing only the ethical dimension of injustice. By

---

8. In an alternative economic system, the state will be transformed from being chiefly a facilitating agent of the present economic system that is dominated by domestic and transnational corporations, into a mechanism that genuinely represents and serves the people's will and promises a strategy of relatively self-reliant, community centered development. Ibid. , 243-244.

[28] Ibid., 282.

[29] Ibid., 283.

[30] Walter Wink, *Naming the Powers: The Language of Power in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press,1984), 108-111.

itself, Wink maintains, social action grounded in ethics alone addresses only the shell of injustice, leaving intact the indwelling spirituality that sustains oppression. [32] He contends that even if unjust social structures are dismantled and replaced with new structures, the history of political revolutions has shown that the new structures are prone to "behave on the basis of the old spirituality."[33] Unless the old spirituality is rooted out, it can reemerge to legitimate a recurrence of oppression in the name of the new social structure.

Wink declares that of all institutions in society the Church through its tradition, its teachings, and the Scriptures, is uniquely equipped to expose the idolatrous spirituality of human institutions. Thus, Wink advocates an anti-idolatry praxis as a pastoral strategy for engaging systems of domination. His anti-idolatry praxis combines prophetic criticism, nonviolent action and prayer (individual and public) to create *a spiritual counter-climate* as a moral force to de-legitimate systems of oppression. Wink believes that too often the churches have followed secular paths of social action, ignoring the power in its own symbolism, imagery, liturgy and story. He points to the experience of the Latin American base communities in their struggle for social justice to illustrate the efficacy of combining social action with the liberating dimension of Christian practice— pastoral, catechetical and liturgical— in building a spiritual counter-climate to destabilize idolatrous systems of oppression.[34] Wink maintains that in creating a spiritual counter-climate, the church engages in a ministry of

---

[31] Walter Wink, *Engaging the Powers* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1992), 84 (my italics)
[32] Ibid., 164-168.
[33] Wink, *Naming the Powers,* p. 117.

disclosing the idolatrous pretensions of systems of oppression, thus, revealing their dehumanizing values and stripping them of legitimacy. [35]

Wink believes that a spiritual counter-climate begins with prayer, specifically intercessory prayer. He describes intercession as "the spiritual defiance of what is, in the name of what God has promised. Intercession visualizes an alternative future to the one apparently fated by the momentum of current contradictory forces. It infuses the air of a time yet to be into the suffocating atmosphere of the present."[36] Intercessory prayer confronts the spirituality of idolatrous institutions with the alternative of the reign of God. This initiates the process of de-legitimating idolatry by reminding the system of oppression that it, too, is under the sovereign rule of God. Prayer calls upon the spiritual interiority of earthly institutions "to abdicate all pretensions to absoluteness, and to offer praise and worship to the true God."[37]

A spiritual counter-climate founded on prayer also serves to de-legitimate the idolatry inherent in systems of domination by proclaiming a "politics of hope".[38] A politics of hope, Wink explains, envisages an alternative future and "then acts as if that future is now irresistible, thus helping to create the reality for which it longs." In the presence of the absolute will of the idolatrous system, the politics of hope declares that the future is not closed.[39] Wink comments:

---

[34] Ibid, p.115-118.
[35] Wink, *Engaging the Powers,* 164.
[36] Ibid., 298.
[37] Ibid., 167.
[38] Ibid., 299.
[39] Ibid.

> The message is clear: history belongs to the intercessors, who believe the future into being . . . . Even a small number of people, firmly committed to the new inevitability on which they have fixed their imaginations, can decisively affect the shape the future takes. These shapers of the future are the intercessors who call out of the future the longed-for new present. [40]

In the New Testament, Wink explains, the alternative future is "God's domination-free order, the reign of God."[41] That is why in Wink's spiritual counter-climate, prayer and evangelization are always social action and social action is always prayer and evangelization. Proclaiming the sovereignty of God in the midst of the anti-kingdom is an act of resistance. That, he argues, is why every social struggle has to be considered within the broader issue of God's sovereignty.[42] By way of example, Wink refers to the "hymns and gospel songs, the eucharists and prayers of a Martin Luther King, Jr., or Cesar Chavez" as "essential forms of struggle" in the spiritual counter-climate created during the American civil rights and farm workers rights movements of the sixties and seventies. According to Wink, these liturgical celebrations served to both confront an idol of death—racism— with the sovereign rule of God and to provide a means of mobilizing awareness and focusing for action.

Wink describes systems of domination as "unnatural systems." He claims that they cannot exist "for a moment without the spiritual undergirding of a persuasive ideology." He claims that the churches' power to de-legitimate this spiritual undergirding is "the most powerful weapon of all" in the struggle against systems of domination. Prayer that acknowledges this power to de-legitimate

---

[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid.

becomes a form of social action, for systems of domination can be confronted and transformed to God's will but only if the spirit of the system as well as its forms of power are touched. And that spirit can only be spiritually discerned and spiritually encountered."[43]

6.4. Conclusion

Neo-liberalism has been characterized as a meaning-structure, a faith in conflict with the Judeo-Christian faith tradition. Liberation theology has identified this conflict as a "battle of the gods", a clash between the Triune God of Life and Community (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) and the spirit of neo-liberal capitalism with its idols of death. Alternative critiques of neo-liberalism recognize that the struggle for economic justice in a system of domination is not only an issue for social ethics but also an issue of faith as required by the first commandment: "I am the LORD, your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; you shall have no other gods before me" (Deut. 5:6-7). In a situation of domination, there will always be a confrontation between a liberating God and "the Empire".

The alternative responses to neo-liberalism described in this chapter recognize that in a situation of idolatry, an anti-idolatry practice of resistance is integral to faith in a Triune God. However, the theological theme of *faith as apostasy from idols* is not a part of our Canadian social teaching. The absence of discourse in Canadian Catholic social doctrine on the God-question relative to neo-liberalism might help explain why so many of the faithful ignore Church

---

[42] Wink, *Naming the Powers*, 117-119.

social teaching and serve systems of oppression with a clear conscience. Idolatrous systems mask their oppression through ideologies that normalize injustice and make it difficult for us to envision an alternative social order built on God's justice. When Christians accept the values, myths, and allegiances of a system of domination as "normal," they serve the anti-kingdom rather than the Kingdom of the God of Life and Community.

