

BOOK REVIEWS

Andelson, Robert V., and James M. Dawsey. *From Wasteland to Promised Land: Liberation Theology for a Post-Marxist World*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1992. xiv + 146pp. \$16.95.

Robert Andelson and James Dawsey, professor at Auburn University, are both ordained ministers. Andelson brings to the discussion a Calvinist perspective, while Dawsey is Wesleyan.

The volume arises out of recognition that the lot of the poor today is as oppressive as ever. For the authors, Liberation Theology has failed to liberate; Marxism has lost credibility; capitalism needs an alternative. In the writings of Henry George, a 19th-century North American political economist and social philosopher who proposed that inequality in the ownership of land is the greatest cause of unequal distribution of wealth, Andelson and Dawsey find that alternative. They then attempt to set forth a program that will bring true liberation by solving the universal land problem.

After an introductory chapter, Andelson and Dawsey develop their position in nine not always interrelated chapters. Chaps. 2 and 3 give a socio-economic description of Latin America, chosen because it was the birth place of Liberation Theology and also illustrates how contemporary socio-economic problems originated with the belief that the land and produce belong to the "select few" (16).

An examination of the role of the church and political structures in condemning people to poverty is given in chap. 4 while chap. 5 clarifies the concept of "God's preferential option for the poor" who are poor because of injustice. Chap. 6 examines the persistence of exploitation and oppression even after political independence.

Chaps. 7 and 8 give, on the one hand a lengthy critique of Marxism, and on the other, a just as lengthy but not as stinging critique of the intellectual roadblocks erected by those who wish to keep the status quo regarding land tenure. Finally, the last two chapters present brief biblical guidelines for land reform with extrapolation for the 20th century following the authors' land-rent proposal.

This book should be welcomed by all who wish the Liberation Theology conversation to continue even after the death of Marxism as an adequate political ideology. Economics and social issues should continue to inform our theological understanding. These have not been categories of western Enlightenment theology. Land tenure, though a very biblical issue, is not treated in major systematic and biblical theology textbooks. Thanks to the movement to do contextual rather than systematic theology, to do theology from below rather than above, to use categories of sociology

and not simply those of western philosophy, themes such as that of the land, together with the anthropological and soterio-logical insights it provides, are gaining their rightful place in the theological enterprise.

Professors Andelson and Dawsey recognize that the land problem is not the only social problem, and that their solution of a land value tax would not solve all social ills. They maintain, however, that it is "the most basic social problem, and that its solution would do more to lift the curse of poverty than would anything else" (10). However, in my opinion, this assertion remains to be proved.

We must ask why the narrow category of land? Could property be the larger category and land a subset of this? Or could the problem be one of domination—a problem that precedes the Exodus, going back to the creation narrative. As an aspect of oppression, Domination involves more than land. The authors, I find, have not proved that the wider rubric of oppression, under which Liberation Theology works, is less adequate than their narrower proposal. It seems to me that their position should be an expansion of rather than a substitution for Liberation Theology.

A large segment of the volume is a critique of Marxism and liberation (based largely on Michael Novak's *Will it Liberate?*) in such areas as, dependency theory, the concept of alienation, the theory of surplus value, the doctrine of class struggle, and socialism. In many instances the arguments have much validity. But in a number of cases what appears is a critique of Marx and radical liberationism more than temperate and balanced liberation theologians, such as, Jon Sobrino and even Gustavo Gutierrez, who comprise the majority of the guild. Thus the theological system the authors critique would hardly be recognized by many in the enterprise as Liberation Theology.

With such extensive research as has gone into this work, it is surprising that W. D. Davies' seminal 1974 work, *The Gospel and the Land*, which describes in detail the territorial theology in Judaism and Early Christianity, is not even noted.

I believe that "Land" is an excellent category on which to theologize. But this book's proposal may not lead us to the promised land. I felt left instead in a wasteland.

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Beasley-Murray, George Raymond. *Gospel of Life: Theology in the Fourth Gospel*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991. xii + 131 pp. Paperback, \$7.95.

Gospel of Life is the published version, in slightly expanded form, of the 1990 Payton Lectures delivered by the author at Fuller Theological Seminary. As such, the book is not an exhaustive study of the theology of