Their pastoral strategy reveals the bishops' hope that Catholic communities become God's leaven for creative social change. But can that hope be realized if Catholics are not clear as to which God they, in fact, serve?

---

[43] Wink, *Engaging the Powers*, 301.

Chapter VII

How Might the "Religious" Reading of Neo-Liberalism and the Theological Theme of Idolatry Assist Canadian Catholic Social Teaching?

In part, the decision of the Social Affairs Commission to emphasize ethical over religious language in their pastoral statements on neo-liberalism was affected by the cultural context of the early to mid 1980's when the Social Affairs Commission first began to respond to the emerging neo-liberal agenda. With *Ethical Reflections on the Economic Crisis*, the Commission was hoping to summon the various sectors of civil society— workers, working poor, welfare recipients, small farmers and producers— to solidarity so as to form a common front against neo-liberal economic policies. Since religious language in the era of Ronald Reagan and TV evangelists served as a red flag to many in secular society offended by the narrow-minded rantings of the Christian Right, ethical language became a common denominator for dialogue between the Canadian bishops and secular society. Subsequently, social analysis and, particularly, social ethics have become the principal framework on which the bishops have built their pastoral response to neo-liberalism.[1] Yet for theologian, Michel Beaudin, this confining to sub-text of the theological dimension of the discourse on neo-liberalism has the effect of conceding to secular society other "creeds"

[1] Tony Clarke, *Initial Responses to Your Questions* [on-line] Available email: djs@web.net from tclarke@web.net, 7 January 2000.

and "ethics" inconsistent with the biblical notion of human dignity and human solidarity .[2]

Liberation theologians would agree. As we have seen, several liberationists maintain that removing religious discourse from the concrete spheres of people's lives (culture, economics, politics, etc) runs the danger of reinforcing the view that religious faith belongs to the realm of personal piety and bourgeois moral issues. Liberation theology insists that a "religious" reading of social reality and the use of the theological category of idolatry in a socio-economic context has a direct role to play in liberating society from the spiritual oppression inherent in a system of domination:

> Idolatry gives domination a spiritual, supernatural and transcendent depth. . . (which) becomes uncontainable and penetrates the whole of society. The root of idolatry is in the dominant power, but this power can convert the whole culture and the dominant religion into mechanisms of spiritual domination. Because of this, idolatry is not only a theological deviation or perversion. On the contrary, idolatry is a dimension of the dominant power, a social phenomenon, highly dangerous, which affects society and individuals at their root and permeates them totally.[3]

Insights from liberation theology and critical theology presented in previous chapters have established that when we speak on neo-liberalism, we *ipso facto* encounter the God-question— who or what are we allowing to rule as absolute god in our society? — and the God-question's corollary, the theological

---

[2] Michel Beaudin, "They Persevered as though They Saw the One Who Is Invisible," in *Coalitions for Justice*, eds. Christopher Lind and Joe Mihevc (Ottawa, Ontario: Novalis, 1994), 276.

[3] Pablo Richard, "The Presence and Revelation of God in the World of the Oppressed", in *Where Is God? A Cry of Human Distress,* eds., Christian Duquoc, and Casiano Floristan (Nijmegen, The Netherlands: SCM Press, 1992), 28.

issue of idolatry. The bishops, who are "pastorally responsible"[4] for a *faith community,* and serve, in part, to educate and direct that community on matters of faith and justice through their social teaching, do not present the full dimension of the challenge to faith posed by neo-liberalism when their pastoral statements confine the theological questions raised by neo-liberal economics to sub-text.[5] Furthermore, limiting discourse on the faith requirement to work for economic justice to the domain of social ethics may explain why many of the faithful have not fully assented to Canadian Catholic social teaching. In their view, the ethical discourse of the bishops appears too secular, thus, serving to reinforce their misperception that theology does not encompass economics. The reluctance of the faithful to give assent to the pastoral statements of the Canadian bishops would indicate that the ethical argument, on its own, has not served the Canadian bishops' well in mobilizing the Catholic community to work

---

[4] Episcopal Commission for Social Affairs, "Widespread Unemployment: A Call to Mobilize the Social Forces of Our Nation ," supplement to *Catholic New Times* , supplement, 2 May 1993, no. 7.

[5] Michael Himes and Kenneth Himes , O.F.M. have written of the need for the Church to practice a "public theology". The writers define public theology as "an articulation of the Roman Catholic tradition's worldview or background theory which informs a social ethic and consequent public policy choices." The authors contend that " The evacuation of the public square by religion in the misguided notion that pluralism will thus be protected frequently produces a vacuum which is gradually filled by bigoted social self-idolatry." Himes and Himes maintain that "basic creedal symbols and statements of Christianity have public meaning" (they mention "the language of communion" and "covenant"). They assert that "a public theology helps to avoid the neglect of our biblical and theological tradition when we move to matters of social life." By way of illustration, Himes and Himes relate that when a group of Church activists were invited by a theologian to reflect on the theological foundation of their activism, the theologian found the activists "so theologically inarticulate that they can't persuade anybody in the churches who doesn't already agree with them, and even then they come across as political partisans, not as reflective Christians." In Michael J. Himes and Kenneth R. Himes, O.F.M., *Fullness of Faith: The Public Significance of Theology* (Mahwah, New Jersey : Paulist Press, 1993), 1-27.

for economic justice. The bishops simply have been unable to convince even their own constituency that economic policy is an issue for religious faith.[6]

It may well be that the liberation critique of neo-liberalism as a "religion" and as idolatry may better serve Canadian Catholic social teaching in developing a social doctrine that makes stronger links between the faith we profess and the way we live in society. The purpose of this chapter, then, is to suggest in broad terms, how a "religious" reading of neo-liberalism and the theological theme of idolatry can contribute to Canadian Catholic social teaching.[7]

7.1. The Theme of "Religion" and the Bishops' Social Analysis

Following in the methodology of liberation theology, the bishops' would build on their social analysis by extending their ideology critique[8] of neo-liberalism to include its covert "religious dimension". This ideology critique would emphasize that neo-liberalism is more than an economic policy. It is a social project founded on a meaning-structure, a faith that creates and legitimates structural poverty in the name of an absolute authority whose laws it considers as unalterable as the laws of nature. The bishops would describe how neo-

---

[6] John Williams, "What Has Church Social Justice Work Achieved Since 1970?" *Compass: A Jesuit Journal* (November/December 1991) : 8-10. In his article, Williams offers additional explanations as to why the Canadian Catholic community has not rallied to support the social teaching of the Canadian bishops.

[7] The bishops could achieve this by expanding the scope of step two of their pastoral methodology ("to develop a critical analysis of the economic, political, and social structures that cause human suffering.") to include an analysis of the underlying ideological or "spiritual" dimension of social structures to determine whether that dimension manifests itself in the world as a system of religion. Once the presence of this religious dimension is established, it can be held subject to a theological critique to determine whether it is consistent with ecclesial and biblical tradition.

[8] Ideology critique attempts to discern, "any idea or system of thought that disguises, distorts, or even sacralizes a certain political or economic, system for the sake of special interests." Ideology critique

liberalism as a meaning-structure corresponds to religion in terms of the points of comparison established in Chapter II above, particularly in terms of "doctrine" and "sacrifice".

In addition, the bishops would discern and expose neo-liberalism's "God-concepts" which critical theologian, M. Douglas Meeks, claims are interwoven with the logic of the socio-economic order.[9] Even though neo-liberalism ostensibly excludes the God of the Bible from the economy, it specifically employs authoritarian God-concepts to justify conditions of domination (e.g., the market punishes those who defy its laws) and wealth accumulation (e.g., the market showers those who do its will with material rewards). The bishops would point out that these God-concepts are seldom acknowledged in social reality. Therefore, as society's "experts" on God-concepts, the bishops would explain that it is the Church's responsibility to the community of faith as well as to the wider society, to uncover the prevalent God-concepts interwoven in the socio-economic fabric by analyzing what society "worships" as ultimate and what society allows to shape individual lives and social institutions. [10]

According to liberation theologian, Juan Luis Segundo, dominant ideologies have a tendency to affect theological ideas and pastoral practice.[11] For this reason, ideology critique in social analysis must also examine the

---

attempts to "de-ideologize " society in order to unmask its inherent injustices. In Thomas L. Schubeck, S.J., *Liberation Ethics: Sources, Models, and Norms* (Minneapolis, MN : Fortress Press, 1993), 87-127.

[9] M. Douglas Meeks, *God, the Economist: The Doctrine of God and Political Economy* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1989), 26-27.

[10] Ibid., 55.

currents, discourse and practices within the Church itself to discern if these somehow serve the market logic. In effect, the bishops would conduct an ideology critique of the Church in order to detect and expose where the Church practices "Church theology" through omission or commission, in regards to neo-liberalism. Their critique would encompass those God-concepts, spiritual movements and ecclesial policies which serve to isolate the Gospel and Christian faith from the socio-economic sphere of human experience.[12]

Canadian Catholic social teaching on neo-liberalism has not spoken out on the issue of "Church theology". Though it has called for the Church to be" transparent in its efforts to accomplish in its own internal life the Gospel

---

[11] Alfred Hennelly, *Theologies in Conflict: The Challenge of Juan Luis Segundo* (Maryknoll, N.Y. : Orbis Books: 1979) 109.

[12] Canadian businessman, Conrad Black, a wealthy and prominent Catholic layman, is one who tries to separate faith from the socio-economic sphere of social reality. Black has criticized the social teaching of the Canadian Catholic bishops as a "naïve sophomoric mishmash" and accused the Social Affairs Commission of "reckless guilt mongering" in their statements on the Canadian economy. Black states that he prefers a Church that promotes a faith based on "the ancient sources of sincere adherence" rather than one that promotes the "false prophecies, factual errors and reflexive prejudices" of "trendy" social justice advocacy. Black stresses that the bishops should be more beholden to bourgeois society given the fact that the latter has frequently given the Church financial support. He acknowledges that the Church has a obligation to speak out on secular issues that have moral implications, believes that the Church's primary obligation is not to criticize the market system (which he likens to the natural order established by God) for delivering "all the satisfactions that money now buys." The Canadian businessman advises the Church to attend to its "higher calling" for in his opinion, "Jesus' role is usually considered to be more exalted, especially by Christian ecclesiastics." In Conrad Black, "A Naive, Sophomoric Mishmash," *Compass: A Jesuit Journal* 5 (Summer 1987): 9-13.

Cardinal G. Emmett Carter, former Archbishop of Toronto, and a personal friend of Conrad Black , is an example of a prominent Canadian Church leader who also has sought to accommodate Church social teaching to the capitalist system. For example, in 1980 he repudiated *Ethical Reflections on the Economic Crisis* claiming that his colleagues in the Social Affairs Commission risked the Church's credibility by addressing issues for which they did not have "the necessary economic expertise". John Fraser, a former national editor of *Saturday Night* magazine described Carter as "a man who enjoys... the company and hospitality of those who wield power and control vast sums of money." Former social policy advisor to the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, Tony Clarke, describes Carter as a prelate who operates out of the church's traditional charity mode of direct service to the poor. According to Clarke, Carter does not fully accept "the view that the economic system that creates affluence is the same system

message it preaches to others,"[13] the bishops' teaching has remained relatively uncritical of practices and policies within the Church which seem to serve the neo-liberal logic. Though the bishops have called upon catechists and homilists to "ensure that our social teaching and action for justice is an integral part of their Gospel message," [14] they have not denounced as "Church theology" all instances where the Church, too, is captivated by self-interest, competition, profit, and domination. Nor has it denounced as "Church theology" all uses of the liturgy and homiletics which present a non-threatening privatized practice of faith over against the Gospel imperative of engagement with society. Therefore, a key question the bishops must address in applying an ideology critique to the Church as part of an anti-idolatry perspective is: where is the Church, itself, beholden to Yahwist idols? [15] Here, the bishops proceed to the hermeneutical phase of their methodology.

7.2. The Theme of Idolatry and the Bishops' Hermeneutics

Once the Commission has established, through social analysis, the presence in social reality of the religious dimension to neo-liberalism (as well as the presence of the neo-liberal handmaiden, "Church theology"), the bishops would proceed to reflect on neo-liberal "religion" in the light of faith. However,

---

that creates poverty." In Tony Clarke, *Behind the Mitre: The Moral Leadership Crisis in the Canadian Catholic Church* (Toronto, Ontario: Harper Collins, 1995), 24, 62.

[13] Episcopal Commission for Social Affairs, "Widespread Unemployment: A Call to Mobilize the Social Forces of Our Nation ," *Catholic New Times* , supplement, 2 May 1993, no. 34

[14] Ibid., no. 32.

the Commission's usual hermeneutic focus on the ethical dimension of Scripture and sacred tradition would be complemented by a reflection on neo-liberalism using the biblical theme of idolatry.

The Social Affairs Commission would point out that the God-concepts embedded in neo-liberalism and in "Church theology" stand in counter-distinction to the God of Liberation, Life and Community as presented in Scripture. Using the biblical references from Chapter IV above, the bishops would detail how neo-liberal God-concepts correspond to the biblical understanding of idolatry. The Commission would assert that neo-liberalism, as a system of domination is akin to the biblical structures of sin— Egypt, the Israelite monarchy, Babylon, Greece, and Rome. Like the biblical structures of sin, the anti-kingdoms which opposed the God of Liberation, Life and Community and oppressed God's people, neo-liberalism is an anti-kingdom, a structure of sin which denies life and thrives on deprivation and oppression. The bishops would refer, for example, to the Hebrew Scriptures and its biblical stories of resistance to idolatrous systems of domination. They would describe how these biblical accounts reveal that the false gods of systems of domination survive for only as long as they are worshipped.

Next, the hermeneutics of the Canadian bishops would turn to the anti-idolatry praxis of Jesus which operated at two levels — prophetic criticism and apocalyptic resistance (described by Sobrino and Duchrow in Chapter IV above

---

[15] See pages 73-74 on Yahwist idols.

and presented by Duchrow as his inspiration for the *double strategy* praxis). Likewise, the bishops would describe the early Christian community as a community in resistance to the idolatry of the *Pax Romana.* They would point out that these messianic communities opted to live an alternative social reality in anticipation of the Kingdom of God, even under the threat of martyrdom, rather than live in accommodation with the anti-kingdom of Rome. The bishops would point out that the biblical tradition of the practice of resistance to idolatry requires a prophetic shout of "No" to the anti-kingdom and a communal refusal to cooperate with imperial power.

7.3. The Theme of Idolatry and The Bishops' Pratical Strategy

The theme of idolatry would inspire an episcopal practical strategy modeled on the anti-idolatry praxis of Jesus (described above) which incorporates prophetic criticism with apocalyptic resistance. This would require the Social Affairs Commission to continue its practice of speaking prophetically to society on the need to pursue economic alternatives to neo-liberalism. Likewise, it would continue to encourage Christian faith communities to work in solidarity with the wider civil society in envisioning alternative economic relationships and building a new social ethic consistent with the Judeo-Christian vision of just socio-economic relationships.

But an anti-idolatry strategy would suggest stronger concrete collective action by the Church to destabilize the socio-economic order. Here the bishops would shout their prophetic "NO" to the anti-kingdom by withdrawing the

Church's moral sanction of the economic order (de-legitimation). This process of de-legitimating the neo-liberal order would continue the Social Affairs Commission's prophetic criticism of neo-liberalism as an unjust social structure but would include the concrete action of invoking boycotts and sanctions against all neo-liberal institutions that practice socio-economic and environmental injustice.

Since it is in the prophetic tradition to speak directly to the oppressor and bring his transgressions to public attention, the bishops would have to abandon some of the general language they use in referring to the "governments" and "businesses" which forge economic policy.[16] They would begin to name names— e.g. the specific banks and financial institutions, the sweatshop owners, the union-busters, the transnational corporations, the universities, the economic elites— and condemn their ethical transgressions as social sins. As Duchrow points out, the churches can not say "Yes" to sustainable agriculture without saying "No" to agribusiness.[17] The theme of idolatry would require the prophetic voice of the Social Affairs Commission to move beyond "ethical reflection" and the stimulation of public dialogue to passing definitive judgements on specific social institutions and policies that serve the gods of the anti-kingdom.

Duchrow has pointed out that the anti-idolatry praxis of Jesus was not built exclusively on prophetic criticism and action. Scripture has shown that the prophetic voice is viable only in a socio-political context where the dominant

---

[16] Terence J. Downey, "The Bishops and the Mulroney Revolution," *Grail*, 6, no. 1 (1990) : 38.
[17] Kairos Europa, "Document Kairos pour l'Europe," [online]; available from http://www.c3.hu/~bocs/kaird-f..htm; Internet; accessed 1 April 1999.

system is attentive. [18] In a situation where the community of faith has been socio-politically marginalized (as in the biblical periods of Egyptian, Babylonian, Greek and Roman domination), the prophetic voice holds little sway over public policy. [19] The Commission would acknowledge that in our current neo-liberal context, the Church's prophetic voice, likewise, has been marginalized and will have little influence over the Canadian economic order.[20] The bishops would admit that the Church's condition of socio-political marginality in a context dominated by market capitalism and post-modern secularism will prevail for some time to come. [21]

Nevertheless, the anti-idolatry praxis of Jesus reveals that in a context of domination, the faith community does not altogether abandon prophetic criticism. Therefore, the prophetic voice (amplified through Church initiated boycotts and sanctions against neo-liberal institutions and policies) would remain a component of Canadian Catholic social teaching in the hope that neo-liberal institutions and policies might respond, from time to time, to assertive social action — if only out of self-interest. But the bishops would acknowledge that at best a pastoral strategy of prophetic action is a limited strategy for it would only achieve what Duchrow calls a "taming" of the system in order to make it more humane.[22] The bishops would have to concede that this strategy of "taming" the

---

[18] Walter Brueggemann, "Rethinking Church Models Through Scripture," in *A Social Reading of the Old Testament: Prophetic Approaches to Israel's Communal Life*, ed. Patrick D. Miller (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press1994), 266.
[19] Ulrich Duchrow, "Biblical Perspectives on Empire: A View from Western Europe," *Ecumenical Review* 46, no. 1 (1994): 22.
[20] Downey, "The Bishops and the Mulroney Revolution," 41.
[21] Ibid., 41.
[22] Ulrich Duchrow, *Alternatives to Global Capitalism*, 278-280.

system is basically a reformist strategy that addresses the external dimension of neo-liberalism but leaves its essential nature unaltered. Also, the anti-idolatry optic would have the Social Affairs Commission acknowledge that to remain with a reformist strategy, no matter the limited degree of success it might experience through prophetic social action, actually keeps the Church complicit with an idolatrous anti-kingdom. The bishops would conclude that in order for the Church to remain true to its nature as the people of God, their social teaching must take the radical step of rejecting neo-liberalism outright and declaring the Church an apocalyptic community, (i.e., an alternative society, trying to live in resistance to the anti-kingdom as a visible sign of the Kingdom of God which is to come).[23] To establish their credibility, the bishops would call for a fundamental restructuring of the Church's own internal economic order so as to root out all practices and policies that mirror neo-liberal logic. To this end, the bishops would divert Church resources, financial and technical, away from neo-liberal institutions and toward community-based economic alternatives (such as workers co-operatives and community economic development projects) which are founded on the life-giving, people-first vision of the NGO Forum treaty and to ecumenical organizations and NGO's in civil society dedicated to international solidarity work.[24]

Another aspect of the bishops' anti-idolatry pastoral strategy would be to call for ecclesial restructuring along lines of the base Christian communities

---

[23] Pablo Richard, *Apocalypse: A People's Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1995), 24.
[24] See note 26, page 102.

movement. The bishops would present the base Christian community model as a dialogical and consensual model of Church, consistent with ecclesial teaching on the Church as a communion of the faithful. Moreover, the base Christian community, while still attending to the pastoral needs of its members, does not focus exclusively on its own internal concerns, but lives faith in a context that promotes critical social consciousness. As an apocalyptic alternative-society the base community is Kingdom-focused, openly witnessing to the social, economic and political vision of the Gospel message and of Church social teaching.[25]

With the anti-idolatry theme incorporated into its social teaching, the Social Affairs Commission would present its pastoral strategy of prophetic criticism and apocalyptic resistance in the midst of an idolatrous anti-kingdom as the appropriate way for the faith community to witness to its belief in the God of Liberation, Life and Community.

Walter Brueggemann states that in the post-exilic period, when living under Hellenistic and Roman domination, the Jewish people found social power in their faith tradition thereby allowing the community to continually witness "to another mode of reality."[26] Likewise, the Canadian bishops would require the faith community in prophetic/apocalyptic resistance to rediscover its religious traditions as a source of social power to build a countervailing Kingdom-centred spirituality to the benumbing social consciousness of neo-liberal idolatry. The bishops would explain that there can be no responsible, permanent

---

[25] Robert G. Simons, *Competing Gospels: Public Theology and Economic Theory* (Alexandria, Australia : E. J. Dwyer Pty Ltd, 1995), 135-140.
[26] Brueggeman, "Rethinking Church Models Through Scripture," 269-270.

transformation of the socio-economic order that is not rooted in an ardent spirituality that connects faith with justice. Thus, the faith community would re-read Scripture with an eye toward building a spirituality nourished by the following themes: the justice of the Reign of God; poverty as solidarity; the Exodus; discipleship; the cross as the price of discipleship; the triumph of resurrection for those who suffer injustice; the Easter Church. [27]

The anti-idolatry, countervailing spirituality would be expressed through the Christian faith community's practice of solidarity and its identification with the excluded. The bishops would characterize it as Kingdom-focused, solidarity-oriented, justice-centred, prayer and scripture rooted, ecumenically connected, civil society-networked, and socio-politically expressed.

Since idols exist for only as long as they are worshipped, the spiritual counter-climate, through prayer, meditation, and the community's shared experience of faith, would foster apostasy, a spiritual defiance, of all God concepts within and outside the Church that reconcile the *imago Dei* to market logic. The spiritual counter-climate would reject the individualistic bias present in the Church that restricts faith to a "me and God " (God as Consoler) relationship. The Social Affairs Commission would argue that these privatized notions of faith (not to be confused, of course, with the personal search for God) deny the communal *imago Dei* of God as Trinity. They would state that in a market-oriented society, proclaiming God as a communal relationship (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) is an act of spiritual defiance for it de-legitimates the neo-liberal idols

[27] Leonardo Boff, O.F.M., *Faith on the Edge: Religion and Marginalized Existence*, trans. Robert R. Barr

of individualism and competition, as well as, all other false God concepts embedded in neo-liberalism which are used to destroy human community and solidarity. Moreover, the Trinitarian image of God as a loving relationship affirms an important point in Church social doctrine: if we are made in the image of God as Community, we become more fully human and move closer to achieving the purpose for which we have been created whenever we act in solidarity for social justice. [28]

Central to the strategy of a countervailing spirituality would be the importance of prayer and the liturgy as communal expressions of resistance. Here the bishops would declare that the Eucharist, communal and personal prayer, vigils, fasting and abstinence are to serve the process of de-legitimating the absolute claims of the neo-liberal anti-kingdom. The Social Affairs Commission would explain that through the liturgy, the community of faith acknowledges the one God who created and sustains life and proclaims this Triune God to be the absolute source of all human well being. The liturgical recognition of the sovereignty of a Triune God, a God of Life and Community, diminishes the absolute claims over individuals and communities of neo-liberal God concepts used to rationalize inaction for social justice (e.g. "God helps those who help themselves"; "Charity begins at home"; "Religion and politics shouldn't mix," etc.). The bishops would point out that in the liturgy, praising the trinitarian God as the centre of our worship clarifies for the faith community to

---

(San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1989), 65-66.

which God it owes allegiance and obedience. In worship, we profess the Triune God as absolute, the only God who can claim the totality of the human being and we recognize the essence of this Triune God as liberation, life and community. Therefore, as a dimension of our faith in the Triune God, the people of God must be resolved to reject any attempt to re-fashioned human relationships and communities according to a logic inconsistent with the *imago Dei* we confess in our worship.

The bishops would conclude that in its prophetic/apocalyptic resistance to neo-liberalism, the faith community openly witnesses to a Triune God of Liberation, Life and Community over against the community destroying, anti-solidarity idols of the anti-kingdom. By so doing, the Church re-discovers its mission to serve the world by following the anti-idolatry praxis of Jesus Christ.

7.4. Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to re-contextualize the practical strategy of the Social Affairs Commission by proposing an alternative strategies based upon a socio-analytic reading of neo-liberalism as a "religion" and a theological reading using the theme of idolatry. The objective has been to suggest to the bishops that perspectives borrowed from liberation theology and from critical theology present to the faith community a more comprehensive faith response to neo-liberalism than their current ethics-based strategy. The idolatry critique does not diminish the mediating role of social ethics in the Church's discourse on neo-

---

[28] Himes and Himes, *Fullness of Faith*, 56-59.

liberalism. Rather, it serves to make more explicit the theological component of social ethics and perhaps clarify for the faithful the inherent bond between religious belief and issues of public policy.

The suggestions offered above could be received as somewhat "utopian". Indeed, they are intended to be utopian, but in the "concrete" sense as distinguished by sociologist, Ernest Bloch.[29] Hopefully, they might serve to strengthen Canadian Catholic social teaching on economic injustice by emphasizing resistance to neo-liberalism not only out of ethical concern, but out of theological necessity.

[29] See footnote 25, page 81.

Conclusion

The social teaching of the Social Affairs Commission of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops has made an important contribution to the debate on neo-liberalism. The bishop's ethical reading of the defining economic paradigm of our time has shown our socio-economic order to be morally deficient in its prioritizing of wealth accumulation over the basic needs of people. Neo-liberal apologists have attempted to dismiss the moral deficiencies of neo-liberalism— manifested in the world through increased levels of poverty and a concomitant increase in the loss of human lives and the destruction of human solidarity — with the glib neo-liberal mantra "there is no alternative." In response, the Social Affairs Commission has criticized neo-liberal capitalism for its Darwinian proclivities. The bishops have urged local Catholic communities to join with other faith communities and with civil society in forming local and regional economic alternatives that seek to sustain and enhance life over against the business driven, government supported, wealth-accumulation economic order of neo-liberalism. However, this inquiry has attempted to establish that despite the bishops' incisive ethical critique of neo-liberal economics, ethics alone does not present Christian communities with a complete understanding of neo-liberalism.

At its core, neo-liberalism, is a belief system that deifies the market, making it the ultimate source of human well being and the absolute organizing principle of society. In the name of the market (on which neo-liberals have endowed such authoritarian "God-concepts" as omnipotence, omnipresence, and omniscience), private interests and their public sector handmaidens attempt to

control the global socio-economic order so as to maximize personal profit. In their pursuit of wealth, these neo-liberal faithful hold to the infallibility of market "God-concepts" with the fervor of religious fundamentalists. In their immutable belief that neo-liberalism is the only economic system possible, the neo-liberal capitalists reject all alternative visions of economic life and of human individual and communal relationships that fall outside the market logic. Moreover, they guiltlessly justify the social and economic injustice resulting from neo-liberal polices as the regrettable, yet unavoidably necessary sacrifice needed to ensure future economic prosperity for all.

We have seen that out of their experience with economic and political oppression, Latin American liberation theologians have analyzed neo-liberalism *theologically* and have introduced the theme of idolatry in their discourse on socio-economic oppression. Through its social-analytic and hermeneutic reading of neo-liberalism, liberation theology has determined, that in its acceptance of poverty, starvation, even death as necessities in the process of economic development, the globally dominant economic paradigm of neo-liberalism behaves much like the biblical empires of Egypt, Babylon, Greece, and Rome.

Liberation theologians conclude that just as Scripture has revealed the "spiritual" foundations of biblical systems of domination and oppression to be rooted in idolatry, so too does theological analysis reveal the idolatrous underpinnings of neo-liberalism. With its absolutization of the free market, competition, consumerism and individualism, neo-liberalism has fashioned its own idols and has called upon them to legitimize greed and death in the name of wealth-accumulation.

In the view of liberation theology, the legitimation of death and socio-economic deprivation in the name of idols exposes neo-liberalism as an anti-kingdom opposed to the Kingdom of the God of Life and that God's project for human fulfillment. As an anti-kingdom comparable to the biblical anti-kingdoms of the Hellenistic and Roman Empires, neo-liberalism attempts to redefine human destiny in its own image and in accordance with the will of its own "gods." Thus, this condition of total global capitalism, presents faith communities, indeed all humankind, with a challenge of faith similar to that which confronted the biblical people of God under systems of domination — which god do we choose to serve? The God of Life or the false idols of death?

The Social Affairs Commission's preoccupation with the ethical dimension of neo-liberal economics has led the Canadian bishops to overlook a central theological tasks relative to the "God-question" resulting from neo-liberal hegemony: the proclaiming and witnessing to the sovereignty of the true God by discerning and de-legitimating the false gods of the neo-liberal anti-kingdom. This inquiry has proposed that the de-legitimation process is a task for theology, more so than for ethics.

The bishops' current reformist approach, i.e. attempting to "tame" neo-liberal capitalism through a prophetic call for its ethical transformation will have only limited success. Sociologist Max Weber has declared that attempts to hold capitalism ethically accountable are ultimately fruitless since capitalism is "ethically inaccessible."[1] The theological theme of idolatry leaves the bishops'

[1] Ulrich Duchrow, *Alternatives to Global Capitalism: Drawn from Biblical History, Designed for Political Action* (Utrecht, The Netherlands, 1995), 214.

facing the question of whether the Church can reconcile its essential nature to an economic system that is ethically impervious. The proposed anti-idolatry pastoral strategy, drawn from Duchrow's *double strategy* of (a) prophetic criticism when possible, coupled with (b) apocalyptic resistance of rejection and small scale communities, is suggested to the Canadian Bishops as a way of mobilizing the Catholic faithful into a spiritual and frontline force in the contest of faith between the God of Liberation, Life and Community and the idolatrous anti-kingdom of neo-liberalism.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Episcopal Commission for Social Affairs. *Ethical Choices - Free Trade :At What Cost?* Ottawa, Ontario: Concacan Inc., 1987.

_____. "Ethical Choices and Political Challenges." In *Do Justice! The Social Teaching of the Canadian Catholic Bishops*, edited by E.F. Sheridan, S.J., 411-34. Toronto:Ontario: The Jesuit Centre For Social Faith and Justice, 1987.

_____. "Ethical Reflections on the Economic Crisis." In *Do Justice! The Social Teaching of the Canadian Catholic Bishops*, edited by E.F. Sheridan, S.J., 399-410. Toronto:Ontario: The Jesuit Centre For Social Faith and Justice, 1987.

_____. " The Struggle Against Poverty: A Sign of Hope For Our World." *The Catholic Register* supplement (21 October 1996): 12-14.

_____. "Widespread Unemployment: A Call to Mobilize the Social Forces of Our Nation," *Catholic New Times*, supplement, (2 May 1993).

_____. "Will the Poor Have Most to Fear From Social Security Reform?," [on-line]; available from Microsoft InternetPage; Internet ; accessed 14 April 1996.

Secondary Sources

Araya, Victorio. trans. Robert R Barr. *God of the Poor: The Mystery of God in Latin American Liberation Theology*. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1993.

Assmann, Hugo."JPIC and the 'Warm God' of the Global Market." *The Ecumenical Review* 42, no. 1 (January 1990): 48-60.

Babinton, Deepa."Will the Ceiling Be Unlimited on a Vatican Visa Card." *The National Post*, 5 July 2000, C13.

Baum, Gregory. *Religion and Alienation: A Theological Reading of Sociology*. New York: Paulist, 1975.

_____. "Definitions of Religion in Sociology." In *Religion in the Eighties - What is Religion? An Inquiry for Christian Theology*, edited by Mircea Eliade and David Tracy, 25-32. New York,N.Y.: Seabury Press, 1980.

_____. *Compassion and Solidarity*. Toronto: CBC Enterprises, 1987.

_____. "Are We in a New Historical Situation? Must We Rethink What Justice and Solidarity Mean Today?" In *Stone Soup: Reflections on Economic Justice*, edited by Kevin Arsenault, 17-40. Montreal: Paulines, 1998.

_____. *Ethics and Economics: Canada's Catholic Bishops on the Economic Crisis*. Toronto: James Lorimer, 1984.

Beaudin, Michel. " They Persevered as Though They Saw the One Who Is Invisible." In *Coalitions for Justice*, edited by Christopher Lind and Joe Mihevc, 272- 291. Ottawa, Ontario: Novalis, 1994.

_____. "Soteriologie capitaliste et salut chrétien." In *Seul ou avec les autres? Le salut chrétien a l'épreuve de la solidarité*, edited by Jean-Claude Petit and Jean-Claude Breton, 237-81. Société Canadienne de Théologie. Montréal, Québec, 25-27 Octobre, 1991.

_____. "Cette idole qui nous gouverne. Le néo-libéralisme comme "religion" et "théology" sacrificielles." *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 24, no. 4 (1995): 395-413.

_____. " Le néo-libéralisme comme 'Religion.' " *Relations*, Octobre 1995 1995, 238-40.

_____. " L' idolatrie scrificielle néo-libérale." *Relations*, Octobre 1995 , 241-45.

Berthoud, Gerald. "Market." In *The Development Dictionary : A Guide to Knowledge as Power*, edited by Wolfgand Sachs, 70-89. Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey: Zed Books, 1992.

Black, Conrad. "A Naive, Sophomoric Mishmash." *Compass: A Jesuit Journal* 5, no. 2 (Summer 1987): 9-13.

Boff, Leonardo, O.F.M., trans. Robert R. Barr. *Faith On The Edge: Religion and Marginalized Existence*. San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1989.

Boff, Leonardo, and Clodovis Boff. *Introducing Liberation Theology*. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1987.

Brueggeman, Walter. " Rethinking Church Models Through Scripture." In *A Social Reading of Tthe Old Testament: Prophetic Approaches to Israel's*

Communal Life, edited by Patrick D. Miller, 263-75. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1994.

Brueggemann, Walter. *The Prophetic Imagination*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1978.

Canadian Ecumenical Jubilee Initiative. *A New Beginning : A Call For Jubilee*. Toronto, Ontario: CEJI, 1998.

Clarke, Tony. *Silent Coup: Confronting the Big Business Takeover of Canada*. Ottawa, Ontario: the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, 1997.

_____. "Initial Responses to Your Questions." available e-mail: djs@web.net. from tclarke@web.net, 7 January, 2000.

Cormie, Lee. "The Churches and Economic Crisis." *The Ecumenist: A Journal for Promoting Christian Unity* 21 (March/April 1983): 33-38.

Cox, Harvey. "The Market As God: Liviong in the New Dispensation." *The Atlantic Monthly*, March 1999, 18-23.

Cox, Sarah. "The Rag Trade Goes South." *The New Internationalist*, no. 246 (August 1993): 8-10.

de Santa Ana, Julio. "Sacralization and Sacrifice in Human Practice." In *Sacrifice and Humane Economic Life*, edited by World Council of Churches Participation in Development, 17-40. Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1992.

"Debt - The Facts." *The New Internationalist*, no. 312 (May 1999): 18-19.

Development and Peace. *Eradicating Unemployment and Poverty: A Political Choice*. Toronto, Ontario: The Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace, 1995.

Dillon, John. *Turning the Tide: Confronting the Money Traders*. Toronto, Ontario: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, 1997.

Downey, Terence J. " The Bishops and the Mulroney Revolution." *Grail* 6, no. 1 (1990): 29-50.

Duchrow, Ulrich. *Global Economy: A Confessional Issue For the Churches*. Geneva, Switzerland: WCC Publications, 1987.

_____. "Biblical Perspectives on Empire". *The Ecumenical Review* 46, no. 1 (January 1994): 21-27.

_____. *Alternatives to Global Capitalism: Drawn From Biblical History, Designed For Political Action.* Utrecht, The Netherlands: International Books, 1995.

Dussel, Enrique. "Analysis of the Final Document of Puebla: The Relationship Between Economics and Christian Ethics." In *Christian Ethics and Economics: The North South Conflict*, edited by Dietmar Mieth and Jacques Pohier, 101-09. New York, N.Y.: The Seabury Press, 1980.

Eagleson, John, and Philip Schaper, eds. *Puebla and Beyond.* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1979.

George, Susan. "A Short History of Neo-Liberalism: Twenty Years of Elite Economics and Emerging Opportunities for Social Change." http://www.globalexchange.org/economy/econ101/neoliberalism.html, March 1999. 3/18/00.

George, Susan and Sabelli, Fabrizio. *Faith and Credit: The World Bank's Secular Empire.* San Francisco: Westview Press, 1994.

Gunn, Joe and Monica Lambton. *Calling Out the Prophetic Tradition: A Jubilee of Social Teaching from the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops.* Ottawa, Ontario: Concacan, 1999.

Gutierrez, Gustavo. "The Violence of a System." In *Christian Ethics and Economics: The North South Conflict*, edited by Dietmar Mieth and Jacques Pohier, 93-100. New York, N.Y.: The Seabury Press, 1980.

_____. *The God of Life.* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991.

Halbertal, Moshe, and Avishai Margalit, trans. Naomi Goldblum. *Idolatry.* Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press,1992.

Hennelly, Alfred. *Theologies in Conflict: The Challenge of Juan Luis Segundo.* Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1979.

Himes, Michael J. and Kenneth R. Himes, O.F.M. *Fulllness of Faith: The Public Significance of Theology.* New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1993.

Hinkelammert, Franz. "Liberation Theology in the Economic and Social Context of Latin America: Economy and Theology, or the Irrationality of the Rationalized." In *Liberation Theologies, Postmodernity, and the Americas*, edited by David Batstone, et al., 25-52. London: Routledge, 1997.

_____. *The Ideological Weapons of Death: A Theological Critique of Capitalism.* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1981.

Jhaly, Sut. "The Fetishism of Commodities: Marxism, Athropology, Psychoanalysis." In *The Codes of Advertising*, London: Frances Pinter (Publishers), 1987.

Kairos Europa. "Document Kairos Pour l'Europe." http://www. c3.hu/~bocs/kaird-f.htm. Kairos Europa, May 1998, 1998.

KAIROS Theologians. *The Kairos Document: A Theological Comment on the Political Crisis in South Africa.* London: Catholic Institute for International Relations, 1985.

Kammer, Charles L. *Ethics and Liberation: An Introduction.* Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1988.

Latin American Provincials of the Society of Jesus. " "A Letter on Neo-Liberalism in Latin America". http://web.lemoyne.edu/~bucko/sj_pj_67.html. Promotio Justitiae, May 1997, 1997.

Lowy, Michael. *The War of Gods: Religion and Politics in Latin America.* London: Verso, 1996.

McBride, Stephen and John Shields. *Dismantling a Nation: Canada and the New World Order.* Halifax, Nova Scotia: Fernwood Publishing, 1993.

McMurty, John. *Unequal Freedoms: The Global Market as an Ethical System.* West Hartford, Connecticut: Kumarian, 1998.

McQuaig, Linda. *The Cult of Impotence: Selling the Myth of Powerlessness in the Global Economy.* Toronto: Viking, 1998.

Meeks, M. Douglas. *God,The Economist: The Doctrine of God and Political Economy.* Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989.

Mihevc, John. *The Market Tells Them So: The World Bank and Economic Fundamentalism in Africa.* Penang, Malaysia: Third World Network, 1995.

Ransom, David. "Globalization - An Alternative View." *The New Internationalist*, no. 296 (November 1997): 7-10.

Richard, Pablo. "Word of God Source of Life and Hope for the New Millennium." http:/ /www. sedos.org/english/richard,htlm. SEDOS BULLETIN on NET. 28 February 2000.

_____. et al, trans. Barbara E Campbell and Donnie Shepherds. *The Idols of Death and the God of Life: A Theology.* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1980.

_____. "The Presence and Revelation of God in the World of the Oppressed." In *Concilium: Where is God? A Cry of Human Distress*, edited by Christian Duquoc and Casiano Floristan, 27-37. Nijmegen, The Netherlands: SCM Press Ltd, 1992.

_____. *Apocalypse: A People's Commentary on the Book of Revelation*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995.

Schubeck, Thomas L. *Liberation Ethics : Sources, Models, and Norms*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1993.

Simons, Robert G. *Competing Gospels: Public Theology and Economic Theory*. Alexandria, Australia: E.J. Dwyer Pty Ltd, 1995.

Sobrino, Jon. *Jesus in Latin America*. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1987.

_____. *Jesus, the Liberator: A Historical -Theological View*. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1993.

Sung, Jung Mo. "Against the Idolatrous Theology of Capitalism". http://www.uca.ni/koinonia/relat.htm, 1996.

Tamez, Elsa. *The Bible of the Oppressed*. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1982.

Ten Days for Global Justice. *Close the Gap Between Rich and Poor*. Toronto, Ontario: Ten Days for Global Justice, 1999.

Williams, John. "Why Isn't Anyone Listening?" *Compass: A Jesuit Journal* Vol. 5, no. No. 2 (Summer 1987): 27-29.

_____. " What Has Church Social Justice Work Achieved Since 1970 ?" *Compass: A Jesuit Journal*, November/December 1991, 8-10.

Wink, Walter. *Unmasking the Powers: The Invisible Forces That Determine Human Existence*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986.

_____. *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992.